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ГЕНДЕРНА СТЕРЕОТИПІЗАЦІЯ В РЕКЛАМІ
GENDER STEREOTYPING IN THE COMMERCIAL

Попри тренд на толерантність у світі протягом останніх років, рекламний ринок нерідко досі використовує інструменти сприяння гендерній дискримінації та створює стереотипізовані гендерні образи. Така тенденція має негативні наслідки для суспільства та гальмує його розвиток у сучасному динамічному світі. У дослідженні на прикладі світових та українських брендів розглянуто приклади використання популярних гендерних стереотипів.

Гендерні стереотипи не є новим явищем. Вони століттями формувалися у свідомості громадськості, а сьогодні медіа простір, зокрема реклама, лише сприяють їх підкріпленню. Гендерна стереотипізація є соціальною проблемою. Оскільки
рекламні твори мають властивість викликати в споживача різні емоції (позитивні чи негативні), якщо вони є гендерно упередженими, то стереотипи можуть про-никнути глибоко у підсвідомість та спричинити порушення аспектів самоіден-тифікації людини або навіть комплекси.

Було виявлено, що західний рекламний ринок використовує гендерні наративи значно рідше, ніж раніше, однак стереотипізація досі поширина серед менш популярних брендів. Найпоширенішою проблемою, яка досі залишається актуальною в рекламній продукції, є сексуальна об’єктивізація, тобто використання людського тіла як предмета, елемента декору. Вульгарне та недоречне висвітлення осіб під прикриттям «естетики людського тіла» може призводити до серйозних наслідків, зокрема до насилля. Гендерні моделі, які систематично транслюються, мають вла-ствівість глибоко вкорінюватися у свідомість та змінювати мислення споживачів. Деякі рекламодавці, особливо ті, які працюють з маловідомими брендами, до-сі вважають, що використання стереотипів є найкращим способом донести своє повідомлення до споживача.

У рекламних продуктах в Україні також відслідковується зменшення ви-користання гендерних стереотипів, що частково пов’язано з чинним Зако­ном «Про рекламу», а також впливом культури скасування у корпоративних комунікаціях.

Ключові слова: гендер, стереотипи, реклама, ринок, імідж, PR, упередження.

Despite the trend towards tolerance in the world in recent years, the advertising market often still employs tools that contribute to gender discrimination and creates stereotyped gender images. This tendency has negative consequences for society and hinders its development in the modern dynamic world. The study examines examples of the use of popular gender stereotypes using global and Ukrainian brands as illustrations.

Gender stereotypes are not a new phenomenon. They have been shaping public consciousness for centuries, and today, the media space, particularly commercial, only reinforces them. Gender stereotyping is a problem because advertising works by eliciting various emotions (positive or negative) from consumers. If commercials are gender-biased, these manipulative mechanisms can deeply penetrate the subconscious of individuals, causing disruptions in self-identification or even complexes.

It has been observed that the Western advertising market uses gender narratives much less frequently than before. However, stereotyping is still prevalent among less popular brands. The most widespread issue that remains relevant in advertising production is sexual objectification — the use of the human body as an object or a decorative element. Vulgar and inappropriate portrayal of individuals under the guise of “aestheticizing the human body” can lead to serious consequences, including violence. Gender models systematically broadcast
through advertising have the tendency to deeply root themselves in the consciousness and alter the thinking of consumers.

Some advertisers, especially those working with lesser-known brands, still believe that using stereotypes is the best way to convey their message to consumers. In advertising products in Ukraine, a decrease in the use of gender stereotypes is also observed, which is partly related to the current Law “Advertising Law”, as well as the influence of the cancel culture in corporate communications.

**Keywords:** audiobooks, promotion, social networks, advertising, PR, prejudice.

**Introduction.** The advertising industry is a powerful tool of influence on human consciousness. The systematic presence of advertising objects instills habits in consumers and normalizes the perception of situations presented in commercial. However, it often violates ethical norms, discriminates people, and perpetuates stereotypes, including those based on gender. If the information conveyed is negative, over time it can be reflected in the real world and, to some extent, modify individuals’ attitudes toward each other, as seen in gender stereotyping. Gender discrimination is often embedded in content that reaches a wide audience, distorting the perception of the roles of men and women in society, showcasing certain life values, and attributing them to a specific gender.

