

# Gender stereotypes in original digital video advertising

## Abstract

This exploratory study looks into gender stereotypes in original digital video advertising as an independent trend in the advertising industry worthy of a new avenue of research. Content analysis is performed on a judgemental sample of 324 original digital videos that have won awards from professional marketers. The results show that there is no statistically significant association between gender and any of the ten studied attributes (mode of presentation, credibility, role, age, argument type, reward type, product type, background, setting, and end comment). Women and men are equally portrayed in non-stereotypical activities and roles. However, central figures are more likely to be men than women, indicating a gender difference in terms of the assignment of main roles. This paper highlights the change in women's role according to advertisers' and marketers' criteria for original digital videos.

**Keywords:** gender stereotypes, original digital video, advertising, content analysis, marketers

## **Introduction**

Since McLuhan's (1967) assertion that the medium is the message, technology has shaped and restructured media. Television, newspapers, magazines, and radio are no longer the only media to encourage and influence consumers to purchase a specific product or service. Rapid changes in technology, above all with the introduction of the Internet, have altered the meaning of this mythical medium, introducing updated processes of message interconnection according to current cultural and social structural patterns. Consumers receive information via multiple platforms, including smart devices. Moreover, to reach new consumers, brands have to use new technologies and accept that if they wish to send a message, they must do so using not only new platforms but also new formats, from mobile applications to online campaigns. These new emerging formats, including original digital video (ODV), are more prevalent than older formats.

Original digital video advertising (ODVA) has the power to alter people's perceptions as never before and is considered the most effective form of direct advertising to consumers. Some 84% of marketers and agencies surveyed by the IAB stated that ODVA is more engaging than television commercials, and 80% said that ODV is more effective than other digital video content, as the format enables more prominent placing and branding. From 2016 to 2018, the health and beauty and household goods sectors increased their ODVA spend by more than 180%, although the auto and telecom sectors still spend the highest dollar amount on ODVA (\$6.4 M) (Advertiser Perceptions, 2018). ODV reaches an audience of 86 million Americans, 60% of whom are aged 13-34 (Marketing Charts, 2018). As for personality traits, ODV viewers are creative, curious, forward-thinking, fun-loving, and tech-savvy, and they discover content by word-of-mouth, simply by talking with other ODV viewers (Marketing Charts, 2018). Moreover, the connection to and affinity with new and direct-to-consumer brands is stronger

amongst ODV viewers, as their curiosity makes them brand seekers, more open-minded and likely to buy new products or services; furthermore, they believe that advertising can be beneficial and fun (Sweeney, 2018). Therefore, two thirds of ODV advertisers allocate their budget to native advertising opportunities.

ODVA designers have substantial control over how people's perceptions are shaped through specific content. Perhaps nowhere is this aspect more important than in the shaping of gender expectations, their stereotypical projection, and their enhancement through steady role playing (Collins, 2011). The creation and reinforcement of stereotypes, some more universally typical and prevalent than others, can be highly detrimental to society at large (Coltrane & Adams, 1997). The information projected through digital video advertising also has the ability to alter people's perceptions, thereby affecting not only their choices but also, ultimately, their behaviour. Consumers choose based on their perceptive understanding and rationalize based on their perceptive exposure. Thus, research on gender stereotypes, a well-known concept in the advertising industry that has drawn extensive scholarly attention (e.g. Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Debevec & Iyer, 1986; Goffman, 1979; Manstead & McCulloch, 1981; McArthur & Resko, 1975), is seeking to determine whether the same aspects of gender stereotyping will exist in ODVs as an independent channel for promotion.

This opportunity has prompted the design of even more targeted digital video advertisements. Original digital videos are moreover essential to reach audiences that cannot be reached through television and, as noted, enable greater placement and branding by companies. Specifically, two thirds of advertisers will reallocate funds from television budgets to promote digital video advertising (Advertisers Perceptions, 2018). In this new advertising environment, companies will not create a single video for all their sales channels as they did in the past. Today, companies and marketers recognize ODV

campaigns as a primary source of advertising (Advertisers Perceptions, 2018). Consequently, researchers should be looking into this new field.

