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LANGUAGE, GENDER AND 
ADVERTISING: 
IS A PICTURE WORTH A 
THOUSAND WORDS? 
Female role portrayals in 
advertising

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Advertising is an ineluctable result of a capitalist world that has evolved into an almighty marketing tool over the last decades. In today’s modern era, invaded by a wide range of means of communications such as the Internet, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook or Twitter), mobile phones, etc., advertisements can be found everywhere: in all types of mass media, from newspapers and magazines, to television and radio. So, it will not be out of place to assert that people are impelled by the influence of advertisements.

In this globalised world in which we are nowadays immersed, the widespread presence of advertising is increasingly affecting people’s daily lives; it conditions our mindset, motivations, beliefs, knowledge, way and style of life and, above all, our sense of identity. Advertising is the resource used by producers to broadcast particular messages about certain products or services. To convince customers, advertisements have to ‘feed’ different types of recipients. In fact, one of their principal functions is to attract the addressee’s interest, stimulate his/her imagination so that the advertisement will be remembered for longer. They seek to encouragingly influence the opinion of people up to the extent of moulding their attitude and behaviour.

‘Advertising is a mirror of societal viewpoints and it is frequently thought to be the reason for the negative stereotyping of females’ (Grau et al., 2007: 63 cited in Holtzhausen, 2010: 126). Culture plays a significant role, as well as language and its association with gender issues, which are deeply grounded in our society. Specifically, language and gender, which are inherently linked to power, are relevant aspects that remain extensively controversial in this field. Advertisers have been portraying women for centuries to increase their income. The female patterns displayed in the media are regularly stereotyped in very limited roles, with the cultural notion of perfect body shape and appearing as decorative models or repeatedly sexual objects. Cultural norms prescribe the idea of being attractive, seductive and dependent as common features of feminine traits, whereas being autonomous, sturdy and freewheeling is regarded to be more masculine. These representations of gender in advertising provide persuasive and effective models of behaviour to imitate or react against.

For decades, women in advertisements have been depicted in stereotypical roles, such as the housewife or femme fatale. These portrayals do not obviously reflect the undergoing -though insufficient- change in our current society, in which women are gaining ground in
many spheres of life. In fact, women are usually portrayed in negative roles and in a bad shape in every form of media. Masculine images usually portray strength, power, assertiveness and achievement, whereas feminine images display submissiveness, beauty, modesty, cooperation and nurturance. Such topics appear incessantly in our popular culture and they are usually welcome by those who consider them as natural aspects of the human condition (O’ Barr, 2006). Simpson and Mayr (2010: 16) reassert this idea through the following statement:

For instance, women’s inherently ‘natural’ roles as ‘mothers’, ‘nurturers’ and ‘carers’ and men’s supposedly natural function as ‘providers’ and ‘breadwinners’ have been used to reassert and cement stereotypical family and gender roles. Other examples of ‘gender ideologies’ are the postulations that women by nature are more suitable for the lower status and less well paid ‘caring’ professions, such as nursing or social work, whereas men by nature are better qualified for the more prestigious technical professions, such as medicine, engineering or aviation.

Sex is another ‘issue’ that has been successfully used in advertising certain products, such as perfumes, watches, cars or jeans (Nagi, 2014: 75). In fact, defining women as sex objects has become the foremost image in the media. This type of advertising contains sexually appealing imagery by including muscular men, attractive women, nudity and sexual behaviour. These sexual appeals are highly provocative, eye-catching and memorable. They contain implicit messages that contribute to perpetuate gender stereotypes and gender inequality, by reinforcing the traditional concept of masculinity and femininity, focused on the so-called androcentrism and the objectification of women.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The media have an extremely powerful influence on culture, moulding societal structures. They play a significant role in developing social norms since television, films and series, radio, newspapers and magazines, social networks (such as Twitter or Facebook), as well as advertisements are present almost everywhere and everyday in every culture. People are

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1 The concept of ‘gender ideology’ is understood, throughout this piece of work, as ‘the justification of gender statuses, particularly, their differential evaluation’ (Lorber, 1994: 30). Hence, according to a traditional gender ideology focused on family roles, for instance, men would be the primary economic providers whereas women would be completely devoted to housework and family care.
exposed to advertising wherever they go and wherever they are. It has become a significant aspect of today’s modern world because it is about displaying information, raising awareness, educating people and exhibiting new commodities and services to the society. It is not only a ‘perfect instrument’ for reaching people efficiently, but it is also a tool which serves for maintaining and establishing contact with others culturally, socially, nationally and internationally, politically and even mentally.

Whereas the principal aim of advertising is to show products and services through language and images in order to get the addressee’s attention and persuade her/him to acquire it, there is a considerable ideological charge around them. Hence, through these ideologies, advertising creates, infers, portrays and perpetuates power relations, stereotypes and categorizations, besides processes of discrimination among social groups, often with intended or unintended effects, deliberately or thoughtlessly. According to Leech (1966: 23) advertising language (and discourse), which still depicts women as inferior to men, is usually described as ‘loaded’ characterized by both, the linguistic and visual component.

That being said, the current piece of work seeks to find an answer to the following questions: To what extent is sexism expressed and transmitted through language and images? How do portrayals of women and men in advertising influence or develop the understanding we have of both sexes? Do semiotic references such as images, words and colours play a relevant role in the overall success of advertisements? Which repercussions will all this have on people’s mindsets, viewpoints and thoughts?

1.3. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to analyse women’s portrayal in advertising on the basis of two aspects: the role of image and language, as well as their main (hidden) purposes. Specifically, it seeks to understand the role of advertising and how it influences the culturally gendered stereotypes, as well as how society depicts the image of women in comparison with that of men.

For all these reasons, we will explore the relevance of both linguistic resources and visual imagery in establishing and strengthening female and male differences in speech (content and form), viewpoints, behaviours and attitudes. We will observe how gender is depicted and arranged in language and society, in addition to how the linguistic and visual component (particularly aimed at alluring the potential purchaser’s attention and predispose
him/her favourably towards the featured service or product) may mould and reveal the social and cultural situation in which both, men and women, interact.

This principal aim will be attained by exploring the following specific objectives:

i. To examine the nature of the visual portrayals of women firstly – and men secondly- in advertising.

ii. To explore the nature of linguistic and rhetoric devices used in advertisements.

iii. To establish the incidence with which women firstly – and men secondly- are depicted in multiple roles in advertisements.

iv. To identify the product or service categories advertised for the various roles portrayed.

1.4. Hypotheses

Evidence from studies of marketing and advertising points out that some linguistic features are gendered and that gender differences in advertisements exhibit and reinforce the traditional portrayal of females. Indeed, advertising has steadily held on these traditional gender role divisions, considering women as homemakers and men as breadwinners, employing this visual imagery to foster all types of commodities from household products to clothes, computers and automobiles. Commodities addressed to women are stigmatized to preconceived notions of femininity as obedient, manageable and servile, and products targeted to men are generally branded as impassive, independent and work-oriented (Fugate and Phillips, 2010).

Taking this into consideration, the following hypotheses are generated with reference to the projection of women in advertising through image and language:

i. Advertising discourse employs language and image that fosters gender stereotypes.

ii. Advertisements depicting women will contain more references to (a) domesticity, (b) physical appearance (c) beauty and (d) sexuality and nudity.

iii. Advertisements portraying men will include more references to (a) power, (b) action, (c) technology and (d) strength.

iv. Visual imagery used in advertising promotes male dominance and women submissiveness.

v. The stereotypes promoted by advertising reveal the conservative ideologies of society about the relationship between women and men.
1.5. Justification and relevance

Leech (1966: 23) indicates that the ‘language of advertising is characterized by being loaded language, aimed at skewing the viewer’s perception of the message’. The linguistic and visual component in advertising can be charged with particular intentionality and sexist connotations. It is then considered a powerful instrument. Furthermore, different linguistic and visual choices advertisers make when promoting certain products, tackling different issues or addressing specific people in particular contexts usually unveil a specific goal or ideology, which in turn may set off different presuppositions, implicatures and/or prejudices in power relations. In other words, language matters and visual imagery matters too. For instance, the selection of certain words or expressions to describe a person or a social group can uncover significant attitudes and opinions that will have either a positive or negative impact on society (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 2).

In this scenario, the analysis of women role portrayals in advertising gains special prominence. As a mirror of societal viewpoints, it is commonly considered to be the reason for the negative stereotyping of women. Bearing in mind that people spend a lot of time watching television and surfing the web, it is more than obvious that advertising will have a great influence on the understanding of the widespread gender roles. The media are still generally charged with portraying women models as ‘sex objects’ and ‘decorative’, such as, for example, in perfume advertisements. The usual image of the passionate and sensual woman invitingly or defiantly turning her gaze to the viewer continues to be incessantly used in contemporary advertising, taking the form of agent provocateur, whose principal function in advertisements is that of becoming an object of desire for the addressee (Cortese, 2004: 29). Since language and visual images are often employed to depict love, eroticism and domesticity through women, the same language and visual images can be employed to represent them as having equal power as men.

Although gender roles have noticeably changed in our society since the 1950s, there is still a long way to walk. Sociocultural thoughts, attitudes and norms with the traditional notion of patriarchy that declare persistently on women and men performing roles assigned to them traditionally by the society still persists across and within countries and cultures in a different way. The representation of women in advertising has been especially stereotypical by limiting them to housework and, above all, sex, nudity and beauty. As a matter of fact, female models are increasingly depicted in advertising to promote commodities that may/may not be directly associated with them. Sex is one of the most useful resources that has been
successfully used by advertisers in publicizing watches, jeans, alcohol, cars or perfumes, as
aforementioned.

Many psychologists conclude that the expert manipulation of sexual appeals in visual
imagery, in copy or in both, may awaken subconscious interests or desires that are revealed in
the acquisition of particular goods or services (Nagi, 2014: 75). These types of advertisements
can be harmful as well as ineffective but they are still employed because they generally
satisfy the wishes of many viewers. In this sense, this study intends to exhibit the out-dated
role portrayal of women in today’s modern world, in which women are still regarded as
inferior beings in many spheres of life: socially, politically and economically.

