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## Research Article

### Advertisements and Sexism in the Philippines

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#### ABSTRACT

Advertisements have been an effective tool used to promote a product or service. It can also be considered as a way to shape the mind and the culture of society. Hence, this study determined the linguistic elements and analyzed different types of sexism through language in Philippine television advertisements. The study used qualitative approach to research and utilized a validated self-made research instrument which served as the primary tool of the study. The study identified the linguistic elements present in Philippine television advertisements in terms of its lexical and syntactical feature and analyzed the types of sexism through language in Philippine advertisements. The study revealed that the commonly used lexical feature of advertisements is simple vocabulary; meanwhile for syntactic feature, the most common is ambiguity and the use of imperative. It is also found that advertisements can be used as a sexism platform in the Philippines. Moreover, the way these elements are used or depicted along with the portrayal of men and women in the advertisements may influence the audience's perception and understanding of what they have seen thus, the audio-video material as output of this study may serve as a tool to liberate the minds of the viewing public.

**Keywords:** *linguistic elements, Philippines, sexism, television advertisements*

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### Introduction

Advertisements are everywhere. It can be seen on television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards and even on the internet. An advertisement, which is mostly shortened to advert or ad, is the promotion of a product,

brand or service to consumers in order to attract interest, engagement and sales. Advertisements are a guaranteed method of reaching a wide variety of audience. In fact according to Hanaysha (2016) the significant part of doing advertisement is to reach out to consumers as

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well as competitors and show its presence to the market. As a result people are exposed to the advertising process wherever they are and it has gained the attention of a large number of individuals in different corners of the globe. Not only does advertisements became a tool to make a product or service known to the public, it has also become a medium to disseminate information. Suharyanto and Hidayat (2018) claimed that advertising has become a form of communication consisting of information and ideas about a certain product with the primary aim to acquire a good reception from the audience. Advertising has continuously tried to provide information, at the same time convince and persuade, making it an effective means of communication to disseminate information, promote products or services and ideas from the advertiser to the audience.

In making an advertisement it will undergo a process such as identifying the target consumers, needs, wants, age, statuses, and gender together with visual effects. The choices of linguistic items also play a significant role which can affect the audience's critical thinking and selection of the product that they would buy. Different branding companies want their products to be remembered by the people, hence making a trendy advertisement that may or may not work for any gender in the society. It is crucial that gender equality is given importance in both societal and business perspectives knowing that it is one of the many social issues discussed in the Sustainable Development Goals in and outside the country. The Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs are a call to action to end poverty, protect the earth's environment and climate, as well as ensuring that people everywhere can live in peace and prosperity. Specifically, SDG 5 which pertains to gender equality is aimed to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." According to the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), SDG 5 is primarily concerned with achieving true and sustained gender equality in all aspects of women's and girls' lives, which includes (1) ending gender disparities, (2) eliminating violence against women and girls' lives, (3) eliminating early and forced marriage, (4) ensuring equal participation and

opportunities for leadership, and (5) universal access to sexual and reproductive rights.

The cultural content of advertising, its language and its connection with gender issues, is deeply rooted in our society. People's daily life has been increasingly influenced by the presence of advertisements, affecting their worldviews, knowledge, motivations, experiences, expectations and sense of identity (Chafai, 2010). This alone could influence the perceptions of an individual in regards to gender that may lead them to being sexist. Advertising in the Philippines has evolved beyond traditional tri-media outfits (print, TV, electronic billboard, radio and different social media sites). The emergence of internet based media like banner ads, social media, electronic billboard and applications, called new media, has made it possible for advertisements to reach a wider audience around the Philippines and even all over the world (Shah, 2020). More advertising companies have also made use of this platform as effective strategy to make their products or services known. The Philippines is a brand-conscious market and advertising plays a significant role in promoting consumer goods. Local brands are also faced with a challenge with Filipino's colonial mentality because it creates the misplaced beliefs that imported goods are of high quality and durable while local products cannot challenge against foreign goods (Baquillas, 2018). This shows that in order to compete with the international and well-sought brands, Philippine advertisements also use foreign ways of advertising that can be deemed as a means of sexism. According to Cortese (2004) as cited by Andersson and Schytt (2017), sexism is any attitude, behaviour, institutional arrangement or policy that favors one gender over another. Sexist conduct ranges from overt, incontrovertible acts, for example using female gender categories to construct insult, to covert and subtle forms, such as women being explained to or corrected by men who have less expertise on the topic under discussion (Bates, 2016). Sexist advertising produces images of gender-related stereotypes and behaviour to socially devalue specific groups (women, men, transgender, homosexuals, etc.) in relation to others. Sexist words and actions that can be found in any advertisements can

also affect consumers' decision-making in terms of choosing products they want to purchase given that over the years according to Joyce et al. (2021), in everyday interaction, subtle manifestations of sexism often pass unacknowledged, become internalized and thus perceived as natural conduct.