This paper helps to fill this gap on ODVs, reviewing the extant literature on both traditional and digital video advertising, specifically in the context of gender stereotyping and how genders are represented in digital video advertising. The main aim is to study the existence of gender stereotypes in digital video advertising and the different roles played by men and women in ODVs, thereby advancing the knowledge of digital advertising and showing that marketers' and advertisers' perspectives may differ from those reported in previous studies based on end consumers' reception of the advertisements.

### **Perceptions and bias generated through digital video advertising**

Kay, Matuszek, and Munson (2015) contend that online advertising portrayals of gender stereotypes in occupational contexts have a damaging effect on women's role in the professional world. This damage is perpetuated through heightened stereotypical perception of the differences between gender portrayals and affects the opportunities available to women, their range of choices, and their compensation. This finding is further substantiated by earlier studies of offline media, especially television (e.g. Jacobs, 1995; Massey, 2007). It is also in line with Cultivation Theory (Potter, 1993), originally put forward in relation to the then dominant medium of television, ascribing to it a negative impact consisting of professional challenges for women created and reinforced through gender stereotypical advertising. In their qualitative study, Kay et al. (2015) conclude that gender stereotyping in online advertising largely exaggerates stereotypical portrayals. These authors further find that under-representing women helps reinforce people's perceptions, which have already been shaped by other media, and assure them of the

validity of their results. Regardless of these results, advertisers believe that they are producing advertisements within a policy of avoidance of gender stereotypes (Wally, 2019). However, consumers disagree with the statement.

Both advertisers and researchers have become more aware of the specific effects of gender stereotyping in advertising, as reflected in prior studies, albeit with multiple media. Miller (2014) highlights a promising positive shift at Getty Images and LeanIn.org, which sought to address the negative stereotyping of women in a professional capacity by increasing the depiction of women employees in their stock images. That is a still medium, however, and it tells only half the story compared to video advertising.

Another important consideration in the gender stereotyping debate is the target viewership. McMahan, Hovland, and McMillan (2009) contend that around half of US Web users are women. Hence, almost 52% of the target audience for digital video advertisements consists of women. This statistic should prompt advertisement designers to rethink their content in terms of the creation and projection of stereotypes. The change in viewership is likely to directly impact the perception and interpretation of online video advertisements, once they are viewed. Therefore, marketers need to reassess the situation with regard to gender stereotypical content in their advertisements, especially in Web-based environments. Conversely, McMahan et al. (2009) also note that men use the Internet for both entertainment and information purposes, whilst women use it as a communication tool. However, they further remark that online advertising content should be tailored to the viewership's gender and that gender stereotyping is a dangerous trend that would thus need to be broken should the different gender-based markets have to be tapped. The target audience for digital video advertising seems to be clearly divided in this context, suggesting that the percentage of men exposed to video advertisements is still higher than the percentage of women.

Some studies that have assessed stereotypical depictions in online video advertisements have found patterns similar to those of traditional advertising. Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos, and Zotos (2008) find that online video advertising uses women in different types of stereotypical roles, portraying them in the role of traditional homemaker, as the siren and seductress, for purely decorative purposes, and in completely neutral roles related to the decorative one. They further report that sexism against women in online videos is deeper than in print media. Reversely, men are depicted as male-authored science role and muscular physique human being (Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, 2007; Sugimoto et al., 2013). To these stereotypes, the industry of video games have strongly contributed to emphasize the differences. In the study of Gestos, Smith-Merry and Campbell (2018) showed that female characters are portrayed as objectified, hypersexualized with disproportionate body parts and subordinate to the male hero, which influence the real-life setting and increase sexist attitudes. The bias created due to stereotypical representations is quite harmful in a practical sense, as ODVs will presumably follow the same path.

### **Online gender stereotypes in the new medium**

The issue of gender stereotypes in advertising has been extensively explored over the years, in multiple media and across different cultures (e.g. Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Debevec & Iyer, 1986; Goffman, 1979; Manstead & McCulloch, 1981; McArthur & Resko, 1975). As marketers have been made suitably aware of gender stereotypical attributes and influences, one might expect to find awareness-driven reform in this area.