Advertising discourse plays a crucial role as it can reach and influence the entire
world, in such a manner that it stops generating and perpetuating power relations, social
stigma, as well as categorization, discrimination and sexism. With all the research carried out
about the use of language and image in advertising discourse, this investigation will
complement the significant studies available about the portrayal of women in advertising as
well as the theoretical knowledge of this field of study.

1.6. Sections

This investigation comprises six chapters. In chapter one, a comprehensive picture of gender
advertising is painted to serve as a basis on which our study is grounded. Hence, a general
introduction is provided, where we set out the significance of our investigation and the
rationale. Chapter two is focused on the theoretical and conceptual framework of this analysis
through different parts: from the review of related literature about women’s role portrayal in
advertising to a thorough explanation of basic concepts when dealing with gender in
advertising. Chapter three is devoted to the research method of the study. This part presents a
clear picture of data collection, sampling, classification and encoding features, as well as
procedures used. Chapter four focuses on the analysis of selected gender advertisements in
order to explore how women are represented from a visual and linguistic perspective. In
chapter five the conclusions, based on the research findings achieved, are presented. This
chapter also contains the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research in the
field. This study finishes with a list of bibliographical references that have supported all the
ideas and arguments reflected throughout the study.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Literature Review

One of the most hotly debated issues in the current theoretical discussion concerns the representation of women in all forms of media, particularly, in digital and print advertising. A thorough analysis of the literature on the female role portrayals in advertising unveiled that each of these investigations had its main focus on stereotyping images of women displayed in various categories, through language and visual imagery. Particularly, depictions of women in advertising as opposed to men, have been a matter of interest and concern among media and linguist researchers. Thus, focusing our attention on the role portrayal of women in advertising, this part delves into prior research on the topic.

Velasco-Sacristán and Fuertes-Olivera (2006) adopted a critical cognitive-approach to analyse gender metaphors in English advertising. They conducted a case study of 1142 advertisements published in British Cosmopolitan from 1999 to 2000 (p. 1982). Curiously enough, the instances of gender metaphors displayed in this paper depicted in a vast majority discrimination against women (p. 1995). In fact, they only found few examples of discrimination against men (13.01% of the gender metaphors). They also proved that many of these advertisements still reinforced negative gender stereotypes towards women as housewives (p. 1995) and sexual objects (p. 1996). They came to the conclusion that ‘a critical cognitive-approach to advertising gender metaphors is of most salience’ (p. 1982) since it allows us to discover the advertiser’s rhetorical purposes and implicit meaning and face the negative social effects of the employment of gender metaphors in English advertising (p. 2000).

Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos (2009) examined ten advertisements chosen from an online corpus in order to demonstrate that image schematic devices were employed to incorporate sexism in advertising. The analysis indicated that women held more discriminating attitudes towards sexual role depiction than men. Advertisements depicted women mostly as sexual and desirable objects as opposed to men, who were portrayed in powerful and violent positions over the opposite sex. Nonetheless, they also found that many advertisements are nowadays trying to end up with stereotypical gender images traditionally promoted, by displaying a ‘healthy body image of women’ (p. 265).

Simpson and Mayr (2010) conducted a study focused on the ways in which language (and discourse) is profoundly associated with gender, ideology and power in many different
spheres of life and in real contexts of use. Thus, through a wide range of texts and instances of different fields (advertisements from different companies, extracts from political discourses, newspapers excerpts and headlines or spoken dialogues), they identified examples of power in both public and private contexts through a critical discourse analysis approach. Although they encompassed all the ‘traditional’ issues related to power, such as gender, race and ethnicity, a particular attention was given to socially constructed distinctions between men and women (p. 16).

Results of a study by Holtzhausen (2010) revealed that women were employed as ‘visual attention-attracting focus points across a range of different product or service categories’ (p. 4). The sample included 203 magazine advertisements (55% featured women) and 245 television commercials (40% featured women). Regarding the different roles depicted by women, the most common one was that of physically decorative object (27%) in magazine advertisements, in contrast to other portrayals such as: mother and nurturer, romantic love or sex object (p.3). Furthermore, the author highlighted new roles that had not been previously investigated, such as leisure woman and sportswoman (in magazine advertisements), as well as spokesperson and buyer (in television commercials). These findings suggested that future investigations should be carried out to gain in-depth knowledge of women’s viewpoints concerning female role portrayals in advertising.

Chafai (2010) explored females’ depiction in magazine advertisements from Britain and Morocco in order to understand the role of advertising through its visual and linguistic component, as well as how it influences gender stereotypes. This analysis particularly demonstrated that there exists a close association between how women are men are represented in advertising and people’s notions about how females should act, as well as the roles they are supposed to occupy within a particular religious, economic and sociocultural context. Finally, a corpus analysis was carried out concerning the negative stereotyping of women, which can be summarized as follows: 1) women are sensitive, dependent and weak; they are not good at repairing things and tend no to be skilled at sciences or technology; 2) women are fundamentally concerned with relationships and therefore, they are more centred on family and love, occupying roles such as nurturers, mothers and wives; and 3) women must consider the importance, first and foremost, of their physical appearance and sexual attractiveness.

Nagi (2014) conducted a study focused on the projection of women in advertising and viewpoints of people towards it, by applying the technique of factor analysis on the collected data (p.75). The study was aimed at exploring the main factors conditioning the choices made
by purchasers for the representation of women in advertisement. To undertake this investigation, ‘a sample of 300 respondents from the city of Amritsar (India) was selected on the basis of judgment sampling’ (p.78). The results of her study of advertisements from India Today, Cosmopolitan, Femina and Women Era from the period 2000-2007 evidenced that few changes were made concerning the stereotypical depiction of women. The author found that the general roles women play in advertising were: decorative, recreational, independent, family-supportive, self-involved, carefree and family. Additionally, advertisers successfully used nudity and sexuality in portrayal of women in promoting jeans, perfumes, alcohol or watches (p. 75). They concluded that women were hardly ever displayed as equal partners.

Shaikh et al. (2015) attempted to examine twelve Pakistani and Western advertisements collectively at four levels: textual, semiotic, discursive and hegemonic analysis. The investigation has used a critical discourse analysis approach and semiotics as research tools (p.108). The analysis is grounded on the following two models: Fairclough’s (1989) three-dimensional framework (as it is based on the text, discursive and social practice), besides ‘a propaganda model’ presented by Chomsky (1988) in order to interpret how advertisements become effective in a specific society (pp.117-118). Findings indicated that advertising fosters gender inequality and a patriarchal ideology (p.108). Finally, the study suggested the way women’s role could be portrayed beyond their traditional role in a male-dominated society (p.109).

2.2. Some basic concepts

2.2.1. What is meant by advertising?

‘Advertising is our environment. We swim in it as fish swim in water. We cannot escape it… Advertising messages are inside our intimate relationships, our homes, our hearts and our heads’ (Kilbourne, 1999 cited in Shaikh et al., 2015: 110).

Advertising is ubiquitous in our modern society, being an inherent part of our daily lives. We can find advertisements in newspapers, magazines, TV and even in bus stops. According to Geoffrey Leech (1966: 25), the most frequent and relevant type of advertising is ‘commercial consumer advertising’ addressed to a mass audience in order to promote sales of a commercial good or service. Nonetheless, this is not obviously the only type of
advertisement, as there are others whose aim is rather different. That would be the case, for example, of non-commercial advertising, directed towards charity or political propaganda.

But what does ‘advertising’ exactly mean? Where does this term come from? As far as its etymology is concerned, the word ‘advertising’ is classified as a derivation from the Latin verb *advertere* which means ‘to direct one’s attention to; give heed, to turn toward’². Broadly speaking, advertising does turn the attention of potential customers to a particular product or service. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for its part, defines it as a ‘publication of an announcement in a public medium; the activity, trade, occupation or profession of advertising or producing advertisements, now typically for a commercial product or service’.³

These definitions have something in common: advertising is described as a means of promoting a product or service in which the addressee plays a significant role in the whole process, as its main aim is to attract his/her attention through specific linguistic devices and visual imagery. However, this definition is not accurate enough as advertisements can be aimed at educating, raising awareness or even developing identities and stances. It could be labelled then as a specific means of communication that transmits a particular message from the producer (addresser) to the costumer (addressee).

It goes without saying that advertising discourse plays a crucial role in moulding and assembling our values, standpoints and ideas towards our lifestyle, actions, decisions, public roles and the choice between right and wrong (Shaikh et al., 2015: 109). Attitudes towards advertising can be suggestive of our nature and essence, besides our ideological, political and social position. Cook (2001), cited in Shaikh et al. (2015: 110) adds that ‘advertisements inform, persuade, remind, influence and perhaps change opinions, emotions and attitudes’. It is then considered a special register, which significantly differs from the ordinary language.

Through textual, visual and semiotic devices advertisers do not only promote products or capture the viewer’s attention, but also seek to change mindsets and implicitly compel people to acquire certain items they do not really want or need. One of the main purposes of advertising is, therefore, to be appealing so it will be remembered for longer. In this sense, advertisements employ particular linguistic devices and visual imagery in order to gain the addressee’s attention, arouse interest, stimulate desire, create conviction by establishing a relationship with the viewer and, finally, motivate him/her to take action (Arens and Bovée, 1994).

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² Definition drawn from the *Online Etymology Dictionary*: [http://www.etymonline.com/word/advertise](http://www.etymonline.com/word/advertise)
However, when we talk about images and words, it is important to clarify their respective meanings. According to Fowles (1996: 84), ‘words are completely arbitrary creations whereas images are naturalistic representations’. Hence, ‘the heart of any advertisement is not only either the picture or the text, but it is the visual imagery redolent with symbolic properties that the advertiser hopes the consumer will find significant’ (Chafai, 2010: 35-36). In this sense, the combination of both linguistic and image components are pivotal for communication to be successful, being necessary and complementary in achieving the goal expected from the advertisement.

Advertising conveys specific information that is often loaded with stereotypes. In such respect, women are often displayed as passive, exploitative, submissive and likely to be controlled. Men, conversely, are represented as independent, strong and powerful (Brown, 1998 cited in Shaikh et al., 2015: 110). All these images invade our minds up to the extent that they shape our opinions, ideas and presumptions of what people’s values should and should not be like (Shaikh et al., 2015: 110). In this context, the notion of ‘gender identity’ comes into play, as both the masculine and the feminine are displayed in their heterogeneity: the masculine is generally associated with power and determination, whereas the feminine as fragile and dubious. Consequently, advertising influences and ‘places’ recipients ideologically, so that they can categorize their respective gender identities as potential purchasers.