*The actuality of the topic* lies in the prevalence of violations regarding the portrayal of gender aspects in commercial. Consequently, consumers develop a distorted perception of representatives of a particular gender, altering the perception of individuals in the social sphere and fostering stereotypical thinking. Despite the global trend towards tolerance in recent years, the advertising market often still employs tools that contribute to gender discrimination, creating stereotyped gender images. This trend has negative consequences for society and hinders its development in the modern dynamic world.

*A review of the literature.* Various aspects of gender stereotypes in commercial are addressed in the works of L. Andrushko [1], where advertising strategies for constructing normative gender discourses are discussed. The research of T. Melnyk and L. Kobelianska [4] outlines the fundamental gender roles and stereotypes underlying gender theory. The works of scholars such as M. Kimmel [2], I. Broverman and others [14], W. Lippmann [11], A. Oakley [12], S. Pavlychko [5], T. Marcheniuk [3], and others were also considered in the course of the study.
In general, a stereotype is an established pattern of thinking that is distant from real situations. This definition was introduced by W. Lippmann in the work “Public Opinion” [11] and led to subsequent scientific research on the topic of stereotyping. He described the concept of a stereotype in the dimension of conservatism and emphasized that individuals tend to view others through pre-existing cultural representations, determined not by personal assertion but by a formed stable social setting.

Moreover, gender stereotypes can contribute to the spread of sexism and, as a result, gender inequality. PhD in Psychological Sciences N. Bugayova expressed the opinion that women are more often subjected to images based on gender characteristics, as they are attributed traits of vulnerability, psychological instability, and excessive expressiveness. At the same time, N. Bugayova notes that a cult of masculinity is artificially imposed on men. The scales of gender discrimination of the opposite sex are different, but this fact does not diminish the urgency of the problem [7]. Gender stereotyping directly stems from the issues of gender inequality. Sociologist A. Oakley, in her work, was one of the first to provide a rationale for this concept, stating that only differences in sex characteristics generate gender differentiations [12].

Researcher J. Scott identified the key components of gender relations that can contribute to a successful historical and sociological analysis [13]:

Sets of cultural symbols that structure into stereotyped perceptions in the society.

Normative prescriptions that define the range of possible symbolic interpretations and are reflected in religious, political, and educational doctrines.

Social institutions (in addition to the system of family relations, J. Scott also mentions the labor market, governance, and the educational system).

Subjective gender identity.

Gender studies emphasize the inappropriateness of concepts regarding masculinity and femininity. According to most scholars, this plays a negative role in societal life, as such a model discriminates against people, confining them. In turn, psychologist S. Bem introduces the concept of gender polarization, where society sees only differences between men and women, leading to negative consequences [9].

The purpose of the study is to outline contemporary trends in gender stereotyping in commercial.
Methods. Analysis and synthesis have aided in identifying trends in the formation of gender stereotypes in commercial. With the assistance of content analysis and the comparative method, advertising products featuring gender-related issues have been characterized in both the Ukrainian and global advertising markets.

The results. The Western advertising market tends towards tolerance and eradicating violations that discriminate against individuals based on various characteristics. Commercials that violate ethical standards are currently condemned by society, leading to gradual changes in stereotypes. For example, the portrayal of women in commercial has evolved, with a decrease in advertisements depicting women as unable to perform tasks solely due to their gender. Previously, marketers associated women with weakness, domestic duties, beauty, child care, and often portrayed them only in such roles. Today, companies strive to avoid content that perpetuates gender inequality and stereotyping. However, despite these efforts, such commercial still enters the media space in a more subtle form.

In this context, former members of the executive teams of London-based agencies Ogilvy and DDB, now founders of PrettyLittleHead (a research company helping marketers better understand the female audience), J. Cunningham and E. Melton, introduced the term “subtle sexism.” This term refers to the covert portrayal of sexist narratives in media content. The researchers specify that advertisers still convey various forms of sexism in their marketing campaigns, but in an implicit manner to avoid backlash from the so-called cancel culture. They believe that the Western advertising market is gradually moving away from gender color coding (blue/pink). However, the trend of using softness, florals, and pastel color schemes in products for women and contrasting themes for products targeting a male audience persists [10].