Whilst the predominant advertising media in the twentieth century were television, radio, and the printed press, the twenty-first century ushered in a completely new scenario, i.e. the Internet, made even more popular through the introduction of smart

phones (Okazaki, 2007). The Internet has changed consumer behaviour, and advertisers have adapted to the new medium, changing their campaigns accordingly. Researchers have also paid special attention to new advertising trends and examined the effect of gender stereotyping in the promotion of products through site recommendations (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004), Web advertising (Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2003), the application of Hofstede's masculinity index in Web advertising (An & Kim, 2007), the online advertising of global products (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008), social media (Tortajada, Araña, & Martínez, 2013), and the interpretation of Web atmospherics in information searches (Tsieh, Hatzithomas, & Boutsouki, 2014), amongst others.

Gender stereotyping has been heavily researched since 1970, across both cultures and countries (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971). The portrayal of gender in different media, including print, radio, television, and, increasingly, the Internet, has likewise received extensive attention (e.g. Arima, 2003; Kuipers, Van der Laan, & Arfini, 2017; Mont-Turner, Kouts, Parris, & Webb, 2007; Wallis, 2011). Various researchers have tracked the progression of gender stereotyping through the different prevailing media at various points over the past few decades. Women have primarily been objectified either through the role of dutiful wife, mother, or daughter, in a caring occupation, or through the somewhat dubious role of a symbol of attraction – glorified as a physical beauty, a sex object, or in a similarly decorative role (Kyrousi, Panigyrakis, & Panopoulos, 2016). Although they have also been frequently portrayed as professionals, these portrayals are, again, limited to women-dominated occupations, such as nursing or teaching (Anand, 2013). On the other hand, men are typically depicted as the capable partner, the wiser, more mature, and more authoritative counterpart, regardless of their status or profession (Prieler, Ivanov, & Hagiwara, 2015). In contrast, several studies have found that men and women are portrayed in a more egalitarian way (Hatzithomas, Boutsouki, & Ziamou,

2016; Kotzaivazoglou, Hatzithomas, & Tsihla, 2018), whilst others suggest that there has been a change in roles, such as the new trend featuring men who are concerned about their physical appearance (Barry, 2014).

In this line, Zalis (2019) argues that bias and stereotypes impact both genders (men and women) equally. These stereotypes constrain how women and men act and penalize those people who take on roles outside the traditional gender rules (Plan International, 2018). In fact, men and women both suffer from cultural expectations and stereotypes when choosing their careers. Rather than being predisposed to accept one role or another, we must shift the paradigms to allow both genders to succeed at home or work (Zalis, 2019). Stereotypical expectations emphasize the existing differences between genders and define how men and women think and behave within a group (Ellemers, 2018). Moss-Racusin and Good (2015) posit that gender stereotypes not only affect women, but also create unrealistic expectations for men, suggesting a rich and unexplored area of empirical research.

### **The purpose of the study**

This paper will explore the relatively new phenomenon of gender stereotyping within the context of ODVA. Advertising content for purely online purposes is still relatively limited. In contrast, many television advertisements are also used with online media. Therefore, limiting the investigation solely to ODVA can open new avenues for both the advertising industry and research. Zotos and Tsihla (2014) point to postmodern advertising as a promising path to explore and Eisend (2019) advises to researchers to explore gender differences in new advertising formats. This study will thus focus on gender stereotypes in ODVA, as few studies have been conducted in this particular area.



ODV stereotypes should follow the same path as those found in non-exclusively online videos and their counterparts such as television, radio, or magazine advertising. One could expect to find the same core variables and significant sex-role stereotypes between genders. Since the early 1970s, the following main attributes concerning gender stereotypes have been identified: mode of presentation, credibility basis, role, age, argument type, reward type, product type, background, setting, and end comment.

Building on Gilly (1988) and subsequent studies (e.g. Das, 2011; Milner & Higgs, 2004), the ten measured attributes were as follows:

The mode of presentation is still a frequently used attribute in the measurement of gender stereotypes. Klofstad (2016) concludes that male voices tend to have a higher level of credibility and be more persuasive. In contrast, Martín-Santana, Muela-Molina, Reinares-Lara, and Rodríguez-Guerra (2015) find no evidence of increased effectiveness due to the use of a male voice in terms of persuasion. Nevertheless, men are predominantly used for voice-over messages, whilst women are most often shown visually and have less of a presence as voice-over narrators (Furnham, Mak, & Tanidjojo, 2000b; Neto, 2016; Sandhu, 2019; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007).