In short, one of the most significant aspects of advertising is ‘the art of persuasion’, which is achieved through its primary function: conative/persuasive, in which the poetic function gains special prominence. It is undeniable that advertisements play a crucial role in informing consumers, influencing their emotions, beliefs, feelings, etc., as well as persuading them to acquire what is being promoted that is to say through the use of both, language and images.

**2.2.2. Language, ideology and power**

Over the last fifty years, there has been an interesting discussion about the critical association between language, gender and power (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 15). Language can be loaded with many hidden and implicit intentions and purposes. It is then regarded as a powerful instrument in shaping, organizing and representing the world in which we live. When we talk or we write about a particular topic to specific people and in certain contexts, we opt for particular linguistic devices. This action unfolds a specific goal or ideology, as it reveals the
attitude of the person who is talking or writing. In this sense, each utterance has an implicit meaning, which in turn may lead to different presuppositions or implicatures in power relations. In a nutshell, language is more important than we realise.

We use language to carry out a whole range of actions, from communicating with our family and friends to give a lecture. According to Jakobson (2000: 335), 'language must be investigated in all the variety of its functions'. He distinguishes six elements that are required for communication to take place: emotive (or affective), referential, poetic, phatic, metalingual and conative. Some of them are intimately connected to power, such as the poetic function that focuses its attention on the message itself. In fact ‘advertising, whether spoken or written, often takes advantage of the poetic function of language (i.e. the form of the message). The same is true of political and other persuasive texts’ (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 13).

The referential, the conative and affective functions would be of utmost relevance concerning power too. The referential function of language ‘is what we might normally think of as information, or the denotative function of language’, but also includes the ideas, objects and conventions which speakers share knowledge of” (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 12). It would be then related to how we depict our reality and the impact of those portrayals on the way we conceive it.

The conative function, for its part, is associated with the addressee as it ‘helps us describe messages that are intended to have an effect on the audience. This might be anything from a command, an insult or an attempt at persuasion’ (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 12). This function may have implications in terms of power relations, since language positions people in some manner. With respect to the emotive (or affective) function, linked to the addresser, ‘it aims a direct expression of the speaker’s attitude towards what he is speaking about’ (Jakobson, 2000: 336). This function would be closely linked to ‘who is allowed to say what to whom, which is deeply tied up with power and social status’ (Thomas et al., 2004: 9).

With regard to power, Moore and Hendry (1982) define it as ‘…the force in society that gets things done, and by studying it, we can identify who controls what, and for whose benefit’. There are certain people or particular social collectives who have more power than others. This could be the case of, for example, the elderly, people with disabilities, women or children, regarded as vulnerable groups in many countries and cultures. In this sense, they may encounter inequalities in access to human rights, discrimination, isolation or categorization, among others.
Power is endorsed by ideologies. According to Mooney and Evans (2015: 16), ‘looking at language closely allows us to pick out these ideologies. In the same way we can deduce the structure of a language by studying the way people use it, we can also describe the structure and content of an ideology’. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991: 167) asserts that ideologies exist at an individual and group level: ‘ideologies serve particular interests which they tend to present as universal interests, shared by the group as a whole’. Hence, we can reach the following conclusion: everybody has an ideology. Those ones who share the same ideologies may form groups with a particular perspective about certain topics. Nevertheless, ‘ideologies are often not recognised by the individual or group as a powerful influence on their own behaviour’ (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 17).

2.2.3. Gender versus sex

Language, which is closely associated with ideology and power, may contribute to building stereotypes, prejudices, identities and human relationships. By creating stereotypes, language also displays and perpetuates, for instance, gender differences, which usually go unnoticed through songs, films and series, proverbs and sayings or slogans in newspapers and magazines. In this sense, there are many questions we should ask ourselves, such as: To what extent is sexism expressed and conveyed through language, images and colours? If we decide to change language and particular visual imagery, will it change attitudes and mindsets? Why and how is gender regarded as a relevant and powerful element in social interaction? How is it negotiated in language, across cultures and countries? And finally, how does the social construction shape men and women’s personalities according to social expectations, roles, linguistic choices and traditional viewpoints?

‘Men are from Mars and women are from Venus’. How often have we heard that phrase which attempts to emphasize the existing differences between men and women based on gender issues? It has been reported that they are so unlike each other they seem to be from different planets but the real truth is that neither men are from Mars nor women are from Venus. Advertisers, journalists and writers have resorted to this idea that men and women are ‘like chalk and cheese’ to write interesting and controversial stories, generate worldwide discussion and advertise compelling images that will be remembered for longer.

Shirley Chrisholm, an American politician, educator and author, already highlighted this idea through her well-known quote: ‘The emotional, sexual and psychological stereotyping of females begin when the doctor says: It’ a girl’. But, are men and women really
different or does society mould them in this way? Are these differences the consequence of biological features or sociocultural pressures instead? How weighty are they in the real world? Let us go a step further: how does the media and, specifically, advertising construct the perception we have of both sexes?

Let us start from the very beginning. There is an obvious link between language and gender, and between visual imagery and gender that delineate stereotypical gender roles. So, what is the difference between gender and sex? Are they considered the same? Whereas sex refers to biological and physiological differences and it is linked to being male or female, ‘gender is socially constructed’ (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 109) and it describes the features that a culture or society depict as masculine or feminine. ‘This means that gender refers to the traits that men and women are assigned and how these can vary within different classes, cultures and societies’ (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 15). Hence, ‘analysing behaviour as connected to socially constructed gender rather than sex is crucial in understanding the different ways people perform their identity as well as how they are judged’ (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 109). Gender, then, is not related to what a person has but it is something people fulfil through different aspects: their attitude, customs, outfit and speech.

Moreover, how men and women behave can vary from one class or community to another and even from one situation to the next, while assumptions about what is appropriate in discourse for both men and women often become naturalized into taken-for-granted beliefs about linguistic usage. These beliefs translate as androcentrism which, as many feminist linguists have observed, equates male with what is normal, and female as a deviation from that norm. (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 15-16).

These ‘socially constructed differences’ between men and women based apparently on biological traits are highlighted through the traditional roles assigned to both sexes. Although one could affirm that gender stereotypes are less present among new generations, this unfortunately may vary across communities, cultures and societies. As stated in the previous section, these distinctions may be implicitly and explicitly associated with ideology and power and ‘they have been often used to justify male privilege’ (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 16).

For example, domestic behaviours (women primarily at home, taking care for their family members and doing housework whereas men are at office, taking care of finances and
doing home repairs) have been employed to reinforce gender inequalities and stereotypical roles. Other instances of ‘sexist ideologies’ are related to personality traits (women are usually supposed to be more emotional and sensitive, whereas men are often expected to be fearless and competitive), occupations (many people take for granted that teachers, nurses and secretaries are women and that engineers, plumbers and doctors are men) and physical appearance (women are supposed to be beautiful and thin, whereas men are expected to be strong and tall).

2.2.4. Feminism versus sexism

Women around the world are sexually harassed everyday, everywhere and at any time. They have always been oppressed in some way. Despite the fact that gender equality is a goal that has been legally accepted by many states and international organizations, sexism still prevails, and one of its most crucial representations is the continuous objectification of women.

Sexism makes sense within a historically hierarchical relationship between men and women, where one is the norm, and the other marked as ‘other’ or inferior, and in relation to a wide range of social practices where women (and in some cases men) are exploited, manipulated or constrained because of their sex. (Litosseliti, 2006: 13)

The term sexism was coined in the 1960s, probably by analogy with the term racism, to describe ‘discrimination within a social system on the basis of sexual membership’ (Wodak, 1997: 7, cited in Litosseliti, 2006: 13). According to Mooney and Evans (2015: 109), ‘the current inequality of sexes is evident in the performance and interpretation of gender identity’. These gender disparities can be perfectly found in advertising, which pictures stereotypical gender roles through images and language. We are all invaded day after day by images of girls and women that appear in the media, ‘coated with’ stereotypes about who they actually are and which roles they should have in society.

Bearing in mind that the linguistic and visual components are extremely powerful instruments through which our reality is both shaped and defined, sexist language should be both analytically investigated and discussed. As will be outlined below, representations of both men and women in advertising are portrayed in a different way, as regards attitudes, lifestyle, behaviour and social status. In this sense, gender advertising provides the addressee
with a glimpse into a reality loaded with socially defined and constructed gender relations, displays and roles (Attenborough, 2014).

This gender inequality is denounced by feminism, a social movement ‘which is not there to enhance the superiority of women and disregard men because they are the source of a problem… Feminism is there to remind us that women have to fight for equal -absolutely equal- rights’ (Martín Alegre, 2015: 5). Whereas many people firmly believe that feminism is related to negative connotations and effects on society, others declare that although it was once required, it is no longer relevant. However, they are both mistaken.

Feminism, considered as the ‘tool for change’, is none other than a concept referring to the fight for gender equality. It is ‘the equality of human species, without any specific treats that can label us’ (Martín Alegre, 2015: 5). Thus, feminist investigation has shown ‘how language reflects and helps to perpetuate a social system that, on the whole, benefits men more than women’ (Weatherall, 2002: 8). In this regard, it is relevant to highlight the traditional concept of patriarchy and how advertisements create a psychological construction of it in the bodies and actions of women.

Finally, this idea would be profoundly connected with the dominance theory, ‘which takes the difference in power between women and men as the main cause of discoursal variation’ (Thomas et al., 2004: 71). In this sense, we do totally concur with authors such as the Australian feminist writer Dale Spender (1980), who pointed out that ‘it is not women who are deficient but the social order, which has been established according to patriarchal categories for their interest’.

2.3. Stereotypical gender images in advertising: the role of Relevance

When talking about advertising, it is inevitable not to mention Relevance theory (henceforth RT), its two creators, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, as well as the field in which this theory is inscribed: cognitive pragmatics. Before focusing our attention on its definition and some basic concepts within this model, it is relevant to remember the main aim of advertising for a deeper understanding: to attract the addressee’s attention, stimulate his/her imagination and to work as an aid to memory, so that the advertisement will be remembered in an easier way and for longer.