On the official website of the French luxury fashion house Louis Vuitton (refer to Figure 1), the winter collection of 2022 for men and women stands out with different color schemes. Men are depicted against a brown wooden background, while women are portrayed against a pastel-blue background. Such color distribution trends in 2022 are less common in the Western advertising market than in previous years, as it is considered outdated, although some lesser-known brands still exhibit these patterns.
For instance, the company WorkPro, which sells tools for repairs, continues to gender-code colors. WorkPro has a separate line for women where the tool colors are pink, while for men, they offer black, blue, green, gray, etc. In a new advertising integration, WorkPro shows a blonde woman dressed in a pink dress, holding a kitchen spatula in one hand and a pink drill in the other (refer to Figure 2). This commercial may reinforce several gender stereotypes, such as associating the kitchen as a place for women and suggesting that women, especially blondes, prefer pink.
Another brand, Hero Clean, promoting odor-eliminating products, positions itself as “exclusively masculine.” The advertising text contains phrases indicating that sweat can be “masculine,” thus differentiating it from feminine sweat. The brand portrays men in masculine roles and dictates a corresponding tone: “You are a real beast. You work out a lot. You sweat. We understand. Your stuff smells bad. Don’t worry; it will be our little secret.” The creators note that Hero Clean’s story began with a trip to a store for laundry detergent. Hero Clean emphasizes masculinity in depicting male representatives, positioning itself as caring for the comfort of men while implicitly prescribing standards of toughness to them (refer to Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Commercial of the Hero Clean brand](image)

Well-known companies are gradually moving away from gender biases, as adherence to gender stereotyping can face consumer condemnation, ultimately leading to a global refusal to buy products. Renowned and controversial American designer Tom Ford, who made a breakthrough in the fashion world through the sexualization of models, believes that society still exists in a culture of objectification, especially of women. He argues that provocations in the advertising industry make sense but compares his work in the 90s to the present, emphasizing that the world is changing, and so is his creativity. Ford states that his current works are filled with sensuality, not sexuality, as sex in advertising no longer surprises anyone. In an advertising teaser for the Autumn/Winter 2022 collection on Tom Ford’s official Instagram page, close-up shots of women’s legs are prominently featured, with the silhouette of a girl in the background (refer to Figure 4).
One example of the portrayal of gender roles in the global advertising segment is commercial from the Dettol brand, which promotes household cleaning products, including antibacterial ones. On the official Dettol YouTube channel, in a short video for Vietnamese consumers, a family is presented: a father, mother, and their sick child. Additionally, a doctor is sitting beside them on the bed, to whom the woman asks why their child often falls ill. The specialist continues the dialogue with the woman and responds that even if the surfaces in the home look clean, they can still be full of bacteria, so the mother should disinfect the house with Dettol, as it, according to the advertisement, kills 99.9 % of bacteria (refer to Figure 5).
This advertisement conveys several gender biases at once. Firstly, the expert opinion in the commercial is presented by a male, as is often depicted in advertisements of a similar nature (a similar trend can also be observed in projects by Procter & Gamble, specifically in the majority of commercials featuring the character Mr. Clean, who is not only an “expert” but also a savior). Secondly, household cleaning responsibilities are placed on the woman, while the man is exempt from household chores. Another commercial from the Dettol brand for the Malaysian market, with a significantly shorter duration (six seconds), demonstrates a similar scenario where a man, playing the role of an expert, introduces a surface cleaning spray for the sofa. At the end of the commercial, the viewer can see a happy family: a mother and two children (refer to Figure 6). Almost all Dettol commercials depict women in stereotypical gender roles as homemakers, while men are portrayed as experts providing instructions.