Credibility basis refers to the power to persuade consumers. In this regard, women are generally depicted as non-authoritative users, whilst men are presented as authorities or experts (Aronovsky & Furnham, 2008; Furnham & Paltzer, 2011; Prieler et al., 2015).

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, men and women's roles have supposedly dramatically changed. Nevertheless, professional and autonomous roles are more often assigned to men, whilst dependent ones are more often assigned to women (Fowler & Thomas, 2015; Knoll, Eisend, & Steinhagen, 2011; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Verhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2016; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). For instance, digital video advertising still uses women in purely decorative roles (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008;

Tsichla & Zotos, 2016). In contrast, Furnham and Skae (1997) suggest that the role of interviewer/narrator is equally prominent in both genders.

The age of an advertisement's central figures has also been studied as an attribute of gender stereotyping. Men are depicted as more mature figures, in the 36-50-year-old range, whereas most of the women depicted in commercials are between 20 and 35 years old (Das, 2011; Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003; Prieler et al., 2015; Verhellen et al., 2016).

Non-argument attributes are significantly more common in women than men, who are given factual arguments (Furnham & Lay, 2019; Furnham & Paltzer, 2010; Lim & Furnham, 2016). Opinions, i.e. non-argumentative explanations, are assigned to women.

Manstead and McCulloch (1981) find a significant difference between men and women in terms of reward type: men are often associated with practical rewards and women with self-enhancing ones. Additionally, women are sometimes depicted as rewards resulting from products supposedly targeted at men (Aronovsky & Furnham, 2008; Neto, 2016; Prieler, 2016).

Women are mainly featured in relation to certain product categories, such as beauty and personal care products (body products) and, on the whole, products related to aspects of their physical appearance (Bresnahan & Inoue, 2001; Espinar-Ruiz & González-Díaz, 2012; Nassif & Gunter, 2008; Pounders, 2018; Uray & Burnaz, 2003) and household products, appliances, and furnishings (Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007). In contrast, men are predominantly depicted in connection with cars and automotive accessories and technology (Ganahl et al., 2003; Prieler, 2016; Snadhu, 2019).

Men and women are depicted against various backgrounds. The literature is contradictory on this point. Some authors find no significant differences between genders

(Furnham & Skae, 1997; Mazzella, Durkin, Cerini, & Buralli, 1992). Others report that men are more likely to be shown with women in the background, whilst women are more likely to be depicted in the company of children or men (Furnham, Babitzkow, & Uguccioni, 2000a; Royo-Vela, Aldas-Manzano, Küster, & Vila, 2008). Still others have shown that men are most often depicted in the company of other men and women in the company of other women (Neto, 2016; Neto & Pinto, 1998).

Most studies have found that women are portrayed in the home or indoors engaging in role-related behaviour, whilst men are shown in settings outside the home, such as occupational ones (Bresnahan & Inoue, 2001; Espinar-Ruiz & González-Díaz, 2012; González-de-Garay, Marcos-Ramos, & Portillo-Delgado, 2019; Milner & Higgs, 2004; Sink & Mastro, 2017). On the whole, women are less likely to be depicted in a professional setting than men (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Verhellen et al., 2016).

Finally, central figures who are men are more likely to make an end comment than central figures who are women (Ali, Ali, Kumar, Hafeez, & Ghufraan, 2012; Furnham & Skae, 1997; Sandhu & Singh, 2017).

The present research was therefore guided by the following two research questions about the interconnection between ODVA, previous gender stereotyping, and marketers' and advertisers' opinions:

RQ1. Does ODVA exhibit the same gender stereotypes (mode of presentation, credibility, role, age, argument type, reward type, product type, background, setting, and end comment) as previous studies have found for other media?

RQ2. Do marketers' and advertisers' points of view differ from those identified in previous studies based on end consumers' reception of the advertising?

## **Methodology**

### *Method*

When the first empirical studies on gender stereotypes emerged in the early 1970s, content analysis proved to be an extremely valuable tool for measuring the portrayal of gender stereotypes in advertising (Dominick & Rauch, 1972). This method has continued to be used in a wide range of studies up to the present day (e.g. Furnham & Paltzer, 2010; Grau, Roselli, & Taylor, 2007; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009; Prieler et al., 2015). Table 1 shows the technical details of the present research.

