

# Gender in Philippine advertisements: Portrayal patterns and platform differences immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic

Fernando Paragas, Czekaina Esrah Rapanot, Marrhon Mangalus, Catherine Faith Hoggang, and Mariam Jayne Agonos

## Abstract

Informed by the pioneering work of Erving Goffman, subsequent studies by Mee-Eun Kang, recent innovations in the Geena Davis Institute, and local approaches by Philippine scholars, this study sought to determine the portrayal of gender in Philippine advertising across various media. Specifically, it located gender across products, storylines, characters, pitch, and setting. It provided the baseline data for the depiction of gender immediately before the pandemic, and served as the benchmark against how gender may be portrayed differently in ads in the next normal.

The population of TV, print, and radio advertisements was based on a database maintained by Aries Insights and Media Solutions (AIMS), access to which was facilitated by Kantar Media. The study covered two TV stations, three broadsheets, two tabloids, two FM stations, and two AM stations. The researchers constructed two weeks from January - December 2018 for TV and print, while one week was constructed from October to December 2018 for radio.

Across platforms, the most advertised products were food and non-alcoholic beverages, pharmaceutical/health/herbal products, and restaurants, retail outlets, and malls. Ads focused on product/brand prestige, appealed to any of the five human senses, or concentrated on health. Certain ad pitches showed noticeable gendered differences. Women rather than men were associated with beauty, youth, and value for money. Print and radio ads featured more men than women, while TV featured more women than men.

The study found that while overt objectification was no longer prevalent in advertisements, stereotypically gendered portrayals remain in subtle forms across platforms.

Keywords: gender, advertisements, ad products, ad storylines, ad characters, ad pitch, ad setting

## **Plaridel Open Access Policy Statement**

As a service to authors, contributors, and the community, *Plaridel: A Philippine Journal of Communication, Media, and Society* provides open access to all its content. To ensure that all articles are accessible to readers and researchers, these are available for viewing and download (except Early View) from the *Plaridel* journal website, provided that the journal is properly cited as the original source and that the downloaded content is not modified or used for commercial purposes. *Plaridel*, published by the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>).

## **How to cite this article in APA**

Paragas, F., Rapanot, C. E., Mangalus, M., Hoggng, C. F., & Agonos, M. J. (2022). Gender in Philippine advertisements: Portrayal patterns and platform differences immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic. *Plaridel*, 19(1), 180-203. <https://doi.org/10.52518/2022.19.1-04praha>

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes in personal and professional lives as well as in private and public places are supposedly upending gender norms. To understand prevailing gender norms in society, researchers have historically examined advertisements as these supposedly “mirror” or “mold” (Grau & Zotos, 2016) societal values. Examining how gender was portrayed immediately before the pandemic thus provided us with a benchmark against which we could determine the extent to which COVID-19 and the response to it altered gender norms as depicted in advertisements. This study, conducted in 2019 using data from 2018, opportunely gives us such a pre-pandemic baseline for the patterns and platform differences in gender portrayal across TV, print, and radio.

Inspired by the extensive work of the Geena Davis Institute on gender representation in media, this study presents a localized analysis of advertisements for gendered portrayals on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies on gender representation in media conducted by the Geena Davis Institute (2015; 2017; 2018b; 2019) showed that female characters in movies and television do not speak as much and get less screen time than male characters, are depicted negatively when they are professionally successful and driven characters, are emotionally weak; in advertising they are often objectified and hypersexualized. At the same time, there is positive evidence that when women are depicted as courageous and successful, female viewers can be motivated toward greater ambitions (Geena Davis Institute, 2016; 2018a; Smith et al., 2012). Positive female role models in entertainment have the potential to change social norms and expectations of all genders.

Localized analyses of media content for gendered portrayals are critical to the advocacy and communications efforts of the producers and creators of these content. This study thus seeks to determine the portrayal of gender in Philippine advertising across various media, specifically, as located across products, storylines, characters, pitch, and setting.

## **Review of Related Literature**

Advertisements are shaped not only by the industry that makes them, but also by the culture of the society in which its industries belong (see Grau & Zotos (2016) for a comprehensive meta-analysis of the literature on gender and ads from 2010 to 2016). Ad creatives often draw inspiration from various aspects of social life, like their daily interactions, regular consumption of media content, and constant exposure to pop culture (Soar, 2000; Zayer & Coleman, 2015). What we see in advertisements is a reflection, not of reality per se, but of ad creatives’ perceptions of various social realities and how they choose to present such realities. Although there is no question

as to the validity of personal experience as basis for content, there seems to be a border between a content creator's intention and an audience's interpretation of an advertisement.

Ad creators have become a cultural elite group whose motivations and standards for content creation come from within and among themselves (Soar, 2000). What ads show are mediated by what ad creatives think would satisfy not their main audience (consumers) but their peers (fellow creatives) (Soar, 2000; Zayer & Coleman, 2015). It is also important to note that the making of an ad involves client demands and production costs. Interestingly, ad creatives were found to think that: (1) what makes a good ad is something the creator can take credit for, and (2) a bad ad is not reflective of creative incompetence but of problematic clients and mishandled accounts (Soar, 2000).

What advertisers observe from society heavily influence how they create content, and one of the many social aspects advertisers usually delve into is gender (Jhally, 1987 as cited in Zayer & Coleman, 2015). However, they "continue to misunderstand and misrepresent gender by conflating sex, gender, and sexuality" by "utilizing outdated and inaccurate stereotypes (Dobscha, 2012) and portraying unattainable standards (Zayer & Otnes, 2016)" (as cited in Zayer & Coleman, 2015, p. 266).