Thus, for communication to be successful the addressee must catch the audience’s attention, making them turn towards it, try to arouse interest and, in summary, be liked. This will have a double effect. On the one hand, if an advertisement is regarded as engaging and
appealing, it will be remembered more easily and it will live in the purchasers’ minds for longer. On the other hand, as Díaz-Pérez (2000: 37) remarks, the potential consumer will have a more positive attitude towards that product or service which is being promoted, s/he will link it to desirable qualities and it will give ‘food for thought’, up to the point of becoming an object of desire and therefore, relevant.

RT is considered nowadays as one of the most influential models within the domain of pragmatics. Sperber and Wilson (2005: 359) describe the concept of relevance ‘as a property of inputs to cognitive processes which could be either external stimuli or internal presentations’. This means that RT ‘is based on the assumption that the addressee will make the effort to process a statement if s/he assumes it to be relevant, that is to say, if s/he considers it will be able to modify or improve his/her cognitive environment4 or, in other words, his/her assumptions about the world’ (Díaz-Pérez, 2014: 109). Therefore, RT ‘emphasizes the fact that there is a difference between what we say and what we mean, between the abstract semantic representations of sentences and the particular interpretations of statements or utterances in context’ (Díaz-Pérez, 2000: 38).

In this regard, the term ‘ostension’ comes into play and can be interpreted as ‘a request for attention’ (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 155 cited in Díaz-Pérez, 2000: 43). If the ostensive stimulus originated by the advertiser is not able to attract the addressee’s attention, there will be no communication at all (Díaz-Pérez, 2000: 43). Success in communication will then be determined by the viewer considering the utterance to be relevant enough to be worth their interest. The addressee will therefore make an effort to processing new information if s/he thinks it will be relevant. In this sense, Díaz-Pérez (2000: 38-40) adds that being relevant is not an intrinsic feature of utterances, but it is derived from the association between utterance and context.

That being said, catching the addressee’s attention is then of utmost importance when dealing with advertising, ‘since it is a much more difficult task than in normal conversation, where the speaker practically always takes for granted that the hearer is going to pay attention to his words’ (Díaz-Pérez, 2000: 43). In fact, many advertisements are overlooked since ‘some of the characteristics of advertising discourse are that it is intrusive, uninvited and parasitic on other discourse types’ (Cook, 1992: 199 cited in Díaz-Pérez, 2000: 43).

As indicated in other sections, advertising language is considered as ‘loaded language’ characterized by two key elements: the linguistic and the visual one. The image frequently

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4 The concept of ‘cognitive environment’ of someone alludes to that person’s assumptions and/or suppositions about the world around him/her.
becomes the focus when attracting and holding the addressee’s attention. The verbal component, for its part, plays a significant role too, with the headline occupying a ‘top position’. For an advertisement to be successful, paralinguistic aspects (such as colours or typography) and uncommon words are employed together with catchphrases, sayings and proverbs, as well as devices such as metaphors, puns, rhyme, repetition, etc. To this list, it is important to incorporate the use of implicatures and presuppositions, since they may make the reader consider the existence of particular thoughts, premises and/or socioculturally expected attitudes.

In this sense, there is no getting away from the need to talk about gender stereotypes and, particularly, sexism through advertising, since it is the subject matter of our study. Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos (2009: 239) affirm that our knowledge is based on and structured by some patterns of our perceptual interactions, bodily actions, etc. These patterns are called image schemas and ‘they motivate important aspects of how we think, reason and imagine’, playing a significant role in persuasion (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 240). Taking this into account, they declare that ‘images schemas are communicative devices that can give rise to sexist interpretations. They are often used to introduce a value system on gender that often activates and imposes negative values by means of mostly covert and weakly overt communicated assumptions’ (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 245).

Both authors apply the concept of image schema to sexism, objectification and misogyny in advertising, among others (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 265). They reach the conclusion that many advertisements are degrading and offensive to women, portraying men as superior to the opposite sex.

Nevertheless and fortunately, another type of advertising is possible. In fact, a type of advertising free of stereotypes has recently appeared, which tries to dissociate itself from traditional advertising. It comes from two very distinct areas: on the one hand, there are many public institutions and NGOs that organize advertising campaigns in order to raise awareness for gender equality, girls’ education, etc. In this sort of advertisements, men and women appear in equal attitudes and when this is not the case, the objective is precisely to denounce these stereotypes. On the other hand, there are companies whose corporate social responsibility includes equality and they stand up for a non-sexist usage of advertising when broadcasting their messages, through the representation of men doing household chores and triumphant women at work, for example. In short, both share the same goal: to modify or end
up with these stereotypical gender images traditionally displayed by many advertisers for many years.

2.4. The representation of women and men through advertisements: a Critical Discourse Analysis approach

Throughout this piece of work, we have been using the terms language and discourse rather indistinctly, but they are not synonymous. In fact, there is a relevant difference between both which is going to be explained below:

> Basically, *discourse* is what happens when language ‘gets done’. Whereas *language* refers to the more abstract set of patterns and rules which operate simultaneously at different levels in the system (the grammatical, semantic and phonological levels, for example), *discourse* refers to the instantiation of these patterns in *real* contexts of use. In other words, *discourse* works above the level of grammar and semantics to capture what happens when these languages forms are played out in different social, political and cultural arenas. (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 5).

This brief paragraph introduces the approach of *Critical Linguistics* (coined in the late 1970s by Roger Fowler and his colleagues at the University of East Anglia in the UK) and *Critical Discourse Analysis* (chiefly linked to Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk) (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 50-51). All these authors concur with the same idea: ‘language is a means of social construction: it both shapes and is shaped by society’ (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 4).

Additionally, both approaches are focused on the linguistic realizations of power and they ‘are critical in that they regard language not as something neutral or transparent, but instead focus on the social and ideological functions of language in producing, reproducing or changing social structures, relations and identities’ (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 50). Nevertheless, they differ in the following: the former, Critical Linguistics (henceforth CL) has been criticised by its lack of development of the nature of the association between language, ideology and power (Fairclough, 1992), whereas the latter, Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is a ‘type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context’ (van Dijk, 2001: 352).
Since CDA is centred on ‘how language produces and reproduces domination and abuse of power, engendering injustice and inequality’ (van Dijk, 2001: 96), it is closely related to the aim of this research: to analyse women’s portrayal in advertising on the basis of two aspects: the role of language and image and their main (hidden) purposes, bearing in mind the role of advertising and how it influences the culturally gendered stereotypes.

That being said, although the principal focus of CDA is on language, it is not only related to language itself. It also analyses the context of communication: who is transmitting the message, with whom and why; in what type of situation; through which medium; how many types and acts of communication are involved and which is their connection with each other. When images, music, colour and light are combined with language to modify, condition or influence its meaning, then discourse analysis comes into action.

Particularly, CDA can be employed as a conceptual framework for examining gender stereotypes in advertising, by exploring how ideological presuppositions are hidden underneath the surface structures of language choices in text (Machin and Mayr, 2012). For instance, it can delve into how women may be underrepresented or misrepresented in diverse types of discourse through the analysis of semiotic aspects (such as dressing, setting, place, gestures and posture) and the linguistic component. It can then investigate what power relations are disseminated through advertising and consider if it fosters patriarchal ideology and gender inequality. According to Shaikh et al.:

Advertising employs different strategies (textual and body features) in order to naturalize stereotypical roles of male and female. Such advertisements reinforce soft, decorative, ignorant, family oriented but intellectual women. On the other hand, men are represented as courageous, bold and breadwinner. As a result, the ads serve social power relations and support the patriarchal state. (Shaikh et al., 2015: 109)

This discourse approach is intimately linked to sociolinguistic and feminist researches that discuss the issues of gender identities and the ways in which they are developed. In fact, Talbot (1998) cited in Magalhaes (2005: 182) suggests that ‘the mother identity now coexists with other identities, such as that of the feminine, which is constructed in the media (magazines, papers, radio, television)’. Magalhaes (2005: 182) continues by asserting ‘gender identities are constructed in dynamic social processes, as a result of the interface between verbal and visual texts’. Velasco-Sacristán and Fuertes-Olivera (2006: 1983), on their behalf, pay particular attention to critical feminist discourse and explain its main purpose. Hence,
these authors implicitly underscore the compelling and urgent need to change the portrayal of men and women in advertisements by quoting different prestigious linguists:

A critical (feminist) discourse analysis aims to uncover or make transparent those social processes and mechanisms that can perpetuate injustice, inequality and manipulation and (sex) discrimination in both overt and subtle, pernicious forms (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak, 1989), and those that promote and reproduce androcentric views of life, including defining appropriate behaviour and desirable attributes of women (Sunderland and Litosseliti, 2002: 21).

Thus, it is indeed extremely necessary to examine gender advertisements through a critical discourse analysis approach, since it is aimed at revealing the implicit ideologies ‘installed’ in the discourse of advertising. In this sense, Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse (1992, 1995) is of utmost importance, as it ‘is designed as an important first step towards the analysis of language and power in different types of text’ (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 53). Advertising discourse can be explored in a three dimensional process: text (semiotic and linguistic aspects), interaction and social context. In other words, ‘Fairclough’s framework explores not only the text itself but also its production and interpretation within a larger social context’ (Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 53).

Thanks to it, we will be able to explore how advertisements reinforce and portray a particular image of women as ‘promoted’ by the culture and specifically those social power relations that stand up for a patriarchal society. As a matter of fact, in media and specifically advertising, ‘there has often been a tendency to hasten to the interpretative stage of the what rather than the how’ (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 10). For this reason, the interrogative pronoun ‘how’ is of utmost importance when dealing with the Critical Discourse Analysis approach, as it will serve to exhibit more comprehensibly how advertisements construct meaning in addition to what they really mean.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This section focuses on some basic methodological aspects of this research paper. The means of data collection, instruments and procedures in order to analyse the ways in which women are depicted in advertising and the ideological implications of these portrayals are explained below.

3.2. Data Collection

The analysis undertaken is centred on a meaningful collection of various print and digital advertisements ranging from 2000 to 2015 collected from the primary sources, that is: from websites devoted to fashion and perfumes to digital platforms and databases aimed at collecting advertisements across the world. Particularly, a sample of nine advertisements will be comprehensively analysed in order to display how ideological processes work in discourse to perpetuate power relations through language and visual imagery.