Advertisement is considered as a way to shape the mind and the culture of society and in some cases, sadly in the Philippine context, some advertisements had allowed the use of language to promote gender discrimination. There are even some Filipinos who prefer to buy or follow international products without realizing that the advertisement is sexist. Despite this fact, only limited studies are done to prove this phenomenon and to liberate the minds of the public. Most studies about advertisements deals with identifying solely the linguistic styles of utterances and their power relations, analyzing the visual aspects and marketing strategies, and determining the occurrence of men and women in advertisements and how they were portrayed. In fact, a study by Prieler and Centeno (2013) on gender representation in Philippine television advertisements showed results of gender stereotyping wherein more males were reportedly shown in the workplace and females were shown more in the home; males clothing mostly covered their body whereas females were seen often with suggestive clothes; males were observed to deliver more voiceovers than the females; and most of the product categories were mostly stereotypically associated with gender. Despite these results, there is only one exception to these stereotypical gender portrayals, and that is the prevailing influence of female primary characters in the said television advertisements (58.3% vs. 41.7%).

It is equally important to also take note of how language in advertisements can be used to promote sexism given that advertisement is an effective tool to attract the attention of the masses. In the study of Samarina and Poliakova (2018), they explained that advertising has a socio-psychological impact on a person but its perception by opposite sexes is different due to the color, visual and acoustic cues, and the texts used in the advertisements. In this case, advertisements could be a means to influence the

minds of the viewing public especially on how they perceive things based on what they have seen. In fact according to Sheehan (2004), there are three most important factors that must be involved and should be taken into consideration in the advertising context: the 'individual' who is the recipient of the advertisement, the 'context' of the advertisement and the 'content' of its message because these are very crucial in creating people's own perceptions.

Language, gender, and society are three complex and closely intertwined concepts. Language reflects or shapes the social life and consequently influences gender relationships and expectations. Language and gender is an interdisciplinary field of research that studies the variety of speech in terms of gender, gender relations, gendered practices, and sexuality (Nordquist, 2019). This simply refers to the relationship along with the differences between the language of male and female in different specific contexts. Gender difference however is not only a reflection of the speeches between male and female, but also a reflection of how they live, along with attitudes towards various contexts. For example, Lakoff (1975), a pioneer in language and gender studies, introduced the deficit model. She explained women's language in terms of inadequacies resulting from the political and cultural subordination of women by men. In her view the linguistic features of women's language portray them as tentative, uncertain, and lacking in authority and submissive. On one note, gender issues have become connected with the issue of language over the past thirty years. Gender studies evolved differently, with the greatest impact in North America; the era of feminism that began in the late 1960s and affected academic and public life as well as high and popular culture has been instrumental in shaping the historical and scholarly context of its generation (Flotow, 2004 as cited by Xia, 2013). This led to the changes of perceptions towards gender roles. Many feminists have demonstrated through research that language, understood as discourse, functions as a powerful tool of patriarchal culture.

In this context, the study aimed on answering the following questions: (1) What are the linguistic elements present in the identified Philippine Advertisements?, (2) What are the

types of sexism through language in Philippine advertisements?, and (3) What possible audio-video material can be proposed based on the findings of the study? The researchers argue that if Philippine advertisements contain elements that promote sexism, a liberation tool for the viewing public in the form of audio-video material can be crafted. Hence, this current study answers the call of contributing to the body of knowledge in line with this phenomenon.

## **Methods**

The research study was done using a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural environment and try to understand or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings they give them. This study also utilized the grounded theory type of research design which was first developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Grounded theory has an enormous appeal for a range of disciplines due to its explanatory power. This power reveals common people's problem in a way that allows them to empathize with theory and apply it to their own lives. In addition to that, grounded theory is a research method which uses strict procedures for data analysis and will enable the researchers to search for and conceptualize the hidden social and collective patterns and constructions in their area of interest.