Depictions of women and girls in products of popular culture—from the complex narratives of films to the purely photographic framing of print advertising—reflect and perpetuate socially acceptable and often constraining gender roles. Biases against women in popular media are well-documented in the West (Collins, 2011), and monitoring of stereotypical gender roles in advertising has been going on for three decades in the United States (Grau & Zotos, 2016). However, such studies have not been pursued in a systematic way in the Philippines.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Advertising works by projecting what people feel and what they dream of. It promotes consumerism via a "commodity image-system" that

provides a particular vision of the world—a particular mode of self-validation that is integrally connected with what one has rather than what one is—a distinction often referred to as one between 'having' and 'being,' with the latter now being defined through the former. (Jhally, 1995, p. 80).

Moreover, two distinct characteristics of 21st century advertising are (1) "reliance on visual modes of representation" and (2) "increasing speed and

rapidity of the images that constitute it” (also called the ‘vignette approach’) (Jhally, 1995, p. 84). These changes in the realm of advertisement production focus on making people feel rather than think. Given that an ad only lasts for seconds, the viewer is expected to give it undivided attention, which in turn draws them to its message. Additionally, the increasing speed of ads “had replaced narrative and rational response with images and emotional response” (Jhally, 1995, p. 84).

Guided by the Institutional Theory, Linda Tuncay Zayer and Catherine Coleman (2015) asserted that “structures within advertising institutions legitimate certain ethical practices, which serve as guides for institutional actors (i.e., ad professionals) in their creative and strategic decisions about gender portrayals in advertising” (p. 265). The authors discovered that there are four (4) themes in ad professionals’ views of how gendered portrayals in advertising impact its male and female audiences:

- Silent professionals are those who think that “ethics do not drive the creative and strategic choices they make with regard to gender portrayals in ads” (p. 268).
- Those who believe that ‘Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus’ manifest a reliance on “stereotypical perceptions of men and women that cast women as particularly vulnerable and therefore in need of protection and men as immune to media influence” (p. 268).
- Ad professionals who ‘talk the talk’ “demonstrate an awareness that advertising images may negatively affect *both* male and female audiences” (emphasis in text, p. 269).
- Those who ‘walk the walk’ “understand gender as socially constructed – that is, both men and women can be ‘sensitive’ or ‘tough’ and both can be vulnerable to advertising images, given certain contexts” (p. 270).

The challenge remains for advertisers to observe ethics in portraying gender and reconcile these principles as they produce advertisements and/or meet client needs (Zayer & Coleman, 2015).

Citing Erving Goffman (1979), Sut Jhally (1995) reiterated how the “commodity image-system” in advertising has distorted people’s perceptions of gender by showing how men and women are thought to behave, instead of showing how they “actually behave.” Gender, in contrast to sex, is not based on physical attributes but on how people behave and present themselves in relation to the socially constructed standards of femininity and masculinity

(Goffman, 1976; West & Zimmerman, 1987). For Goffman (1976), gender displays—that is, the adherence to either side of the dichotomy—may be optional, but given the “dialogic character” of displays, non-conformity may also entail certain consequences for an individual.

Goffman’s (1976) work on gender in advertisements has been cited and reproduced for many other studies with the same line of questioning. Interestingly, Mee-Eun Kang (1997) criticized how Goffman’s study uses a purposively chosen sample that already features his major assertion that women are almost always featured as subordinate to men. Kang tested seven variables—with five lifted from Goffman) and two additional ones—on a random sample: relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, ritualization of subordination, licensed withdrawal, body display, and independence/self-assurance. Most of Goffman’s original findings still held true as Kang found little difference between her study and Goffman’s. The ads from 1991 that Kang used even featured more stereotyping of women in terms of licensed withdrawal and body display. Meanwhile, two of Goffman’s (1976) variables – relative size and function ranking – were not prevalent in the 1991 ads and were hence deemed quite irrelevant. Kang (1997) found that either ads showed a solo female or male, or the two genders together “in a family scene,” which may imply that “advertisements are frequently targeting more specific audiences” (p. 994). Additionally, cosmetic advertisements featured “more powerful and independent female gender displays” (Kang, 1997, p. 994).

### **Gender in Philippine ads**

The study by Michael Prieler and Dave Centeno (2013) found that the representation of women in television advertisements does not mirror changes in Philippine society where the gender equality score ranks among the most progressive in Asia. This was contrary to a much earlier study by F.T. Marquez (1975) which measured, among others, male-female roles, masculinity and femininity, and personality types presented in Filipino print advertisements and found that Philippine ads favored a more Western value system. It must be noted that in either case, the local studies argued that Philippine ads did not mirror prevalent gender dynamics. Instead, they ran counter to studies elsewhere which argued that advertisements reflected their home country’s values (Huang & Lowry, 2015; Tartaglia & Rollero, 2015). That there was deviance between a portrayal of gender in ads and the actual social norms regarding gender in the Philippines suggests that care must be taken in extrapolating between the two. In the case of this research, comparisons that were made as regards gender dynamics before and perhaps after the pandemic duly considered the extent to which ads

themselves reflect gender-linked social values. In other words, as stated in the first paragraph of this paper, the baseline that this research provided referred to gender as depicted in ads, and not to gendered dynamics in general.