[Insert Table 1]

### *ODVA Sample*

The research sample was drawn from the Internet Advertising Competition (IAC) database. These awards were created by the Web Marketing Association, which promotes Internet marketing and corporate development on the World Wide Web. The category corresponding to ODVs is the format 'online video'. In fact, these awards are the first online advertising award competition based only on industry. The IAC database is a valuable source of real ODVs. When brands advertise, their digital videos do not specifically state whether the video is an ODV or not, making it harder to obtain real ODVs. The competition's judges belong to the best Internet advertising communities, such as Google or IBM Interactive, and the criteria they use are based on creativity, innovation, impact, design, copywriting, use of the medium, and memorability.

From 2010 to 2017, 354 videos received awards. The award-winning videos hailed from the automobile, beverage, computer, consumer goods, entertainment, fashion and beauty, hotel, insurance, and toy industries. The sample is made up not only of the Best in Industry award winners, but also the Outstanding Online Video award winners. Some of these videos are not currently available online, especially the videos from the

first years of the competition. In an attempt to remedy this problem, the competition organizers were contacted and asked for access to all the videos for strictly research-related purposes. However, they claimed to have no control over the maintenance of the winning participants' links. Additionally, some videos receive awards in multiple categories. Such duplicate advertisements were likewise not considered. Table 2 shows the composition of the final sample per year. Therefore, the final judgemental sample consisted of 324 videos (91 Outstanding award winners and 233 Best in Industry award winners in their specific category) with an average duration of 2 minutes and 23 seconds.

[Insert Table 2]

### ***Coding Procedure***

Two coders (one woman and one man) received four hours of training on the coding procedures and then coded all the ODVs independently. The one woman-one man coding system has been used elsewhere (e.g. Milner & Higgs, 2004; Uray & Burnaz, 2003). In the training sessions, the categories and study variables were clearly explained to the coders. The coders were also provided with coding guidelines, definitions, and an online table for data input linked to the content analysis of the digital videos. As suggested by Weber (1990), before the study sample was coded, a pilot coding of fifty original video advertisements was conducted in order to reduce differences in the coding and facilitate the reaching of final agreements. This process, consisting of training and prior coding, has been implemented by several researchers and proved to be a valuable method (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008). ODVs were classified as female or male: if a video highlighted more than one stereotype, it was classified as the dominant one.

Perreault and Leigh's (1989) reliability index was used by both coders. This index is suitable when two coders are involved. Scores range from 0.0 (no reliability) to 1.0 (perfect reliability). Male gender stereotypes had a reliability score of 0.91, and female ones, 0.93, and the intercoder agreement exceeded 90% for all variables. Both scores are considered very high and are well above the 0.70 score deemed trustworthy by Rust and Cooil (1994). Each coder worked independently, and any coding discrepancies to appear were later discussed by the two coders until an agreement was reached to obtain the final sample.

### *Central measures and attributes*

This paper is based on the content analysis categories proposed by McArthur and Resko (1975), a method that has been used in more than 70 studies (Gilly, 1988; Manstead & McCulloch, 1981; Furnham & Paltzer, 2011).

Any adult portrayed in a central role (visually or vocally) is considered the central figure. Of the 324 ODVs, 212 featured a central figure who was a man, and 112, a central figure who was a woman. In all, 18.5% of the ODVs lasted less than 2 minutes and featured a central figure who was a woman vs 40.4% lasting less than 2 minutes and featuring a central figure who was a man. For ODVs lasting between 2 and 4 minutes, these figures were 17.3% (women) and 12.4% (men) respectively, whilst for ODVs lasting over 4 minutes, they were 3.7% (women) and 7.7% (men), respectively.

Building on Gilly (1988) and subsequent studies (e.g. Das, 2011; Milner & Higgs, 2004), the ten measured attributes were as follows:

*Mode of presentation.* The mode of presentation of the central figure was classified as: voice-over, visual speaking, visual speaking & voice-over, or visual non-speaking.

*Credibility.* Four main types of credibility were included: user, authority, other, and neither.