Since our objective is to analyse different advertisements, our only sources of data are the adverts themselves, because this investigation applies a purely qualitative research design. The methodology suggested by Cook’s (1992: 3), which consists principally of content analysis, understanding the ‘content’ as every element incorporated into the advertisement, will be employed. Content analysis as an inquiry method has an empirical, basic research design. It includes both visual and verbal components as indispensable and proportionately weighty parts of the advertising discourse. There is such an interaction between the linguistic and visual components that one is required for the interpretation of the other one. It would therefore make little sense to prioritize visual matter over textual analysis (or vice versa), as it would lead to a seriously unbalanced analysis of the different advertisements, which are considered semiotically complex texts (Tuna and Freitas, 2012: 96). In spite of being virtually impossible to analyse concurrently both channels (the linguistic and visual one), we will attempt to consider every component in the advertisements selected for our corpus. Therefore, a qualitative discourse analysis will be selected as the most suitable one for our aim: to find out how gender, particularly women, is represented through advertising.
3.3. Sample Selection

The following nine advertisements will be selected in order to analyse how women are represented in advertising. Our current investigation is descriptive and non-experimental and it will draw primary data gathered through purposive sampling. A maximum of nine advertisements chosen from different websites, databases and platforms from the Internet (focused on fashion, beauty, perfumes, healthcare and advertisements campaigns) will be examined.

These samples were chosen on the following basis: traditional roles assigned to women and the way advertising discourse fosters gender inequality. The wide range of time of creation from 21st century (dating from the year 2000 to 2015) is fostered, bearing in mind the particular type of advertisements being searched for. Out of these 9 samples, five are print (figures 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9) and four are digital (figures 1, 2, 4 and 8). Furthermore, four advertisements feature only women (playing a merely decorative role), two portray a woman accompanied by her respective baby or children (acting thus, as a mother and/or nurturer) and the other two display both sexes (a couple made up of a man and a woman).

The nine advertisements have been chosen randomly among those that displayed sexism, gender inequality and patriarchal ideology. They are listed below together with their respective years and sources from where they have been drawn:

1. ‘Fairy’s washing up liquid’ (2015) from Procter & Gamble (P&G) website.
2. ‘Mustela skin-care product’ (2015) from AdPharm.
5. ‘OLAY REGENERIST Body Care products’ (2015) from Rankin.
6. ‘Woman’s bag at French Connection’ (2014) from Rankin.

These advertisements were selected because they portray traditional, decorative and submissive roles performed by women. Thanks to them, we will explore, apart from their different roles, the values of our society and how gender inequality and the patriarchal ideology are still present in our daily lives.
3.4. Classification and encoding of the advertisements

In order to choose the main topics in this corpus, besides identifying the main traits of the advertisements proposed, the selected advertisements have been classified into three broad categories: domesticity illustrating the traditional stereotypes about the roles that women carry at home (Women as nurturers, mothers and wives); ideal beauty depicting women as decorative instruments, concerned with their physical appearance and attractiveness maintenance (Women: beauty, body and trend) and finally, sex and submissiveness, featuring women in subordination to men as ‘sex objects’ (Women as sexual objects).
CHAPTER FOUR: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

4.1. The role of gender in advertising: masculinity versus femininity

We are limited by the English language to reflect and ‘think in terms of binaries: man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine’ (Coates, 2004: 8). Hence, when we meet somebody, the first thought that comes to our minds is if this person is male or female, and accordingly, ‘the person interprets everything in terms of gender and its related stereotypes’. (Chafai, 2010: 48). Following this premise, Cross and Markus (1993: 60) cited in Chafai (2010: 48) vigorously affirm that ‘thinking of others in terms of gender is almost inescapable’. In fact, people interact and relate to one another according to the gender knowledge that has influence over our understanding and personal opinion about the other (Chafai, 2010: 48).

But, what does the term ‘stereotype’ mean? What does it imply? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as ‘a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception’.\(^5\) Beall and Sternberg (1993: 11), cited in Chafai (2010: 47), complements this acceptation by claiming that ‘everyone’s knowledge about the world includes all of the old gender stereotypes as tacit or implicit beliefs. The stereotypes include personality traits, role behaviour, physical appearance and occupations’. Therefore, it can be assumed that a stereotype is a depiction of a person founded on basic, limited and fallacious presuppositions.

Advertisements frequently depict men and women stereotypically. These stereotyped images of men and women may convey a wide range of social warning signals and even the subtlest ones make an impact on the addressee (Baran and Davis, 2008). In this sense, bearing in mind the traditional gender stereotypes, women should be feminine concerning their reactions and attitudes: they should be dependent, romantic, soft, submissive; in addition, they should look physically attractive for men, being decorative models. They should also be the perfect mother and wife, who takes care of their respective families, devoted to cooking, cleaning and bringing up their children (Chafai, 2010: 48). To this list, Nagi (2014: 86) adds another element: women considered as sex objects. She states that ‘the media is generally charged with depicting women as sex objects that can grab attention and interest of viewers’. Holtzhausen, (2010: 125), on her behalf, denounces that ‘advertisements are often criticised for using out-dated role portrayals of women –primarily that of the mother or the seductress’.

Conversely, depictions of men in advertising have commonly been associated with men’s traditional role in which they should have a masculine personality: they should be physically stronger, more active and unemotional, besides responsible for the household economy (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 256). Moreover, they are also expected to be more competent and autonomous in the professional sphere. Particularly, according to Stevens and Ostberg (2011: 402), ‘advertisements of this type either address or portray men in a taken-for-granted manner, where stereotypes of how men are –not comfortable in taking care of babies, poor at expressing emotions, or naturally unskilled at household work – are sustained’. Finally, beauty is not a characteristic associated with men’s personal qualities, but it is mandatory and even a requisite for women’s physical aspect (Chafai, 2010: 48).

In a related vein, Barrett (1982: 35) emphasizes that definitions of ‘femininity and masculinity’, ‘the social meaning of family life’ and ‘the sexual division of labour’ are grounded on visual imagery, symbolism and ideology, three main aspects that can be perfectly transmitted through advertising. In this respect, whereas there have been changes in how masculinity is depicted in advertisements, ‘there is still a dominance of fairly traditional modes of representations where men are active, in control and acting upon the world’ (Stevens and Ostberg, 2011: 402).

Consequently, although one may confirm that gender stereotyping is diminishing in today’s world, this obviously may differ across societies, countries and cultures. Furthermore, we reach the conclusion that men and women are portrayed in terms of the ‘constructed definition’ of what we understand by masculinity and femininity. In this sense, social roles, status and power are relevant situational triggers of behaviours of both men and women (Geis, 1993: 21 cited in Chafai, 2010: 48).

That being said, we have categorized the subsequent advertisements into three main areas which are the most frequent ones in advertising: 1) women presented as wives, nurturers and mothers; 2) women portrayed as beautiful and perfect bodies focused on keeping their physical attractiveness either through fashion and/or beauty products; and 3) women depicted as passive, submissive and merely sexual objects. It is worth mentioning that women’s representation as active, qualified and competitive at professional level is occasionally promoted through advertisements, although this will not be covered in our study. As a matter of fact, the most typical role in which women are usually displayed is the role of preserving their attractiveness for men’s pleasure and entertainment (Chafai, 2010: 76-77).
Last but not least, it should be noted that these three ‘categorizations’ would be analysed from a twofold perspective: they will be centred on the visual imagery (dressing, gestures, postures, colours, setting and place) and the linguistic –and discursive- features of advertisements (wordplay and puns, metaphors, implicatures and presuppositions, etc.) so as to realize how both components become so influential in perpetuating gender stereotypes, specially those related to women, which is the subject matter of our investigation. These advertisements cover a variety of products and services that will be explained below and will help us to analyse the aforementioned aspects in depth.

4.1.1. Women as nurturers, mothers and wives

For many years men have been presented as financial providers, independent, assertive and competitive, whereas women have been considered to be tender wives, mothers and housewives, responsible for doing housework and bringing up their children (Stevens and Ostberg, 2011: 401, 402). Indeed, advertising has solidly perpetuated this traditional representation of women as ‘homemakers’ and it still employs this visual imagery to advertise a wide range of commodities related to household chores.

The reality shows that both, men and women lead busy lives loaded with many societal roles at present. In this sense, although a family model is focused on a partnership rather than on patriarchy, and although women have more rights and opportunities in the labour market than many years ago, it still prevails this patriarchal representation in society and consequently in advertising, in which women are still considered family-supportive, responsible for the maintenance of the household and everything it stands for. In such respect, there are many advertisements in which women are represented in activities that are restricted to family and home, whereas men are not included in the housework or in their children rearing.

In fact, women are usually depicted with one or two children and the focus is on the child or children or even on the product being promoted (Holtzhausen, 2010: 131). The following three advertisements clearly reinforce, through the linguistic and visual component, gender stereotypes of what many years ago it was thought that a woman should do. It should be remarked that the father/husband figure is not present in either of the advertisements. Let us analyse each one of them in depth.
This digital advertisement (Figure 1) dates from 2015 and it has been obtained from an English online platform developed by Procter & Gamble (P&G), a corporation that has been establishing brands for the last 175 years. It is a clear instance that both visual imagery and language play a crucial role to attract the potential consumer’s attention, which will be detailed below.

Firstly, it is important to determine what is being promoted: a Fairy’s washing up liquid. In it, a woman and her daughter seem to be enjoying the task of doing the washing up while using Fairy’s product. Secondly, the presence of the product itself together with the appearance of a mother and her child leads us immediately to the following implicatures: 1) women feel more comfortable in the ‘domesticity’ field as their facial expressions suggest, being responsible for the care and maintenance of the household unit; and 2) household chores are associated with women from an early age. Therefore, it subliminally transmits the following message: every woman, regardless of their age, must learn and know how to do housework. That being said, let us analyse the advertisement by considering the use of three basic elements: text, colour and participants.