Traditional gender roles continue to prevail in ads where more men are shown in the workplace, generally fully clothed, and delivering more voiceovers; while women are predominantly placed at home, often suggestively dressed, and has less voiceovers. In terms of product categories, more women are associated with cosmetics/toiletries while more men are associated with pharmaceuticals/health products. An exception to this trend is the dominance of female characters in ads attributed to women being the primary target audience owing to their position as the majority of TV viewers.

The familial roles assigned to Filipino parents tend to follow traditional gender roles. The mother, *ilaw ng tahanan* [light of the home], is expected to be the nurturer and primary caretaker while the father, *haligi ng tahanan* [pillar of the home], plays the role of the provider for the family but has minimal involvement in child-rearing. In reality, working mothers are not uncommon, especially since the feminization of Filipino labor migrants. The inability or failure of mothers to perform their domestic role as caretaker is viewed negatively by others and even by themselves (Alampay, 2014), a position that is translated in the ads that feature them (Soriano et al., 2014).

### **Platform Differences**

Gender portrayal is facilitated by the affordances of particular media, as demonstrated in previous research. In television, women are often portrayed in housekeeping roles and associated with domestic, health, and beauty products (Cheng & Leung, 2014; Prieler & Centeno, 2013; Verhellen, et al., 2014) and retail outlets (Prieler, 2016). Meanwhile, men usually appear in professional roles and are associated with technological and leisure products (Prieler, 2016; Verhellen, et al., 2014). Men are shown with idealized body types and are engaged in paternal roles (Fowler & Thomas, 2015). Men also dominate voiceovers (Pedelty & Kuecker, 2014; Prieler, 2016) and are featured in a wide variety of topics for public service announcements (Cheng & Leung, 2014). The feminine voice, meanwhile, is more likely to be featured when the character's body is also on display (Pedelty & Kuecker, 2014).

In magazines, women are often portrayed to be “smaller” (i.e., taking up less space), in positions of submissiveness and dependence, in need of male protection, and sexually available, which, when framed with men, becomes “indicative of their role in society” (Zotos & Tschla, 2014, p. 254).

This is also evident when they are portrayed in non-traditional roles (e.g., as professionals) (Zotos & Tsihla, 2016). The changing roles of women in society (as professionals, belonging to the public sphere) are slowly being reflected but often underrepresented in magazine advertisements. Some studies have argued that women continue to be predominantly depicted in traditional and decorative roles and in settings or activities associated with such (Plakoyiannaki, et al., 2008; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009; Prieler & Centeno, 2013; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007).

## **Methodology**

The population of TV, print, and radio advertisements was based on a database maintained by Aries Insights and Media Solutions (AIMS), access to which was facilitated by Kantar Media. The database includes two TV stations, three broadsheets, two tabloids, two FM stations, and two AM stations. Stations and publications were chosen based on Metro Manila audience share and readership numbers by The Nielsen Company and Kantar Media, as reported on ABS-CBN News (2018a, 2018b) and *The Philippine Star* (Desiderio, 2017). For TV and print, the sampling period covered 1 January to 31 December 2018. For radio, it was from 1 October to 31 December 2018. For TV and radio, advertisements from 5 AM to 11:30 PM were included in the sample. Constructed week sampling means randomly choosing a specific date—within the sampling period, which is the entire year of 2018—for each day of the week. Only one week was constructed for radio due to a limitation in the database it included only the last three months of 2018.

After filtering out repeated advertisements, casual plugging (for TV), time checks (for radio), and advertisements which featured no humanoid characters (for print), the researchers performed simple random sampling to identify 500 TV and 497 radio ads for analysis. All 256 print ads, meanwhile, were included in the study. Platform-specific instruments were developed to capture both advertisement-level and character-level variables.

## **Intercoder Reliability Testing**

To ensure that the research team coded textual data objectively, coders were tasked to run an intercoder reliability testing of the initial instrument. The testing followed an iterative process until the desired intercoder reliability coefficient was achieved. A generally accepted minimum coefficient of .70 Krippendorff's alpha was set as the standard of reliability.

In this project, data encoding was performed by members of the research team and student assistants enrolled in a quantitative research class. The research team selected and trained these data encoders prior



to each intercoder reliability testing. After intercoder reliability scores for the run were calculated, a debriefing and retraining session was held by the research team with the data encoders. The testing followed an iterative process until the desired intercoder reliability coefficient was achieved. For each run of reliability testing, a total of 60 advertisements from the sample population were coded.

Initially, character identification was coded by listing the unique characters identified by all coders in all ads and then dichotomously marking whether the coder identified the character in the ad or not. Dichotomous variables, however, can be problematic especially if 1 or 0 is a rare category since Krippendorff's alpha<sup>1</sup> considers the prevalence of the categories. Thus, a high percentage agreement but a low reliability can be achieved if either value of the dichotomous variable is rarely coded. To remedy this, categories were created from the unique groups of characters or individuals identified by all the coders across all ads.

Character identification in radio, however, differed from TV and print where the character can be cross-checked through visual cues such as a girl wearing red, boy wearing blue hat, et cetera. Since the coders could not agree on how many voices they heard in the ads and their characters could not be cross-checked with each other, the instrument was revised. Instead of listing down the characters and cross-checking whether they were coded or not, character roles (e.g., narrator, character) became the variables and gender was used as the values (e.g., one male, one female, mixed, etc.).

### **Variables and measures**

The main project from which this research article drew its data explored many variables at the ad (e.g., composition and prominence) and character (e.g. function ranking, relational role, familial responsibility) levels. However, these variables were specific to TV, print, and radio, given their respective aural, visual, and/or textual features. Findings for these platform-specific variables would be presented in other articles (see, for example, Rapanot et al., 2020). For this research article, six variables that cut across media were chosen for a discussion on overall patterns and cross-platform differences.

