

Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Media Representation

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Abstract

In today's era, media plays an important role in everyone's life. To some extent, it gives us the opportunity to see the world from different angles and different perspectives. But a question that comes to everyone's mind is, what we see in advertisements, movies, or TV shows either ethical or not? According to the sociological perspective, stereotyping is an oversimplified or general idea about the people who belong to a particular group. It can be based on sexual orientation, race, gender, age or ethnicity. Stereotyping can either be positive or negative. The young audience, especially from the teenage group, takes a lot of ideas from the media regarding how to behave and act in a particular situation and how to treat the people that are either associated with them or are living in their surroundings.

Introduction

Stereotypes always represent a group of people that have a bit different beliefs from the rest of the world, and therefore, they are also sometimes called minorities. It is not necessary that the stereotypical person is either cautious or negative in nature, but sometimes they can be on the right side and can be proven right (Ward, 2004). The two most common exposures of stereotypes are their prejudice and generality. It is usually believed that stereotypical representation is the base for racism, homophobia, xenophobia and sexism (Taylor, 1997). It is also believed that characterizing someone with a typical group of people, especially if the group with whom someone is forcefully attached, has negative prospects in the mind of the general public, then limits the accomplishments of that particular person, lowers his or her standard of life and lower the expectations.

In today's era, media plays an important role in everyone's life. To some extent, it gives us the opportunity to see the world from different angles and different perspectives. Television, Radio, newspapers, and magazines are some different forums of media through which companies give their advertisement, and people become aware of their different products. According to a recent study, it has been identified that every person in the UK encounters around 270 commercials per week (Vaknin, 2008).

But there arises a question when we talk about the advertisements that are run through different forms of media. Whether the advertisement that is being made and running through the media is ethical or not? The types of appeals that are being used in the advertisements are either ethical or

not? Especially stereotypical representation in advertisements is making a lot of negative impacts on society (Bodenhausen, 2016). But again, there arises a question of how we will come to know the appeal that is being used in the advertisement in representing stereotypical behavior.

Description

The term stereotype is reciprocally used in our routine life. But whenever we are using them in our daily life conversations, it is important for us to define them from a sociological perspective properly. According to the sociological perspective, stereotyping is an oversimplified or general idea about the people who belong to a particular group (Solorzano, 2000). It can be based on sexual orientation, race, gender, age or ethnicity. Stereotyping can either be positive or negative. Usually, it is said to be positive whenever it occurs about one's own group; for example, when women say that they are more prone to work and do not complain about any type of pain. It can be negative as well (Roy, 2007). Most of the time, it is negative, especially whenever it is related to any other group, like when a group of dominant people or a group of people who perceive themselves as a majority group say something about a group of people that are a minority (Roy, 2007).

A major question that comes into the mind is, from where do these stereotypes come from? The answer to this question is these are rarely created, in fact stereotypes are recycled from time to time and are assimilated into society by a different group of people. For example, the stereotypes that are currently being used against blacks were once used to characterize Eastern European and Irish immigrants (Solorzano, 1997).

There is a diverse and comprehensive literature available on stereotypical advertising. But the perspective of the UK's practitioners on this issue is unknown. If there is a point of view available from the professionals of the industry on this issue, then it would be very beneficial for us to understand the role of stereotypes in advertisements. According to a study conducted recently, which has analyzed around 150 different books, articles, interviews and different previous studies, it tells us that the stereotypical appeals in advertisements are badly affecting kids, especially of the age of under 18 (Bodenhausen, 2016).

According to that study, gender stereotypes that are being shown in TV shows, movies, cartoons and commercials are affecting the minds of the children (Bodenhausen, 2016). The impact that these studies create on the minds of the children is very hard to change or remove for the parents (Ottosson, 2012). As in teenage, these stereotypes create a very strong impact on the minds of the children that to counteract these impacts, parents work harder, but still, most of the time, all of their efforts go into violence because, at that time, the children do not come under the influence of the parents. How can we determine that the representation is stereotypical?

The approach of an individual to stereotyping is basically associated with a social cognitive perspective. The preliminary approach to this proposition is that, over a period of time, people start

developing beliefs about a certain group of people that are either related to their past experiences or from the knowledge that they are gaining from the environment (Smetackova, 2015). Therefore, a stereotypical approach develops in the mind of an individual according to his or her perception of the environment (Daniels, 2013). The information that is perceived from the environment in the mind of an individual is interpreted then saved in the memory of an individual and then it is retrieved for further processes (Brooks, 2006). Maintenance, changing and development of stereotypes have all been explained from the perspective of social cognitive factors.

Cognitive schema is one of the most traditional approaches for stereotyping if we limit it to individual approaches. Social information and the promotion of effective and parsimonious information are the basics of schema (Dunlap, 2015). Group schemas, while representing the different social groups, provide us with the beliefs and characteristics of a particular social group.

Another approach to the conceptualization of the stereotypical representation is a commonsense notion. This means that the memories of people might get triggered whenever they encounter a person having the same personality attributes that are attached to a certain group of people having the same personality characteristics (Gerbaudo, 2018). This approach for the determination of the representation of the stereotypes is also known as exemplars.