With respect to the linguistic component, the following phrases can be perfectly read: 1) ‘Fun activities’; 2) ‘Mums little helpers’; 3) ‘How to get the whole family helping out with

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6 Source: https://www.supersavvyme.co.uk/family-life/fun-activities/slideshow/mums-littlehelpers

7 The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘implicature’ as ‘the act or an instance of (intentionally) implying a meaning which can be inferred from an utterance in conjunction with its conversational or semantic context, but is neither explicitly expressed nor logically entailed by the statement itself; a meaning that is implied contextually, but is neither entailed logically nor stated explicitly’.
the cleaning’; and 4) ‘Sounds like an impossible dream, right? Read on…’ Through these verbal messages, it should be underscored this advertisement is directed towards women (it then establishes a close connection between women family members and household chores). It even goes one step further, as it relates the task of doing the washing-up to something enjoyable, pleasant and even, an impossible dream that can be realised. Thus, through the use of the adjective ‘fun’, the noun ‘dream’ and the rhetorical question, the advertiser seeks to make positive cognitive effects accessible to the reader, particularly to women. Notwithstanding, it conveys a negative message towards men as, in spite of including in its verbal message the idea that ‘the whole family’ should help out with the cleaning, we do only observe two women: a mother and her daughter. Consequently, men’s absence insinuates they are not autonomous enough to be able to do housework, being considered as lazy and even sexist.

Regarding visual imagery, we will analyse which colours have been selected, together with who is interacting in the message itself. The little girl is wearing a white T-shirt and her mother a blue one. Whereas ‘white’ would indicate purity, innocence and peace, ‘blue’ would represent the sky and the sea, linked to sensitivity and calmness. Therefore, in terms of gender analysis, we could reach the subsequent conclusion: women are ‘labelled’ as delicate, inoffensive and quiet (this last adjective could be even related to motionless and accordingly passiveness, a typical stereotyped role related to females).

Lastly, this advertisement reasserts and cements the idea that women should be actively involved in keeping their household unit neat and tidy, beginning at a very early age. This statement is drawn in view of the following message ‘Mum little helpers’, besides the presence of a mother who is apparently teaching her daughter how to do the washing up. Moreover, their facial expression clearly reveals their happiness in doing so (they seem to be playing with the foam). According to societal roles and gender stereotypes, women should be interested in ‘feminine’ activities, such as housekeeping or taking care of others. In fact, a study carried out by Eisend (2010) evidenced that women are three times more likely than men to be represented at home than in an office in advertisements and they are frequently portrayed as product users rather than authority figures.

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8 Wilson and Sperber (2002: 251) define ‘positive cognitive effects’ as ‘a worthwhile difference to the individual’s representation of the world – a true conclusion, for example’. They argue that this concept is necessary to distinguish ‘between information that merely SEEMS to the individual to be relevant and information that actually IS relevant’.
This digital advertisement (Figure 2) was created in 2015 and it has been drawn from an online visual database of healthcare and pharmaceutical communications called AdPharm. It is a straightforward advertisement that presents a Mustela skin-care product by emphasising the mother-child bond. It depicts a woman with her newborn who is looking after him/her, highlighting, thus, her maternal role. In this sense, it is almost impossible not to consider her the baby’s mother: she holds, reassures and cares for her newborn. But let us explore the advertisement considering both, visual imagery and language.

Firstly, both linguistic and visual components presuppose the two following ideas: 1) this woman is a baby’s mother; and 2) it is any mother’s obligation to support, assist and care for her children. In a related vein, the advertisement promotes the idea that this lotion will make babies and mothers’ skin be cared forever.

Secondly, this figure perfectly reveals the importance of language in advertising. Its message is brief, simple and concise, achieved by the use of an imperative: ‘Protect’. This verbal mode indirectly shows what a woman must do: take care of her children. This definitely reflects a very common gender stereotype: women are the only ones that must look

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9 Source: https://adpharm.net/ Mustela brand.htm
after their babies. The prepositional phrase ‘for life’ implicitly stresses this is something females will have to do forever: be at home taking care of her family-members.

The visual component also deserves an analysis. Light colours predominate in the advertisement, which denote femininity, delicacy, calmness and kindness. Additionally, we do observe joyful expressions that express love and affection. The maternal role is, once again, outlined through the mother’s gaze whereas she is stroking her baby’s foot. This would be closely associated with Simpson and Mayr’s statement (2010: 16), in which the conception of women’s inherently ‘natural’ roles as ‘mothers’, ‘nurturers’ and ‘carers’ –which stands in marked contrast to whereas men’s supposedly natural function as ‘providers’ and ‘breadwinners’ has been employed to perpetuate stereotypical family and gender roles for many years.

![Nice try, mom…](https://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/mcdonalds_sandwich_2)

Figure 3. McDonald’s Sandwich (2007)

This print advertisement (Figure 3) was designed in 2007 and it has been selected from the creative online database *Ads of the World*. It is an obvious example that both visual imagery and language do really matter in advertising. Nevertheless, as far as gender stereotypes are concerned (the subject matter of our study), the linguistic component is extremely relevant in this particular case, as it hides implicit meaning that will be described below.

This advertisement promotes *McDonald’s* fast food products by depicting a home made sandwich wrapped in *McDonald’s* packing paper with the phrase: ‘Nice try, mom…’

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10 Source: [https://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/mcdonalds_sandwich_2](https://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/mcdonalds_sandwich_2)
First of all, with the use of this phrase together with visual imagery, the advertiser seeks to create the situation of a mother (maternal, carer and nurturer role) wrapping sandwiches in McDonald’s paper to mislead her child and make him/her think s/he is going to eat a McDonald’s hamburger or sandwich. Therefore, although the addressee can see neither a woman wrapping up these sandwiches nor her child telling her that it was a nice try, we know this advertisement is specifically addressed to women.

In fact, implicit information is relevant in this advertisement: 1) it presupposes this child has a mother (existential presupposition\(^\text{11}\)); 2) h/she seems not to like sandwiches, so his/her mother decides to wrap it up in McDonalds paper (conversational implicature); 3) this child seems to love McDonald’s (which would be the reason that his/her mother did this) (conversational implicature) and, finally, 4) it is his/her mother’s duty to look after her family members and consequently, prepare them lunch/dinner (conversational implicature). Through its directive function and the aim of influencing the addressee’s actions by stimulating his/her desire of tasting it (this is achieved, above all, through its own slogan: I’m loving it), this advertisement depicts indirectly a woman who is responsible for feeding her children; in other words, it reveals the role of a woman depicted as a mother, nurturer and family-carer. Therefore, it represents the woman, in a certain way, as the ideal mother and wife who is characterised as gentle, patient and engaged with housekeeping.

4.1.2. Women: beauty, body care and trend

‘One of the ideals of femininity in advertising is that of beauty’ (Luzón Marco, 1997: 252). In this sense, advertisements depicting women as less active and more concerned with their own physical appearance and beauty maintenance take a large space in many English magazines, newspapers and webpages, ‘not for their own self-esteem but for men’s pleasure and satisfaction’ (Chafai, 2010: 109). In such respect, female body is inevitably dominated by sociocultural norms conveyed through discursive constructions. These constructions show the unavoidable gender-power relationship between body, beauty and fashion, which are frequently connected with physical appearance.

Shampoos, body lotions, hairsprays, clothes, accessories, make-up and so on are products that are promoted through language and visual imagery. There generally appears an

\(^{11}\) According to Renkema (2004: 133) ‘presupposition’ can be defined as ‘implicit information which must be true for the sentence in question to be itself true or false’. They are fundamental in advertising discourse, since they can make the viewer consider the existence of certain ideas, thoughts and culturally-expected behaviours.
attractive woman who seems to be quite happy with the product’s positive results. Additionally, women are usually portrayed as product users and decorative figures that enhance their attractiveness through the use of these promoted products or services. Particularly, decorative portrayals display women as detached, without interacting with the product advertised in that moment.

According to Holtzhausen (2010: 15), ‘this woman celebrates her femininity, and does so through enhancing her physical beauty by employing cosmetics, jewellery and different hairstyles’. In reality, ‘they are expected to maintain their beauty by using cosmetics and products for the whole body, to enhance their appearance via fashion including accessories and clothes and to keep their looks slim through diet and fitness’ (Chafai, 2010: 73). This would be considered as a traditional way of advertising a particular commodity or service, featuring beautiful women as decorations and displayed visually without an active role.

Figure 4. APOCALIPS Lip Lacquer by Rimmel (2013)

This digital advertisement (Figure 4) dates from 2013 and it has been drawn from the English website Beauty Scene aimed at providing the latest news and updates about upcoming beauty

12 Source: http://www.beautyscene.net/beauty-campaign/kate-moss-for-rimmel-londons-ss2013-campaign/
and skincare products, fragrances and make-up. It clearly shows the relevance of language together with visual imagery in order to achieve the desired goal: to get the addressee to acquire this particular product of this specific brand to become a star like Kate Moss.

But, let us start from the very beginning. A picture of one of the most desirable female top-models, Kate Moss, who uses *Rimmel* make-up, specifically certain lipsticks, is portrayed. The image of this supermodel appearing in this particular advertisement promoting this specific brand has particular connotations related to what we call feminine beauty: attractiveness, slimness, youth and desirability. This idea would be closely related to the widespread representation of beautiful top-models used as persuasion instruments through which advertisers seek to promote and reflect what we call ‘beauty standards’. Intimately associated with the notion of physical attractiveness and beautiful face is the idea of decorative role. Thus, in this picture Kate Moss is not interacting with the product. It should be noted this does not obviously represent a realistic portrayal of the woman gender role.

Regarding the linguist component, we can observe a clear instance of wordplay (specifically, a pun) acting as attention-getter and broadcasting a positive image of the promoted product. As aforementioned, *Kate Moss* is the image of this *Rimmel* make-up called ‘Apocalips’. This is obviously an invented word that results from the word ‘Apocalypse’ and ‘lips’, as the product advertised is a lipstick. It is a ‘homophone’, as both words (‘apocalypse’ and ‘apocalips’) have the same pronunciation but different origin, spelling and meaning. It can be interpreted as ‘your lips’ revelation or uncovering’. Thus, the addressee can perfectly see the result with the accompanying image. In this way, it yields positive cognitive effects, as this advertisement can makes women believe that, thanks to this product, they will achieve this physical appearance. Moreover, advertisers use the onomatopoeia ‘Wow’ that expresses astonishment or admiration, as they seek to impress the viewer in order to catch her attention and, accordingly, buy this lipstick (directive function).