**Table. 1.** Description

Variable	Definition	TV	Print	Radio
Product	General classification of the product or service advertised	•	•	•
Story	The strategic narrative that essays the product and features the characters	•	•	•

Character	Gender of the character (adapted from Monk-Turner, Kouts, Parris, & Webb, 2007)	•	•	•
Pitch	Product feature/selling point as presented in the ad	•	•	•
Setting	Specific setting of the advertisement (categories adapted from Prieler & Centeno, 2013; Luyt, 2010; and Larson, 2001)	•	•	

## Findings

The study covered 500 TV, 497 radio, and 256 print ads. Embedded within these 1,253 ads were 710 TV, 459 print, and 497 radio characters. These 1,666 characters, meanwhile, assumed 1,879 roles across 1,585 settings.

## Products

Across all 1,253 advertisements in all platforms, food and non-alcoholic beverages (22%), pharmaceutical/health/ herbal products (14%) and eating and shopping places (9%) were the most advertised products. These were also the top three most-advertised products on radio and TV, with hygiene and beauty products tied with pharmaceutical/health/herbal products in second place for TV. However, for print, recreational products and services (17%), private services (13%), and automotive and fuels (11%) comprised the top three. Interestingly, print (28%), compared to TV (13%) and radio (11%), also had the biggest number of products outside of specified product categories.

The ranking of product categories was the same for ad-level and character-level data, which perhaps indicated the same number of characters deployed across product types. Across all platforms, there were differences (of at least three percentage points) between men and women in terms of the following product categories: a bigger share of men than women endorsed restaurants, retail outlets and malls (10% versus 5%) as well as alcoholic beverages (3% versus 0%); a bigger percentage of women than men endorsed hygiene and beauty products (11% versus 3%) and household items (8% versus 4%); no difference was observed in the percentages of male and female characters in endorsing the following: food and non-alcoholic beverages, pharma/ health/herbal products, recreational products and services, private services, automotive and fuels, government services, telecommunications and electronics, and real estate.

## Story

In terms of TV form and plot, almost all (87%) were presented in the classical drama and lecture format, with only 13% designed as vignettes. In these TV ads, only seven percent involved a problem solver, which was

almost equally divided between female (8%) and male (6%) characters. Meanwhile, for radio 45% of all stories were primarily opinion-based and/or offered a non-scientific argument. Another 30% of radio ads combined both factual and/or scientific argument and opinion-based and/or non-scientific argument.

Across the gender of radio voices, a bigger share of mixed groups offered an opinion-based and/or non-scientific argument (51%) compared to female (42%) and male (38%) characters. Conversely, groups were also least likely to argue factually or scientifically (9%) compared to male (19%) and female (16%) characters.

The majority (61%) of the 1,169 characters in TV and print ads were typical users/customers, followed by celebrities (25%) and experts (9%). There were gender differences in this regard: more women than men were likely to be typical users/customers (65% versus 56%), whereas men were more likely than women to be experts (13% versus 6%).

These gendered differences did not appear on television. Instead, these were found in print ads which heavily featured women rather than men as typical users/customers (74% versus 50%). Moreover, around twice the number of male than female characters in print ads were presented as experts (26% versus 11%) or as celebrities (25% versus 15%).

## **Characters**

There were more men (44%) than women (41%) among characters in the advertisements. TV ads featured more women than men (56% versus 44%). However, men outnumbered women in print (54% versus 46%) and radio (34% versus 16%) ads. Radio also featured mixed/ indeterminate voiced characters (50% of the radio and 15% of the overall sample).

The majority (58%) of characters were between 21 and 39 years old, followed by those between 40 and 64 years old (21%). Those between six and 12 years old (11%) and between 13 and 20 years old (5%) comprised much of the balance of the characters. Among those between 21 and 39 years old, female characters (65%) outnumber their male counterpart (50%). Among those between 40 and 64 years old, meanwhile, there was a bigger share of male (24%) than female (18%) characters. Moreover, there was twice the number of male than female characters aged 65 years old or older (5% versus 2.5%). These patterns held across print characters. However, on TV, there were more 40-64-year-old women (23%) than men (17%).

Over two-fifths of the characters either had no work (11%) or their occupation was not specified (33%). A quarter (25%) of the characters were models/celebrities/entertainers. “No Occupation” was automatically assigned to children (6-12 years old) when they were explicitly not depicted

as students, unless they were celebrity endorsers. There were more male (14%) than female children (9%), which potentially contributed towards more unemployed men than women.

In TV ads, a bigger percentage of men than women had no occupation (17% versus 9%) and were students or working students (10% versus 5%). In print ads, a bigger percentage of men than women were models/celebrities/entertainers (21% versus 17%), STEM and ABM professionals (10% versus 5%), or worked in skilled labor (7% versus 2%). The only instance where women outnumbered men in terms of occupation in TV ads was as homemakers (17% versus 2%) and in print ads was as students/working students (6% versus 3%).

Most (92%) of print ad characters belonged to the upper middle class, and this cut across men and women.

Among the 1,329 roles assumed by the characters, familial (41%) was the biggest category, with more women (43%) than men (39%) being depicted in this role. The second biggest category is the absence of assumed relational role (37%), followed by recreational (15%) roles. Professional relationships were depicted by only nine percent of characters; a bigger share of men (10%) than women (7%) assumed this role.