Cultural perspective is another way to determine the stereotypical representation. Through this approach, individuals can characterize the cognitive system thus allowing them to efficiently store and retrieve stereotypes (Ford, 1997). In today's era, most of the stereotypical representation is transmitted through mass media, that is, television, radio, social media or other forums of media.

How Gender Stereotypes Are Affecting Our Children?

A recent study shows that the gender stereotype approach used in TV commercials, shows, or movies is badly affecting our children. This stereotypical exposure is not only through cartoons, TV shows or movies, but it is through the constant exposure that our children are taking throughout their lives, starting from preschool and ending with the end of life (Mastro, 2008). There are many stereotypical ideas that are being used in the cartoons and the commercials that our children are watching on a daily basis. For example, the exploitation of children by giving them some concept that boys are smarter than girls and giving them the falsified argument that there are certain jobs that are only fit for boys and not for girls (Hurwitz, 1992). If you think that you can easily leave this kind of stuff behind and easily move forward for further progress and development, you are making a serious mistake.

While talking about the stereotypical approaches used in advertisements, TV shows and movies, think about the preschoolers who are in the early phase of their life. The characters that they see on TV, either in commercials or in the movies, most of the characters are associated with an obvious

feminine or masculine appearance (Ramasubramanian, 2007). For example, a feminine appearance is associated with the long blonde hairs of a princess, whereas a masculine appearance is associated with big muscles or a superhero flying in the air and saving people from evils.

The young audience, especially from the teenage group, takes a lot of ideas from the media regarding how to behave and act in a particular situation and how to treat the people that are either associated with them or are living in their surroundings (Ramasubramanian, 2007). This stereotypical representation of the characters in movies, shows, or advertisements can lead this young generation to false assumptions, as a result of which they can draw conclusions that could be harmful to everyone. The stereotypical use of characters in the media can lead people to many false choices, which ultimately affect their future (Ramasubramanian, 2007). A recent study shows that, watching these stereotypical characters on the tv can lead the young generation to losing their self worth, they can wrongly choose their careers as being negatively affected by the stereotypical characters, can negatively affect their relationships and can affect their ability to fully accomplish their goals.

Advertising And Racial Stereotyping

It has been seen throughout the history of advertising that advertisers are using different racial stereotypical approaches, and over a period of time, some ads have been considered to be more racial as compared to others (Smetackova, 2015). As stereotyping itself does not carry any negative or positive meaning, this approach has been used in advertisements to give viewers a point of view, on the basis of which they can easily assign meaning to that approach as per their ease. Because of this reason, we have seen that this approach is producing positive outcomes in many countries because of the different demographics (Smetackova, 2015). We have also seen that in most countries, it is also generating many negative impacts because, in those countries, stereotyping is known as a serious offense.

Racial stereotyping creates a positive result in a situation where the target market is specific, i.e., a specific race. If in this type of situation, they use this approach, the audience will automatically get biased towards the attributes of the product and start realizing similar attributes in the product that exactly what they want (Ramasubramanian, 2007) even though those attributes are not present in the product.

Different countries have different cultures and have different languages. While launching a product in a different market or advertising a product in a different market, the advertiser has to take into consideration the ingroup effect. The ingroup theory says that people show favoritism towards people of the same nature or same identity (Ward, 2004). Therefore, if an advertising company is launching a campaign in China, it should use Chinese models in the ad, use Chinese characters, and, most importantly it should, use the Chinese language in the ad so that the majority of the people can get affiliated with the advertisement. Targeting specific demographics can be said as racial stereotyping as it can create a positive result for the viewer as well as for the advertiser.

Racial stereotyping can also create many negative results. It mostly happens when people start taking this approach as an offense. We have seen that most of the time, many of the advertisements are misinterpreted because of this, people start taking a different meaning to the approach that is used. This misinterpretation can be caused because there are a lot of factors that are contributing to noise during this whole communication process.

Although the stereotyping approach used in the media is harmless it can be readily turned into an offensive approach. As we have seen, people socially identify themselves and seek the qualities that the people in their surroundings have. So whenever any kind of approach hurts the people in their social circle, they start taking that approach as an offense just because of the reason it has impacted their other members (Smetackova, 2015). Stereotyping has a significant impact on how an individual feels towards this approach because the impact on that particular individual will ultimately create an impact on the entire group in society.

Whenever there arises a racial stereotypical approach in a negative form, it always brings two different results. One, It has affected a person, and that person takes it as an offense and starts hostility toward the advertiser (Ward, 2004). Second, people who get affected by the approach and feel offended start taking it as self-oppression. These stereotypes that surround us will affect our personality and will ultimately affect our decision-making process (Ward, 2004). The outcomes as a result of racial stereotyping advertisements that have been discussed above will ultimately affect the viewer and the advertiser and thus be considered unethical advertising.

Conclusion

Today, media has a lot of influence on everyone's life. We are living in an era in which we are too prone to the media, whether that is electronic media, social media, print media or any other form. We are so much exposed to the media. But the thing that should be considered is whether the type of media that are exposed to is either ethical or not. Whether the advertisements, movies or shows that we are seeing hurting the self-esteem of someone or not? Stereotyping is, when we characterize someone on the basis of the whole group. We associate them with the characteristics of the entire group. This approach is also used in advertisements, movies and TV shows, which can either bring positive or negative results. But the overall studies that have been done on this topic til now show us that the use of stereotyping in the media is unethical.

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