*Role.* The central figure was categorized into one of five roles: dependent, interviewer/narrator, professional, celebrity, and other.

*Age.* Three categories were used: young (aged 35 and under), middle-aged (ages 36 to 50) and older (over 50).

*Argument type.* Four types of arguments were coded: factual/scientific, opinion/non-scientific, other, and none.

*Reward type.* The central figure was coded as being portrayed against one of the following five types of rewards: social approval, social/self-enhancement, practical, pleasure, and other.

*Product type.* The videos were classified into the following categories, depending on the type of product the central figures were depicted with: body, home, food, auto, sport, services, financial, technology, property, or other.

*Background.* The backgrounds for the central figures were classified as: mostly women, mostly men, mixed, mostly children, or none.

*Setting.* Six types of settings were used: private residence/home, occupational, leisure, fictional, animated, and other.

*End comment.* This attribute refers to the inclusion of a final brief remark. The following categories were used: present as a voice, present as an image, present as a voice and image, and absent.

## **Results**

The results for all ten attributes are summarized in Tables 3 and 4. An overall significant chi-square was found for the central figures (men or women) ( $X^2 = 204.429$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p <$

.001). Therefore, women did not account for half the central figures (only 34.6%), indicating a gender difference in terms of main roles in ODV.

*Mode of presentation.* No statistically significant association was found between the mode of presentation and gender ( $X^2 = 2.705$ ,  $df = 3$ , NS). Both men (52.3%) and women (55.3%) are depicted most frequently in visual speaking roles. The second most common option was voice-over; however, men played a main role in a higher percentage of ODVs than women (31.1% versus 24.1%). In contrast, women were portrayed in a higher percentage of visual non-speaking roles than men (20.5% vs. 16.5%). However, when both variables appeared together (visual speaking and voice-over), men had a greater presence than women (7.1% vs. 4.7%). Further analysis, in which the effect of music was tested independently, likewise did not reveal any significant association ( $X^2 = 9.116$ ,  $df = 7$ , NS). When music was tested, visual speaking was the prevailing combination for both genders. Music plays an important role in ODVs and is present in 93.7% of ODVs featuring central figures who are women and 86.9% featuring central figures who are men. These results stand in stark contrast to those of previous studies (Furnham et al., 2000b; Manstead & McCulloch, 1981). In the present study, women central figures were portrayed equally to men in terms of the mode of presentation.

*Credibility.* The overall analysis revealed no statistically significant association between gender and credibility basis ( $X^2 = 6.746$ ,  $df = 3$ , NS). A total of 39.3% of the women were portrayed as authorities vs 37.3% of the men, whilst 41.1% of the women were portrayed as product users vs 35.4% of the men. In other words, the percentage of women users was slightly higher than that of men (41.1% vs 35.4%). The credibility attribute changed in the case of women. Attention should be called to the percentage increase for both genders for a neutral position in terms of credibility in the category 'neither'.



*Role.* No significant association was found between gender and roles ( $X^2 = 5.072$ ,  $df = 4$ , NS). The role of interviewer/narrator was the most common one for both genders (women = 40.2%; men = 43.9%). A professional role was the second most common for both women (25%) and men (28.3%). It was followed by a dependent role, which was the predominant role for women in previous studies (Knoll et al., 2011; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014) but ranked third here. For both genders, the roles of interviewer or narrator and professional accounted for nearly 70% of the whole sample. These results are consistent with those of Furnham and Skae (1997). There were no differences between the genders in terms of the role played.

*Age.* The overall analysis revealed no significant association between gender and age ( $X^2 = 0.733$ ,  $df = 2$ , NS). Younger women and younger men were depicted equally (50.0% for both genders). However, the percentage of middle-aged women has increased compared to previous research (Das, 2011; Ganahl et al., 2003), and the percentage of middle-aged men was close to that for women (42.0% vs 44.3%). The percentages for both genders are quite similar; ODVs do not increase the use of older people as main actors.

*Argument type.* No significant association was found between gender and argument type ( $X^2 = 5.090$ ,  $df = 3$ , NS). Opinion-based arguments were the prevailing type for both genders (45.5% = women; 47.2% = men). The rest of the measured variables were as likely to occur in men as in women. Interestingly, scientific or factual arguments were less important than opinions and non-scientific arguments for both genders, indicating a change in argument type.