Across most specific types of relationships, no difference could be observed between male and female characters. Only in roles as parents which was portrayed by a bigger share of women than men (19% versus 11%), as children which was assumed by a bigger share of boys than girls (15% versus 9%), were there differences between genders, and as peers which more men than women assumed—whether recreationally (16% versus 13%) or professionally (9% versus 5%).

## Pitch

The ads focused on product/brand prestige (19%), appealed to any of the five human senses (12%), or concentrated on health (10%). However, the overall pitch of ads differed across platforms. Product/brand prestige were the most popular pitch for TV (18%) and radio (25%), but it was value for money (*sulit*) for print (10%).

The ad-level pitch (N=1,523) generally translated to the character-level pitch (N=2,003). The characters, across all media, pitched the prestige of a product/brand (18%), appealed to specific senses (13%) and values (10%). However, differences could be observed across media. TV ads focused on senses (20%) and product/brand prestige (17%), while radio ads focused on product/brand prestige (25%) and health (15%). Perhaps because print ads featured diverse products and services, no dominant pitch emerged from among them. Still, the top three character-based pitches for print were

values-orientation (12%), value-for money (*sulit*) (9%), and product/brand prestige (9%).

In general, there were no major difference in the pitches made by male and female characters in the top categories. However, some items could be flagged in terms of gendered differences (of at least three percentage points) in the pitches which were smaller in numbers.

On TV, more women than men endorsed beauty and youth (13% versus 5%) while more men than women pitched product/brand prestige (19% versus 16%) or promoted an experience/lifestyle (13% versus 10%). In print, more women than men focused on practicality (*sulit*) (13% versus 6%) or pitched a certain experience/lifestyle (7% versus 4%), while more men than women endorsed product/brand prestige (10% versus 7%). In radio, women were least likely to pitch product/brand prestige on their own compared to men (28%) or mixed groups (25%). They (24%) were also most likely to endorse health concerns on their own (17%) compared to mixed groups (16%) or men (11%), or to talk about value for money (*sulit*) compared to men (9%) and mixed groups (8%). Essentially only women essayed beauty and youth on radio (11%).

## Setting

The biggest group of print and TV ads was set in areas of the house (34%), followed by miscellaneous spaces (23%), and the outdoors (21%). Within specific settings, gray spaces (also known as “limbo”) was the main setting of the ads (19%), or almost twice the number of the next most popular space, the living room (10%).

TV and print ads differed in terms of setting. Almost half of TV ads were set in the house (46%), followed by the outdoors (20%), and public places (11%). Over half of print ads, meanwhile, were set in miscellaneous spaces (58%), followed by the outdoors (24%).

More female characters (38%) than male characters (31%) were portrayed in the house. A bigger percentage of female (23%) than male (20%) characters was also located outdoors. Men, on the other hand, were more likely depicted in miscellaneous spaces compared to women (29% versus 18%).

Across TV and print ads, there were more places where men and women were proportionately depicted than in the following cases where there were differences (of at least three percentage points) between their location. A bigger percentage of women than men was set in the kitchen (8% versus 4%), while a bigger share of men than women were set in eating places (8% versus 4%) or in a gray space (limbo) (24% versus 15%).

## Discussion

From the findings, three discussion points emerged as regards patterns in 1) stereotyped settings and platform-based portrayals, 2) the depiction of women in the workplace, and 3) the use of sensorial elements.

### Stereotyped Settings and Platform-based Portrayals

Predominant settings in TV and print differ. In TV, nearly half of the characters are portrayed at home at one point in the ad, while more than half of the characters in print ads are found in miscellaneous settings (i.e., limbo, gray spaces). This is perhaps brought about by differences in the kind of products predominantly endorsed in each platform.

In TV, ads are primarily comprised of food and non-alcoholic beverages which are arguably tied to the home. For characters depicted with a relational role, the most common is the familial relational role. Family in the Philippines extends beyond the nuclear family and commonly includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, et cetera. Thus, the predominant narrative, and consequently the stereotypes, shown in tv ads primarily relate to the home and the interaction among members, especially between the father and mother.

Contrary to other studies that associated women to household setting and men to the workplace (Matthes et al., 2016; Prieler & Centeno, 2013; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007), we found that nearly half of the women and men are shown in a house setting at one point in the ad and that women are as likely as men to be shown in a workplace setting. Nonetheless, a more nuanced observation of the house setting showed that more women were depicted in the kitchen while more men were seen in the porch/yard. This may imply that even in the house, women are more likely shown doing food preparation while men are more likely to be engaged in activities outside of the domestic terrain such as going to work. In terms of the division of labor, the study found that in tv ads the number of women engaged in childcare and domestic chores was more than twice than that of the men doing the same activities. Although nearly half of men in the ads were also portrayed in a home setting, women continued to be seen as shouldering domestic duties.

In terms of parent--child relationships, it is interesting to find that more women portrayed parental roles (i.e. mothers, grandmothers, aunts) while characters shown as children were most likely to be boys. We must note, however, that men were not necessarily absent in the ads; they may have been just part of the entire group (e.g., eating dinner with the family). Women, in comparison, were clearly the focus of the ads.

In print, the majority of the ads were varied and could be collectively grouped as “others”. This category comprised fashion, construction, agribusiness, promotional ads (of stations, schools, and other establishments), and event announcements. Although characters with relational roles were mostly coded to portray recreational and familial roles, there was no big difference (less than 3%) in the percentage of male and female characters depicting a familial role (parent, child, etc.). In terms of recreational role, however, more women play the role of friends than do men. Furthermore, almost no character in print was coded to be doing activities related with familial responsibility, as only a small percentage of characters were seen in a home setting.