![Figure 6. Commercial video of Dettol for the Malaysian market](image)

Commercial still, although not as often as before, continues to depict women with oniomania (shopaholism). A commercial released on the official Fiat YouTube channel shows a car in a pastel pink color, next to which a man is waiting for his girlfriend. She approaches him with a large number of shopping bags. Assessing the number of bags in her hands, the woman looks at the man in surprise, as she doesn’t understand how to fit all the purchases into the car. However, the man, with a smile, opens another door of the Fiat 500, thus demonstrating the versatility, convenience, and spaciousness of the presented car (refer to Figure 7).
The feminist initiative “Bilkis,” founded in 2019, organized actions in Lviv at the end of November 2022 as part of the international campaign “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.” The initiative aimed to change the imagery displayed on the signs of the “P’yana Vishnya” (Drunk Cherry) network establishments. They conveyed a message that the woman depicted on the signs is primarily portrayed as a sexual object. The “P’yana Vishnya establishments also depict a man with a dog. However, the man is dressed in a sweater, wearing a beret on his head, and holding an alcoholic drink, while the woman is portrayed naked. In her hands, she holds two cherries covering her breasts. Additionally, the images feature the inscription: “And she won’t refuse, and he won’t retreat” (refer to Figure 8). According to activists, this advertising also reflects gender-based violence against women and may contribute to a culture of rape, as the woman’s “no” in this advertisement is doubted.
Participants in the action stood with posters bearing slogans such as “Stop objectifying women,” “Women’s bodies are not your advertising,” “Boycott sexists,” “No means no,” “Shame on sexists,” “Dress the woman,” etc. One of the posters featured an illustration reflecting the image presented in “P’yana Vishnya.” It depicted a man from the establishment’s ad, but with a bare torso, holding a cherry in his hands, covering the area below the waist. The activists reported that during the action, an employee of the “P’yana Vishnya” establishment approached them with a sign saying, “Don’t pretend you don’t like Drunk Cherry.”

The “Bilkis” team appealed to the State Service of Ukraine for Food Safety regarding the identification of sexism and discrimination in the existing images but is still awaiting a response. However, “Bilkis” managed to receive a comment from “P’yana Vishnya” on Facebook, stating that they decided to change the brand slogan “And she won’t refuse, and he won’t retreat” and had already partially removed it from their products. They mentioned that they, as before, do not encourage violence but acknowledged that the expression was previously perceived as playful and flirtatious. However, due to the ongoing war waged by Russia against Ukraine, the context has changed. “P’yana Vishnya” stated that they don’t want their words to remind Ukrainians who suffered violence from Russian military about the traumatic experience.

The “Bilkis” team commented on this, stating that they do not understand why the brand decided to slowly change the slogan only after the actions of Russian soldiers in February. They emphasized that there is nothing romantic in the violent behavior of a man and the refusal to hear a woman’s “no,” neither in times of war nor peacetime. The owners of the network had enough time to remove the inscription from their products and signs, but unfortunately, it is still observed at the entrance.

During the action, “Bilkis” received various reactions from passersby. According to the team, there were many responses due to a lack of understanding of the situation, but there was also support for the initiative. Additionally, photos of the feminists were shared on several Telegram channels. Commentators had diverse opinions, with some supporting the feminist initiative, while others condemned it, arguing that they did not see anything in the advertising as claimed by the action participants. Some people claim that such issues are not relevant now, given the ongoing war in Ukraine, and there are more important things to focus on. However, the “Bilkis” team believes that violence issues are particularly relevant during
wars, not only in peacetime, and such advertising only contributes to the formation of a violent attitude. This problematic situation has not yet been resolved.

Ukrainian rap artist A. Savranenko, better known as alyona alyona, frequently addressed the theme of self-love on her social media pages. She often dedicated posts on her official Instagram page to express her views on the importance of self-love. The singer also collaborated with well-known brands, one of which was a partnership with Dove as part of the “ShowUs” project. This overall communication strategy is referred to as femvertising. Femvertising is an initiative based on feminist ideas, encompassing advertising projects that challenge gender stereotypes directed towards women.

Dove notes that the “ShowUs” project is supported by women from 39 countries worldwide. As part of the project, there is a collection of over 10,000 photos, each portraying a diverse perspective of human beauty in advertising and media space. Dove emphasizes that “ShowUs” showcases a variety of beauty rarely seen in advertising. Dove features women without digital retouching, presenting them as they are in real life. The participants in the project themselves determine how they want to be perceived by others.