*Reward type.* The overall analysis revealed no significant relationship between gender and reward type ( $X^2 = 2.969$ ,  $df = 5$ , NS). Because there were no differences between the genders in terms of reward type. The predominant reward type for both

genders was a practical reward (33.9% = women; 29.7% = men). The results for both social approval and social/self-enhancement were quite similar (around 20%).

*Product type.* No numerical gender differences were observed with regard to product type ( $X^2 = 1.969$ ,  $df = 9$ , NS). Services were the most common type for both genders (women = 17.9%; men = 19.8%). Body was the second most common product type for both women and men (15.2% vs 13.7%). The change to more egalitarian roles can be seen in the rest of the products. For instance, technology products have predominantly been depicted with men (Ganahl et al., 2003; Prieler, 2016); however, in the present study, women accounted for a higher percentage than men (14.3% vs. 12.7%).

*Background.* The overall analysis revealed no significant association between gender and background ( $X^2 = 1.818$ ,  $df = 4$ , NS). Men and women were equally likely to be shown in mixed backgrounds (33.9% for women vs 37.3% for men). The second most common option for both women and men was to be portrayed with men (20.5% vs 19.3%). There were no differences between the genders; however, being surrounded by women was less common (around 11% for both genders) than being surrounded by men (nearly 20% for both genders).

*Setting.* No significant association was found between gender and setting ( $X^2 = 1.393$ ,  $df = 5$ , NS). An occupational setting was the most likely setting for both genders (women = 30.4%; men = 29.7%). The second most common setting for both genders was a leisure setting (more than 20%). Thus, the setting attributes were quite similar for both women and men. A private residence or home was the third most common setting for women, but not for men. ODV depicted new environments, with an increased share of fictional and animated settings (more than 26% for both genders). Women and men were depicted equally with regard to the setting attribute.

*End comment.* The overall analysis revealed no significant association between gender and end comment ( $X^2 = 4.173$ ,  $df = 3$ , NS). The attribute ‘present as image’ accounted for nearly 65% for both genders. Further analysis with two variables (present and absent) likewise failed to reveal any significant association between the two variables ( $X^2 = 0.098$ ,  $df = 1$ , NS). Instead of creating ODVs with stereotyped attributes, the standard ODV seems to end with an image, regardless of the gender of the role played.

[Insert Table 3]

[Insert Table 4]

### **Discussion and limitations**

The findings of this examination of male and female role portrayal indicate that men and women are portrayed in a more egalitarian way in ODVs in terms of traditional gender stereotypes. In general, there was no significant association between gender and any of the ten studied attributes (mode of presentation, credibility, roles, age, argument type, reward type, product type, background, setting, and end comment). As the chi-square measurements demonstrate, there was no difference between genders; women central figures in ODVs seemed to have the same attributes as central figures who were men. These results differ from previous findings (e.g. Furnham et al., 2000b; Manstead & McCulloch, 1981; Mazzella et al., 1992; Neto & Pinto, 1988). The results for the first research question seem to suggest that ODVA does not present gender stereotypes. In fact, McLuhan (1967) argued that media have the power to change how we think and process information. In this line, as a new format, ODV could leverage this rule to modify gender stereotypes as previous formats have failed to do. However, the only difference found between genders in the present study was with regard to the central figure. Most of

the prize-winning videos featured a central figure who was a man, although the attributes of male and female central figures themselves were quite similar. There is thus still inequality in the advertisements: women are less likely to play the central figure, which may undermine their role as company leaders or the main image of a brand. Marketers, advertisers and enterprises should consider changing central figures to create more ODVs depicting women in a main role. Such a transformation could not only help achieve gender equality, but also enhance women's role as leaders.

With regard to the second research question, marketers and advertisers appear to have a more neutral point of view, which could suggest that there is a cognitive difference between what marketers and advertisers approve of and what consumers actually receive from the advertising. It is thus worth considering whether there is an underlying pressure from brands to create stereotyped advertising, because when marketing and advertising experts share their judgement criteria with the online advertising community, they tend to reward ODVs that apparently lack stereotypes. When advertising agencies win awards, it intensifies their clients' trust (Davies & Prince, 2005), which could lead to an increase in advertising with no or fewer stereotypes and greater resistance to pressure from brands to depict stereotypical behaviour.