Gender stereotypes in terms of credibility or the character’s role in the ad continued to dominate in print unlike in TV. Women were overwhelmingly presented as user or consumers whereas men were portrayed as experts or authority figures.

In terms of the Goffman variables, it is worth noting that a big majority of print ad characters were not shown according to the dichotomies of the measures (75% was neither submissive nor authoritative, 74% did not manifest licensed withdrawal, and 80% was neither dominant nor subordinate). Nonetheless, in cases where such measures applied, more females (27%) were shown in submissive positions than males (11%), and more males appeared in more authoritative positions (9%) than females (4%). More females were also shown as spaced out (12%) or over-engaged, while more men were shown as fierce and assertive (11%). In relation to previous literature (see Zotos & Tsihla, 2014; 2016), these findings showed that while traditional gender representations are still evident in today’s print ads, the lower incidence of this depiction indicated a change in how ads portray gender. The present study found an almost equal portrayal of men and women in terms of function (mostly in the workplace), reflecting women’s participation in the labor force not just as employees but as leaders.

In radio, since the medium relies primarily on sound, setting, which is predominantly a visual variable, could not be applied. Gender roles, however, were inferred from the voiceover-narrator.

### **Women in the Workplace**

TV and print ads have shown a general progress in terms of the portrayal of women in the workplace. There was minimal difference in the percentage between male and female characters set in the workplace (i.e., set/studio and office). However, a closer examination of the relational role of the characters belied this. Overall, more men were shown in a professional role although the difference in percentage between men and women in TV did not reach

three percent. Moreover, there was rarely a boss/subordinate dynamic between characters as they were mostly shown as peers or workmates. This implies that although women are as likely as men to be seen in a workplace setting, the role they continue to portray is that of a mother on television and that of a friend or peer in print. Further, in terms of occupational role, women were also overwhelmingly shown as the homemaker compared to men (11.2% versus 0.9%), while two-thirds of characters who were portrayed as skilled laborers were men.

### **Sensorial Elements**

The small number of user/consumer roles in radio compared to TV may be attributed to the former's limited devices. An audio-only platform needs to be very direct to convey as much information as possible within a few seconds, but in radio there is very little room to explore characters and give them different roles to play. A narrator that has a straightforward dialogue may be not only effective but also efficient for the platform.

The dominance of the masculine "voice-of-authority" (Silverstein & Silverstein, 1974 as cited in Prieler, 2016) in TV and radio is consistent with previous studies on Western TV ads (Prieler, 2016; Pedelty & Kuecker, 2014; Martinez-Pastor et al., 2013). However, as with Prieler & Centeno's (2013) study on Philippine ads, the numbers are considerably lower than in other countries in Asia and the West. Advertisers may still prefer the masculine voice in conveying the objectivity they associate with it, but the feminine voice may be imperative for products that are targeted towards women.

Regarding visual elements, the difference between product categories advertised in TV and print is a factor in the dissimilarities of the findings on the two platforms. Since print ads feature the biggest number of product categories outside the usual ones, the settings and characters present in the ads also differ from what was common for TV.

Most TV ads were set within areas of the house, while most print ads were set in miscellaneous spaces (e.g., gray spaces/limbo, multiple photos as in a collage or mosaic). This layering of images shows how the elements of print as a platform are manipulated to maximize space.

## **Implications and recommendations**

### **On platform differences**

Since the advertising platforms of TV, print, and radio have different modes of presentation, the variables used to capture gender roles and portrayals across these platforms had to vary. This posed a challenge in creating a tri-media comparison.



Extracting a gender value in radio parallel to that of TV and print was particularly difficult. Initially, gender across all platforms was taken from the gender of the identified characters. The coders found it impossible to reliably differentiate the voices of the characters in radio, thus coding gender had to be simplified through determining the roles of the voices present in the ad. This difficulty led to the removal of all character-level variables for the platform.

There were also variables that could not be translated to other ad platforms, such as the Goffman variables in print that could not be applied to either TV and radio. Goffman's categories for gender representations, meant for visual ads, were almost inapplicable to TV ads with moving characters having distinct identities and doing specific (and even multiple) activities. Television required the most complex coding scheme, having both visual and auditory elements, and often a more defined narrative. Interactions between TV ad characters are detailed, and their relationships are more identifiable, since they move. Print ad characters, however, pose a difficulty in the identification of relationships and interactions as they are still. Case in point, a group of children in a TV ad may be depicted as siblings or cousins, but in print they may be identified as merely friends unless otherwise specified in accompanying text. Given the limitations of still images, print ads may depend on text to forward the product pitch.

### **On advertising research and industry practices**

The findings present a path for academics and researchers to move forward from the usual, overt depictions of objectification and delve into the use of gender stereotypes through the roles and activities performed by all genders. They also reiterate that culture is a crucial, defining element in constructing gender portrayals in advertisements. While ads can display longstanding stereotypes and judgments imbibed in a culture (e.g., Filipinos' obsession with skin whitening products because of the notion that fair, clear skin is the beauty standard), they can also show a changing cultural landscape that is more open to diversity (e.g., the rise of LGBTQIA+ campaign ads online) and more reflective of social realities (e.g., the portrayal of different family structures, like having divorced parents).

Importantly, the media platform informs how gender roles can be portrayed according to the elements that can be used in it. Having separate studies that zoom in on platform-specific elements (e.g., dialogue for radio) may shed light on how gender stereotypes are reinforced or challenged in other areas.