Visual imagery together with the linguistic component convey implicit information, such as: 1) if we use *Rimmel* lipsticks, we will achieve this beauty (conversational implicature); 2) if we use this make-up, we will be successful, independent and perfect women like her (conversational implicature); 3) if we do not use this make-up, we will not be attractive to men and we will feel bad about ourselves (gender stereotype).
This print advertisement (Figure 5) was created in 2015 and it has been obtained from the English website Rankin, an online platform focused on creating landmark editorial and advertising campaigns. As can be observed, this figure promotes Olay body care products by portraying a woman slightly laid down, rolled up in a white towel. She seems to be relaxed and calm, enjoying these brand-name products effects while being at home. Hence, the woman as a decorative focal point is once again found in this advertisement, as she does not interact with the promoted product.

Through the use of both image and language the advertiser tries to create an enjoyable spa atmosphere in order to make women think they will feel the same and they will achieve identical results in their skin if they use them. Hence, implicit information is of utmost importance in this advertisement: 1) conversational implicatures can be drawn, along the lines of: by using Olay, you will achieve a spa-like feel and a spa-like feel is desirable and enjoyable; 2) she seems to be quite good and relaxed considering her posture, facial expression and the white towel she wears (the white colour is perceived as calmness and purity which is, in turn, stereotypically associated with women); 3) these products will make your skin smoother and firmer, like hers; and, finally 4) it is any woman’s duty to take care of herself so as to look beautiful (emphasising thus, the concept of feminine beauty). According to Holtzhausen (2010: 146) ‘its relation to personal care items lies in the fact that application of the advertised product will enhance the physical attractiveness of women’.

13 Source: http://rankin.co.uk/advertising/01698_olay_regenerist-cannes_285x440-2/
Moreover, the linguistic component is particularly significant. Through the use of two comparative adjectives 14 ‘smoother’ and ‘firmer’, the advertiser seeks to persuade the addressee by making her think her skin will be much better than before using the advertised product. For the sake of catching attention, it ends up with a forceful phrase written in capital letters (‘A surprisingly spa-like feel’) in order to influence the addressee’s beliefs, feelings and emotions towards these products and persuade us to buy it (directive function).

Finally, the use of evaluative adverbs such as ‘surprisingly’ indirectly expresses the advertiser’s opinion that seeks to stimulate the addressee’s desire and motivate her to take action. This phrase also transmits certain feelings and associations, such as quietness and peacefulness, besides beauty and perfection. This would reinforce Chafai’s (2010: 100) statement, which reads as follows: ‘we are living in a world where women feel or are believed to be useless, incompetent, undesirable or unwanted unless they make efforts to maintain their appearance beautiful and attractive for men’s satisfaction’.

Figure 6. Women’s bag at French Connection (2014)15

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14 It should be noted these are extremely common grammatical categories in advertisements.
15 Source: [http://rankin.co.uk/advertising/fe_rankinsite_02/](http://rankin.co.uk/advertising/fe_rankinsite_02/)
This print advertisement (Figure 6) was designed in 2014 and it has been drawn from the English website Rankin, mentioned above. Both the linguistic and visual components are especially significant and they will be detailed below.

Firstly, this is a clear, brief and straightforward advertisement that promotes French Connection accessories, particularly bags. It portrays an attractive fair-skinned, blue-eyed and blonde-haired woman staring straight to camera. Here both, feminine beauty ideal and women as physically attractive and decorative creatures (emphasising, thus, their decorative role) gain special prominence. The woman portrayed does not have a speaking role in this advertisement; she is depicted as passive and disengaged, as she is leaning on the bag that is being promoted.

Secondly, its verbal message is simple, concise and catchy achieved by the use of an informal phrase introduced by an adverb and followed by an imperative: ‘Never miss a trick’. According to the Macmillan Dictionary, it means ‘to notice every opportunity and use it’. The linguistic together with the visual component would lead us to the following ideas: 1) women are interested in bags; 2) this bag is affordable, as indicated by this idiom of not missing this change or opportunity; and 3) this bag seems to be for beautiful and attractive women. Moreover, there is also a pun on the lexical item ‘trick’, as it refers to the ‘magic trick’ that is reinforced by the appearance of the white rabbit.

Last but not least, the use of dark colours also deserves an analysis. They are often linked to seduction, sexiness and elegance and they create an atmosphere of intrigue and mystery. Hence, the advertiser seeks to persuade women to acquire this French Connection accessory that will serve them as a complement to look sophisticated and stunning in their everyday life (physically attractive role through fashion). This advertisement would follow ‘the lifestyle format’ (Leiss, 1997, cited in Chafai, 2010: 96), mostly employed in advertising, ‘since it combines product image and personalized formats, which is the best way to achieve people’s intentions, expectations and desires’ (Chafai, 2010: 96).

4.1.3. Women as sexual objects

Objectification is defined as ‘the act of treating people as if they are objects, without rights or feelings of their own’. A focus on body parts leads to the loss of individuals’ identities.

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16 This definition can be found through the following link: https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/not-never-miss-a-trick
17 https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/objectification?q=objectification
Consequently, those people whose body parts are underscored in advertisements may turn into sexual objects. In this sense, different previous studies have revealed that there are many excessively sexual advertisements that involve a ‘dual defamation of women as sex objects and maintenance of male sexual superiority’ (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 256).

The objectification of women is very frequent in advertising which, ironically enough, is aimed at promoting a particular product often addressed to women in the first place (such as jeans, perfume or jewellery), but mainly meant to attract men’s attention. In many advertisements, women are hyper sexualized, ‘portrayed in a sexual manner, usually dressed in revealing clothing and/or in provocative poses’ (Holtzhausen, 2010: 129, 130). They may appear as either virginal passive creatures or promiscuous sex objects.

It is quite common to observe, in most types of these advertisements, the interaction of a couple which sends subtle messages of relative power and dominance, through stereotypical images of both men and women. They contain sexually appealing imagery by including powerful men and desirable women (whose ideal of feminine beauty seems to be unattainable and supernatural), together with sexual elements such as models’ behaviour (posture, body language, eye contact with the viewer), camera effects (dim light), and nudity.

Additionally, it should be noted that ‘women are usually presented as weaker than men through the pictorial composition of the ad and through the particular situation of the scene (...) They are portrayed as captured objects, less-than-human, humiliated’ (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 262). Men, for their part, are frequently depicted in a sexual stance next to women and/or in a power position in which men are standing upright or physically active and women remain submissive, passive, vulnerable and sexually available to satisfy men’s desires. This image, according to Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos (2009: 256), leads us to the following idea: ‘man is first and woman is second’.
This print advertisement (Figure 7) dates from 2014 and it has been obtained from Fragrantica, an online encyclopaedia of perfumes and independent magazine, available in different languages and open to everybody. This advertisement could be labelled as simple and straightforward through which both, language and visual imagery deserve a comprehensive analysis to explore stereotypical ways of depiction when it comes to their main figures: men and women (alone, in couples or in groups).

Firstly, let us introduce what is being advertised: Joop Homme Extreme perfume. Although this advertisement is aimed at men, it employs female and male models. It includes the picture of a couple, ‘which is recurrent not only in adverts that promote male and female fragrances simultaneously, but also in perfume advertisements in general’ (Tuna and Freitas, 2012: 101). Nudity and erotic portrayal of both, men and women prevail in this particular case.

Furthermore, the presence of a couple (made up of a muscular man and an attractive woman) together with the verbal message that appears at the top of the image send us several subtle messages related to gender power relationships: 1) ‘real men’ seem to be muscular and

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good-looking (thereby highlighting the concept of masculinity); 2) if men use this fragrance, they will achieve what they really want: sex with attractive women (emphasising here the ideal of feminine beauty) (conversational implicature); 3) *Joop Homme Extreme* fragrance will provide men with ‘extreme’ physical sensations, taking them from seduction to action (underscoring thus, gender stereotypes: men regarded as active and powerful, whereas woman as submissive and passive); 4) this perfume will make both, men and women, have the same feelings as those evoked through the image: sexual attraction, eroticism, passion and sensuality.

With respect to the visual component, specific sexual elements deserve to be highlighted. On the one hand, the woman does not directly look at the addressee. In fact, she appears with her eyes closed. Her passionate gaze and sensuous posture clearly show the power of a man wearing this particular fragrance. In this sense, through her facial expression, every man could feel the irresistible impact of the perfume on women. On the other one, the man has a suggestive sexual posture that is stronger and more powerful than words themselves. He is portrayed as dominant and active, having control over the situation, bearing in mind his body language. Additionally, the use of dim light is aimed at awakening sexual desire. The bottle is deep purple, which refers both to the intensity of the perfume and its nocturnal quality. The ‘X’ logo implicitly suggests what is going to happen.

Finally, the linguistic component is specifically relevant, as it sends a subtle message of relative power and dominance, by stereotyping the roles of men and women. Thus, we can observe the slogan is effective and attention getting. It contains a semantic pun achieved by the use of the phrase ‘get more’ which presents two meanings: 1) real men can get more women and accordingly, more sex; and 2) if you are ‘a real man’ you can get more bottles of this particular perfume. In the first case, without a shadow of a doubt, women are regarded as sexual objects, something that men can ‘acquire’ whenever they want (remarking thus, the concept of women’s objectification and submissiveness). Additionally, the use of the ‘X’ and the adjective ‘extreme’ as part of the perfume’s name reasserts this idea: men are considered as superior beings, stronger and more powerful than women; they are dominant and can seduce attractive women.
This digital advertisement (Figure 8) was created in 2015 and it has been drawn from the website *Fashion Gone Rogue*. As can be observed, both the linguistic and visual component play a crucial role in this particular instance, as they send a clear message to the recipient: if you purchase this product, you will feel as sexy and attractive as the top-model and actress, Gal Gadot.

First of all, it is relevant to highlight what is being advertised: *Gucci Bamboo* fragrance for women. This perfume advertisement consists of one person, ‘a sophisticated perfume bottle, the perfume name and a short text line indicating the product’s target audience (for him, for her, for both)’ (Tuna and Freitas, 2012: 99). Thus, Gal Gadot, a beautiful Israeli actress and model who has recently played *Wonder Woman*, is the brand’s image.