The present research has some limitations. First, the sample does not include all ODVs from 2010 to 2017. However, the use of a judgemental sample ensures the ODVs' origins, which was the main goal, and the present paper is the first attempt to explore this new format. It is also one of the first studies to use a sample created by experienced advertising professionals with an in-depth understanding of the current state-of-the-art in advertising design.

## **Conclusions and future research**

In 1988, Ferrante, Haynes, and Kingsley pointed to a change in women's role as depicted by advertisers and marketers. The present findings support that observation, since the analysed prize-winning videos, selected by marketing and advertising professionals, featured women with the same attributes as men.

The lack of significant differences found between men and women in ODVs for attributes related to traditional gender stereotypes points to a need to find new variables better adapted to the independent scenario of ODVs. This is particularly true in light of Eisend's (2010) writings about the coding scheme and lack of theoretical justification for the categories. The Internet has revolutionized marketing and advertising alike due to the wide-ranging audience. Nevertheless, today's society can also create pressure for men and women to act according to traditional roles (Zalis, 2019). ODVs could serve as a medium to encourage men and women to act outside existing stereotypes and provide examples of how gender need not affect success at home or work. Therefore, the attributes presented by McArthur and Resko (1975) and Goffman (1979) might be outdated or, at least, ill-suited to ODVs. In fact, this study is one of the first to deal with and present specific data on gender representation in ODVs.

The findings are consistent with those of other recent research. For instance, Kay et al. (2015) found evidence of stereotypical representations, but at a declining rate. Their conclusion supports the view that people's conscious desire to be represented in a truly social manner, as opposed to in hypothetically stereotypical ones, provides evidence of changing perceptions, requirements, and desires. This needs to be incorporated as soon as possible in actual practice with regard to visual online marketing content.

Studies looking into work roles (Matthes, Prieler, & Adams, 2016) and advertisements aired during the Super Bowl (Hatzithomas et al., 2016) have found some evidence that the differences between women and men have been lessening. Similar

structural features can be found in Grau and Zotos (2016) and Rubie-Davies, Liu, and Lee (2013), who find that women are equally depicted in more egalitarian societal roles. Apart from this trend towards more egalitarian societal roles, it would be worth studying whether the new advertising format also creates unrealistic expectations for men (Moss-Racusin & Good, 2015), in which case, men and women might feel obliged to take on unpredictable roles even if they do not wish to. It would also be interesting to study whether the information in advisements featuring changing roles could impact the real attitudes of men and women.

Another interesting study (Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017) examined femvertising as female empowerment advertising. The findings of that study highlight that reducing female stereotypes enhances brand attitude. ODVs seem to offer a clear example of femvertising and of how companies are changing their advertisements to spotlight a more equal culture. It is necessary to further explore the influence that carefully constructed stereotypes are likely to have on people's perceptions of social gender roles and how these perceptions are constructing the social fibre of our relationship environments. It is hoped that such an understanding will make marketers and users more aware of the dangers of stereotypical associations in society for both genders.

There seems to be a trend towards creating videos in a more neutral environment. This neutral approach could breathe new life into the research, allowing researchers to create new variables and measurements. The present findings indicate that the number of animated ODVs is increasing each day. Given the lack of research on that topic, trying to identify the gender stereotypes in animated videos could also be an area worth looking into.

Apart from the researchers focusing on women, as it has seen by Barry, (2014), men are depicted in non-stereotypical roles no assigned for men previously. In this line, researching the changing role portrayal for men is a path to follow. Moreover,

Finally, ODVA research should continue to be pursued, using a more representative sample, increasing the number of videos, and taking into account what consumers actually receive or are forced to watch. However, brands will need to identify which format they are using to help researchers take a specific format or platform into account. Within this line of research, it would be quite helpful to determine whether specific features of ODV, such as the duration or where the video is placed, could affect the perception of gender stereotypes. It would likewise be interesting to explore whether an opt-in or opt-out model, in line with a permission-based concept of advertising, would encourage consumers to stop or continue watching a video and whether the videos served under either option are more likely to be related to gender stereotypes.

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