Moreover, existing ad databases are available only to individuals/organizations that can pay to gain access to them. Even with access, the

availability of pertinent ad copies is not guaranteed as storage is an issue even for the agencies that keep them. Establishing an independent database with sustainable storage and intuitive organization systems will be tremendously helpful for those who are interested in pursuing further studies in the topic. An academic institution, with support from government and civil society, can take on this initiative of maintaining a digital archive of media content such as advertisements, for scholars to access to conduct projects similar to that from which this article has been developed.

Following marketing trends in brand activism and feminism, as well as global initiatives for diversity, strengthening the local push to portray more diverse roles and images of cis men and women and to include marginalized identities (LGBTQIA+, PWDs, etc.) is a must. Forrester's 2018 *Consumer Technographics* data show that company values are important in purchase considerations for 70% of US millennials (Lai, 2018), and what better way to communicate those values than to reflect them on screen. Even marketers in a study commissioned by Shutterstock recognize the positive impact of diverse images in brand image (McCabe, 2018).

Finally, this study provides scholars with a baseline of how gender was depicted in ads immediately before the pandemic. It would be interesting to see how ads are now, and will be, portraying gender in post-pandemic communities and societies. Furthermore, as this research focuses on the legacy media of print, radio, and TV, future studies can explore how differently newer media forms essay gender in this next normal.

## References

- ABS-CBN News. (2018a). *ABS-CBN keeps ratings lead in September*. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/10/03/18/abs-cbn-keeps-ratings-lead-in-september>
- ABS-CBN News. (2018b). *ABS-CBN widens Mega Manila ratings lead, keeps nationwide top post: Kantar*. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/12/04/18/abs-cbn-widens-mega-manila-ratings-lead-keeps-nationwide-top-post-kantar>
- Alampay, L. P. (2014). Parenting in the Philippines. In H. Selin (Ed.), *Parenting across cultures: Childrearing, motherhood and fatherhood in non-western cultures* (pp. 105-121). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7503-9\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7503-9_9)
- Cheng, K. & Leung, V. (2014). Reinforcing gender stereotypes: A critical discourse analysis of health-related PSAs in Hong Kong. *American International Journal of Social Science*, 3(3), 36-48. [http://www.aijssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_3\\_No\\_3\\_May\\_2014/4.pdf](http://www.aijssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_3_May_2014/4.pdf)
- Collins, R.L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go? *Sex Roles*, 64(3-4), 290-298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9929-5>
- Desiderio, L. (2017, March 4). ABS-CBN claims nationwide rating. *The Philippine Star*. <https://www.philstar.com/business/2017/03/04/1676444/abs-cbn-claims-nationwide-rating>
- Fowler, K. & Thomas, V. (2015). A content analysis of male roles in television advertising: Do traditional roles still hold? *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 21(5), 356-371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.775178>
- Geena Davis Institute. (2015). *The reel truth: Women aren't seen or heard: an automated analysis of gender representation in popular films*. <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/gdiq-reel-truth-women-arent-seen-or-heard-automated-analysis.pdf>
- Geena Davis Institute. (2017). *Gender bias in advertising*. <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/gender-bias-in-advertising.pdf>
- Geena Davis Institute. (2018b). *The See Jane 100: Gender and race representations in the top family films of 2017*. <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/see-jane-100-report-2017.pdf>
- Geena Davis Institute. (2019). *The Geena benchmark report: 2007-2017*. <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/geena-benchmark-report-2007-2017-2-12-19.pdf>
- Grau, S.L. & Zotos, Y.C. (2016). Gender stereotypes in advertising: A review of current research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 761-770. DOI: 10.1080/02650487.2016.1203556.
- Goffman, E. (1976). Gender display. *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, 3(2), 69-77. <https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol3/iss2/3/>
- Huang, Y. & Lowry, D. (2015). Toward better gender equality? Portrayals of advertising models' occupational status in Chinese magazines. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 27(1), 69-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2014.967904>
- Jhally, S. (1995). Image-based culture: Advertising and popular culture. In G. Dines & J. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race, and class in media* (pp. 77-87). Sage. [http://www.anthrocvone.org/PeoplesandCultures/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/image\\_based\\_culture001.pdf](http://www.anthrocvone.org/PeoplesandCultures/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/image_based_culture001.pdf)
- Kang, M.E. (1997). The portrayal of women's images in magazine advertisements: Goffman's gender analysis revisited. *Sex Roles*, 37(11/12), 979-996. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02936350>