In the music video “The World Needs Beauty,” published by alyona alyona on YouTube in collaboration with Dove, the theme revolves around accepting one’s own body. The song talks about the idea that we are all different and each of us is beautiful. In the video’s finale, the performer delivered a speech addressing her own body. She said, “Hello, my body. I want to talk to you. I was taught not to love you. Taught to hate your folds and your flatness. Taught not to love my legs, not from the ears, not for the dance floor. Taught to cover up all the flaws on my face and taught to want to change myself. Body, you don’t fit into frames, but I don’t want to squeeze, plaster, hate, or want to reshape you. I accept you, and I want to love you! Also, to show you. I want to see different bodies, with the same flawless disproportion as mine. Body, I want to talk. Let’s love ourselves! Show us” [8]. In the video’s description, the singer also expressed her desire to see diverse women everywhere, on the streets, magazine covers, television, social media, in advertising, and in various professional positions. Alyona alyona urged women to express themselves and not be afraid to be in their own bodies. In the comments, people mostly appreciated the video positively. Among the responses were words of approval, and admiration,
with some stating that her words made them reflect. Some people emphasized the importance of conveying such messages to the masses. Of course, there were those who did not understand the problems women face.

Overall, Dove collaborates with many women. In the “ShowUs” project in Europe, Italian Paralympic athlete Veronica Yoko Plebani also participated. She fell ill with bacterial meningitis in childhood, leaving large scars on her body and leading doctors to amputate the phalanges of her fingers and toes. Veronica Yoko Plebani mentioned that she often notices people judging her based on preconceived notions about disability. Therefore, she wants to break down prejudice regarding limited abilities and make everyone believe in their body [6].

Representation of people with diverse appearances in media is an important task, as it shapes a society’s understanding of diversity and fosters a healthy perception of all individuals, regardless of their gender or appearance. Advertising often conveys idealized images that are not reflective of reality. Through photo retouching, wrinkles or blemishes are removed, and specific parts of the human body are digitally altered. Roles with gender biases and objectification are portrayed. In such images, consumers cannot recognize themselves, as being like the beauty standards prescribed is impossible in real life. That’s why initiating similar projects is a relevant issue, and society’s support will help eradicate the problem, which has slowly begun to be addressed in recent years but persists.

Conclusions. The use of unethical elements or gender biases in the global advertising market has been strongly condemned by consumers in recent years and is becoming increasingly rare. The Western advertising market seeks to avoid the use of stereotypical images that violate moral standards, or it does so subtly. This is largely influenced by cancel culture, with brands that make mistakes facing boycotts. Ideally, commercial should reflect dynamic changes in real life, such as a man working in the kitchen, a woman repairing a car, or using mint-scented shampoo, and it should also portray fathers as caregivers, particularly in large families or in the absence of a mother, as men in caregiving roles are now a social norm. Women, although to a lesser extent, are still depicted as the primary caregivers for both the home and children. Some advertisements still portray women taking care of, dressing, cooking for, and cleaning up after children, while men are mostly shown playing with children outdoors. To completely eradicate stereotypical commercial, it will take years of effort from relevant organizations and society.
Commercial should also acknowledge that not all men want to look masculine, wear dark clothing, or work in traditionally male-dominated jobs. Similarly, not all women aspire to have children, take maternity leave, wear pink clothing, look feminine, have ample breasts, or possess an “ideal” body size or flawless skin. Broadcasting unrealistic or detached-from-reality images can cause insecurities among the audience, reinforce gender stereotypes in society, and further contribute to the segregation between individuals of both genders. Commercial should not become the factor that defines life boundaries for the modern individual, regardless of gender.

The most prevalent issue that still remains relevant in advertising is sexual objectification, using the human body as an object or decorative element. Vulgar and inappropriate portrayal of individuals under the guise of “aestheticizing the human body” can lead to serious consequences, including violence. Gender models systematically conveyed through commercial have a tendency to deeply embed themselves in consciousness and alter consumer thinking. Some advertisers, especially those working with lesser-known brands, still believe that using stereotypes is the best way to convey their message to consumers. However, this notion is fundamentally flawed.

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