She is alone, wearing a silver metallic long dress while showing off her bare back in a sensual way. Desirability, attractiveness, beauty and magnetism could be some sexual elements that would perfectly match with this type of advertisements. Additionally, her physical appearance seems to comply with modern beauty standards of slimness and youthfulness. She appears in a decorative sexual position, standing up against the wall with a mysterious face and direct gaze into the camera lens, staring directly at the addressee, unquestionably inviting him to join her, as well as implicitly associating the promoted product with sex. Therefore, apart from her decorative role (she does not interact with the product that

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19 Source: [https://www.fashiongonerogue.com/gal-gadot-gucci-bamboo-fragrance-ad/](https://www.fashiongonerogue.com/gal-gadot-gucci-bamboo-fragrance-ad/)
is being promoted), she is displayed as a sexual instrument for men’s pleasure and entertainment, leaving behind her personality and dignity.

Although ‘one of the most prominent features of perfume advertising is that they are strongly based on visuals’ (Tuna and Freitas, 2012: 96) the verbal message deserves also an analysis. It reads as follows: ‘Underneath it all she wears Gucci Bamboo’. This phrase is clearly aimed at attracting the addressee’s interest and stimulating his desire. The scent is described through imagination, as the preposition ‘underneath’ together with her posture, clothing, body language, eye contact with the addressee and dim light evokes eroticism, sensuality and exoticism. These advertisements try to evoke feelings and sensations rather than describing the product itself. In fact, as Cook remarks, ‘perfumes are marketed and perceived as expressions of the self and sexuality’ (Cook, 1992: 101, cited in Tuna and Freitas, 2012: 102).

This print advertisement (Figure 9) has been selected from the website Fashion Ad Explorer. This site contains 15881 advertisements at the moment. As can be noticed, visual imagery becomes the protagonist of this advertisement, since there is no verbal message that accompanies it. In fact, according to Tuna (2004), cited in Tuna and Freitas (2012: 96) ‘a significant number of these advertisements rely on pictorial elements alone, with no other verbal elements but brand and product names’.

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20 Source: [http://www.fashionadexplorer.com/l-calvin-klein-%E2%80%93-c-ad-campaign-jeans--s-2004ss#NJi9VRYh478V0PIN](http://www.fashionadexplorer.com/l-calvin-klein-%E2%80%93-c-ad-campaign-jeans--s-2004ss#NJi9VRYh478V0PIN)
Focusing on the image, we can observe the interaction of a couple which sends a subtle message of extreme power and dominance, by stereotyping the roles of both sexes. Thus, it depicts a good-looking woman restrained on the floor subjected to an attractive man’s will. Her eyes are closed and her facial expression denotes resignation. She is motionless and, consequently submissive, whereas the man is looking directly at her with desire and taking control over the situation (considered as more powerful, stronger and dominant, underlining thus, the traditional concept of patriarchy, masculinity and sexism).

With reference to colour, black has been employed due to its association with male sexual dominance, closely related to power, strength, authority, fear and aggression. This advertisement clearly fosters violence and abuse against women. The image is found offensive, as it illustrates ‘a masculinity that involves a dual defamation of women as sex objects and maintenance of male sexual superiority’ (Velasco-Sacristán and Cortés de los Ríos, 2009: 256). Femininity, for its part, is perceived in a humiliating and degrading way, as the woman's body language clearly reveals that she is not an active player in this ‘game’.

In short, this type of image has a great impact in society, as it perpetuates gender stereotypes and unequal power relationships, rendering women into a subordinate position. In such respect, women are regarded as passive, helpless and sexual objects. Men, on their behalf, are misrepresented and considered as depraved, inhuman and violent, a portrayal completely away from reality.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Summary of the main findings

Today we live in a screen-dominated globalized world in which advertising plays a significant role, being undoubtedly part of our daily lives. It is everywhere, at any time, in any language and culture, acting as ‘a means of communication between the seller (advertiser) and the buyer (consumer)’ (Nagi, 2014: 86). Through its visual and linguistic components, this study has proved how advertising moulds and influences our ideas, attitudes and ways of thinking towards others, men and women, who still appear in the media coated with stereotypes about who they actually are and which roles they should have in society (particularly women, who have always been oppressed in some way at different spheres of life).

This analysis set out to determine female role portrayals in advertising on the basis of two aspects: the role of visual imagery and language, as well as their main hidden purposes. It reveals that gender and advertising, intimately linked to ideology and power, are very complex and jumbled issues, as they can be loaded down with specific implicit intentionality. In this sense, the way women are depicted with respect to men has proved to be of utmost importance in order to understand the nature of gender-role representations in advertisements.

Although gender roles have undergone substantial changes in our society since the 1950s, there is still a long way to walk. In fact, this study has found that gender inequality is reasserted and reinforced through different roles assigned to both, men and women, in advertising. In fact, these findings suggest that many current advertisements illustrate deeply rooted stereotypes through which women, in comparison to men, are still represented in lower positions, occupying roles such as being family-supportive, decorative, passive and available to satisfy men’s desires.

There are particularly three main types of depiction of women that have been identified and explored throughout this dissertation: women as family carers (domesticity); women as decorative instruments (ideal beauty) and finally, women as sexual objects (sex and submissiveness). These three ‘categories’ are, in turn, closely connected to the product and/or services promoted, which can be summarized as follows: in the first type of advertisement, which illustrates women caring, nurturing, cleaning and sexless (women as nurturers, mothers and wives), we identify products related to babies, skin care, cleaning and food. These advertisements portray women as autonomous in household chores and everything that entails. Moreover, they usually appear alone or with their respective baby or children (as can
be observed in figures 1 and 2). The second type features women concerned with their physical appearance (regarded as decorative instruments through beauty, body and trend), focusing on the following commodities/services: cosmetics, personal care and fashion (clothes and accessories). Women are frequently displayed alone, playing a simply decorative role. The final type portrays female bodies as sexual objects, and in this sense women appear in subordination to men through offensive, degrading and (sometimes) violent images. They are increasingly depicted as attractive, young, sensual and desirable, regarded as merely sexual instruments to be looked at rather than people with their own intellectual capacities. These unrealistic representations of women strengthen common stereotypes and endorse unrealistic body ideals. Products such as jewellery, perfume, watches or jeans are frequently promoted through this category. Finally, women are usually represented alone (playing a decorative role, such as in figure 8) or in couples (accompanied by a man), as can be observed in figures 7 and 9.

With respect to the target audience, this analysis has found that these three main types of women portrayal in advertising are addressed to females; they are mainly meant to attract women’s attention and accordingly, take action and purchase this particular commodity or service. However, those advertisements that promote particular products for women but resort to sex and nudity by objectifying them, in spite of being obviously intended for them, seek to attract men’s attention. This is often achieved through provocative poses (posture, body language and eye contact with the viewer), camera effects (dim light) and the appearance of men and women (alone, in couples or in groups).

These different role portrayals are largely represented through a patriarchal ideology, focused on the so-called androcentrism and the objectification of women that reinforces the traditional concept of masculinity and femininity. The evidence from this study indicates that whereas men are usually portrayed as superior to women (physically stronger, more independent, active and unemotional), women are generally restricted to domesticity, as well as being used as decorative and sexual creatures. These different ‘fields’ in which women are usually depicted seem to legitimize the soft, sensitive, dependent, passive and submissive roles assigned to them traditionally by society.

In such and ideological scenario in which gender and power gain special prominence, a critical discourse analysis approach has proved to play a relevant role to unmask the implicit meaning installed in advertisements through attention-catchig images and simple and straightforward language. In this sense, it has shown how dominance and power are arranged through advertisements by providing predetermined images of stereotypical gender roles.
Bearing in mind advertising discourse is usually described as ‘loaded’ (Leech, 1966: 23) characterized by both visual imagery (including dressing, gestures, postures, colours, setting and place) and language (use of implicatures and presuppositions, catch-phrases and unusual words, as well as devices such as ambiguity, wordplay, puns, metaphors, etc.), the results of this investigation reveal that both –together or separately–, are regarded as powerful instruments through which particular intentionality and specific connotations can be transmitted. It can therefore be concluded that language matters and images matters too, through thick and thin.

5.2. Limitations of the study

This study presents certain limitations that should be remarked. Firstly, its narrow scope (since it is restricted to the English context) and its sampling method (purposive and not probability-based) hint that the findings may neither be generalised nor objective (as the representative sample has been obtained by using the researcher’s own judgement). Secondly, data were only collected over a period of fifteen years within the 21st century. Data gathered over longer periods of time (even from two different centuries) could have led to distinct results and therefore, other possibly interpretations regarding female role portrayals.

Some of the sources from where advertisements were drawn were only aimed at women, restricting thus the scope in terms of the target audience and accordingly, other gender representations. Additionally, a larger sample (in size and variety) might have provided different results (including, for instance, apart from a larger number of advertisements, others selected from TV commercials, different newspapers and magazines addressed to both men and women and specifically to each group).

5.3. Suggestions for future research

This dissertation has focused on women’s representations in print and digital advertisements selected from different webpages, on how they are depicted in terms of image, language and power. Additionally, men’s portrayals in advertising have been explored only in certain cases –to a lesser extent–, so as to compare both groups and analyse how they are portrayed differently.

Future investigations should be carried out to hear both women and men’s viewpoints on female role portrayals in advertisements. A field study (specifically, through surveys,
questionnaires and interviews) would provide deep and valuable insight regarding people’s perceptions, feelings and responses concerning portrayal of women in advertising, since this study has centred on critically analysing different samples (production) and not on gathering audience opinions (reception).

Another thought-provoking path would be to explore the way men are exclusively depicted in advertising from a linguistic and visual perspective in comparison with women. Additionally, it would be of vital interest to conduct comparative research between different countries so as to widen the scope of action, besides assessing women and men’s role portrayal across different cultures. In a related vein, it would be enriching to compare the main findings of this study with larger representative samples selected from TV commercials.

Last but not least, since reality is not as advertising sometimes paints it, it would be extremely interesting to provide counter-examples in futures studies; in other words, advertisements through which gender issues are conveniently addressed (since they do exist). Thus, it would be of great relevance to examine women’s role portrayal from a very different perspective, featuring them in autonomous roles, strong, talented and competitive, both personally and professionally, as well as linked to technology, a growing sector in today’s world in which women are actively involved.

Advertising, this powerful tool that persuades the entire globe, should be more actively involved in empowering women and raising awareness among society, fostering equal opportunities and rights for everyone.
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