- Lai, A. (2018). Millennials call for values-driven companies, but they're not the only ones interested. *Forbes.com*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forrester/2018/05/23/millennials-call-for-values-driven-companies-but-theyre-not-the-only-ones-interested/?sh=24b4ad65464f>
- Larson, M. (2001). Interactions, activities and gender in children's television commercials: A content analysis. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(1), 41-56. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4501\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4501_4)
- Luyt, R. (2010). Representation of masculinities and race in South African television advertising: A content analysis. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 21(1), 35-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.639176>
- Marquez, F. (1975). The relationship of advertising and culture in the Philippines. *Journalism Quarterly*, 52(3), 436-442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769907505200305>
- Martínez-Pastor, E., Nicolás-Ojeda, M. Á., & Salas-Martínez, Á. (2013). Gender representation in advertising of toys in the Christmas Period (2009-12). *Comunicar*, 21(41), 187-194. <https://doi.org/10.3916/c41-2013-18>
- Matthes, J., Prieler, M. & Adam, K. (2016). Gender-role portrayals in television advertising across the globe. *Sex Roles* 75, 314-327. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0617-y>
- McCabe, M. (2018, November 13). *Visualizing diversity in advertising around the world*. Shutterstock blog. <https://www.shutterstock.com/blog/visualizing-diversity-in-advertising-around-the-world>
- Pedelty, M. & Kuecker, M. (2014). Seen to be heard? Gender, voice, and body in television advertisements. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 250-269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2014.926015>
- Plakoyiannaki, E., Mathioudaki, K., Dimitratos, P., & Zotos, Y. (2008). Images of women in online advertisements of global products: Does sexism exist? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 83(1), 101-112. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25482356>
- Plakoyiannaki, E., & Zotos, Y. (2009). Female role stereotypes in print advertising: Identifying associations with magazine and product categories. *European Journal of Marketing*, 43(11/12), 1411,1434. [www.emeraldinsight.com/0309-0566.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0309-0566.htm)
- Prieler, M. (2016). Gender stereotypes in Spanish- and English-language television advertisements in the United States. *Journal of Mass Communication and Society*, 19(3), 275-300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1111386>
- Prieler, M. & Centeno, D. (2013). Gender representation in Philippine television advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 69, 276-288. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-013-0301-4>
- Rapanot, C.Z., Paragas, F., Mangalus, M., Hoggang, C.F., & Agonos, M.J. (2020). Reading gender by the column inch: Analyzing gender representation in Philippine print advertisements. *Plaridel*, 18(1), pp. 265-293. <https://doi.org/10.52518/2021.18.1-04rpahm>
- Smith, S., Choueiti, M., Prescott, A., & Pieper, K. (2012). *Gender roles & occupations: A look at character attributes and job-related aspirations in film and television*. <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/full-study-gender-roles-and-occupations-v2.pdf>
- Soar, M. (2000). Encoding advertisements: Ideology and meaning in advertising production. *Mass Communication and Society*, 3 (4), 415-437. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0304\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0304_05)

- Soriano, C., Lim, S., & Rivera-Sanchez, M. (2014) The Virgin Mary with a mobile phone: Ideologies of mothering and technology consumption in Philippine TV ads. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 8(1-19). <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12070>
- Tartaglia, S. & Rollero, C. (2015). Gender stereotyping in newspaper advertisements: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46(8), 1103-1109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115597068>
- Valls-Fernández, F., & Martínez-Vicente, J. M. (2007). Gender stereotypes in Spanish television commercials. *Sex Roles*, 56, 691-699. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9208-2>
- Verhellen, Y., Dens, N., & de Pelsmacker, P. (2014). A longitudinal content analysis of gender role portrayal in Belgian television advertising. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 22(2), 170-188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.871321>
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 1(2), 125-151. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/189945>
- Zayer, L. T., & Coleman, C. A. (2015). Advertising professionals' perceptions of the impact of gender portrayals on men and women: A question of ethics? *Journal of Advertising*, 44(3), 264-275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2014.975878>
- Zotos, Y.C. & Tsihla, E. (2014). Female stereotypes in print advertising: A retrospective analysis. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 148, 446-454. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/82646110.pdf>
- Zotos, Y.C., & Tsihla, E. (2016). Gender portrayals revisited: Searching for explicit and implicit stereotypes in Cypriot magazine advertisements. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(6), 983-1007. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2016.1189250>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is an inter-rater reliability metric used in the field of Communication and Social Sciences, wherein 1 represents unanimous agreement and 0 suggests random guesses.

## Grant Support Details

**Author Contributions:** The article is an output of a research program where everyone contributed to the conceptualization, implementation, and reporting of outputs. The collective work in the program includes the writing and presenting of this article, with the lead author at the helm. The authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This paper is part of a larger research project on Gender Representation in Philippine Advertising that examined advertisements across print media, television, and radio. The project, conducted from 2018 to 2019 and the report for which is available online, was funded by Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian government.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors extend their gratitude to Prof. Clarissa C. David for her contributions in the early stages of conceptualization of the study, and to Investing in Women for their unwavering support throughout the conduct of this research.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest and have the full support of the funder in the decision to publish the results.

## About the Authors

**FERNANDO PARAGAS** is Dean of the UP College of Mass Communication (UP CMC) and a Professor at its Department of Communication Research. He has been in the field of communication research since 1997. In 2019, UP Diliman awarded Dr. Paragas a Gawad Tsanselor sa Natatanging Guro. In 2020, he was named the Outstanding Senior Faculty Member of UP CMC. (Corresponding author: fcparagas@up.edu.ph)

**CZEKAINA ESRAH RAPANOT** is a lecturer at UP CMC and a graduate student of Philippine Studies at the UP Asian Center. She has been involved in the Department's academic projects and has also presented her own works in academic conferences. (carapanot@up.edu.ph)

**MARRHON MANGALUS** worked as a Senior Project Assistant in the Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies. She has been working in various qualitative, quantitative, and multi-method research projects since 2016. (marrhon@protonmail.com)

**CATHERINE FAITH HOGGANG** is pursuing her Juris Doctor degree at the UP College of Law. She worked as a project research assistant for various research projects at the Communication Research Department from 2016-2018. (catherine.hoggang@obf.ateneo.edu)

**MARIAM JAYNE AGONOS** is currently an Instructor of Communication Research at the UP College of Mass Communication, and a graduate student of Philippine Studies at the UP Asian Center. She has been involved in various academic research projects, and authored a few academic research works as well. (mmagonos@up.edu.ph)