The study was conducted in the Philippines, an archipelagic nation situated south of Taiwan, between the South China Sea in the west and the Pacific Ocean in the east with both Filipino and English as official languages in the country and 19 more that are regional recognized (The Philippines in Brief, n.d.). Like any other country, the Philippines is not an exemption when it comes to the issues of sexism and

discussions on gender representations. It has always been a continuing discussion in the country when it comes to understanding or disaggregating gender equality issues since it also overlaps on multiple issues based on class, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, geographic locations and even considering the intersectionality across marginalized groups in Filipino society.

Subjects of this study are 30 advertisements that were commonly shown or flashed in Philippine television. A validated self-made research instrument was used to analyze the data gathered. The instrument has two parts. Part A contains the elements of Philippine advertisements in terms of linguistics while Part B focuses on the elements of Philippine advertisements in terms of paralinguistics. After the gathering of data, it was then analyzed and interpreted. Thematic analysis was used to determine the different types of sexism through language in Philippine television advertisements. The analysis was done by following the six-phase framework of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) which starts off with becoming familiar with the data, followed by generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and lastly, writing up. The formulation of conclusions and recommendations then followed.

## **Results and Discussions**

The study revealed that the linguistic elements found in advertisements vary in terms of their lexical and semantic features. The features observed depends on what type of product is being shown or depicted in Philippine televisions. As shown in Table 1, hyperbole, glamorization and simple vocabulary are the only lexical features used in the advertisements. Meanwhile ambiguity and the use of imperative are the most common syntactic features.

Table 1. Linguistic Elements of Philippine Advertisements

LINGUISTIC ELEMENTS				
Lexical Features			Syntactic Features	
Hyperbole	Glamorization	Simple Vocabulary	Ambiguity	Use of Imperatives
Grabengsarap Mas grabeng savings.	Super card	Luis: No more excuses saShakey's 2020 meet up meal deal.	Boy 1: Uy! Tignanniyo! Kath: Pa-try nga. DJ: Angnapilimo ay... DJ: Nagsalitanayungiba.	Kath: Pa-try nga. Boy1: Uy! Tignanniyo! DJ: Take the Pepsi Taste Challenge! DJ and Kath: Sundinangpuso...
Umaapawang sangkap Apawsangkap , apawsarap.	Milky sarap	Kim: Chowking halo halo. Umaapawangs angkap at milky sarap.	Woman 1: Oh, break muna.	Woman 1: Oh, break muna. Liza: Sa bawat break, mag smooth and creamy great taste white.
100% natural coconut cream extract	Flat naang hair hair bounce	Maine: Hey girls! Walangganapu martykasi feeling flat naang hair mo? Don't worry!	Naku, yung cash kokinuha ng multo.	Pay online! Mag-McDo delivery.
ultimate no.1	impeccably smoothens exquisitely softens reliantly gives	Pia: My ultimate beauty from the no.1 in keratin.	Male: Anong favorite number mosa electric fan?	Make your move. Get that coneidence with cornetto cookies and dream.
For up to 24 hrs	Sweet escape, Smooth and creamy taste	Woman 1: Oh, break muna. Liza: Sa bawat break, mag smooth and creamy great taste white. Also in white crema and caramel!	Kids 1 & 2: Bakit? Mother: Alamniyoba that probiotics helps you with digestion but they don't last long? Butinalang, angdutchmill delight ay may duo-active formula with prebiotics fibers that help probiotics live longer and digest food better than probiotics alone.	Mother: Mag dutchmill delight muna!

Findings of this study show that hyperbole, glamorization and simple vocabulary are the only lexical features used in the advertisements implying that the use of lexical features vary depending on what type of product is being shown or depicted in the television. The use of

hyperbole in advertisements is one way to exaggerate the product and to attract the attention of consumers.

For example the use of *grabeng sarap*, *mas grabeng savings* and *umaapaw ang sangkap* describes how the consumers could feel the

pleasure, fullness and satisfaction when they eat at Shakey's and Chowking respectively. The words *100% natural coconut cream extract, ultimate, no.1, and for up to 24 hrs* indicates the use of hyperbole in hygiene-related advertisements ads to the variation of personal expression which can affect the willingness of the consumers to try the product. Barbu-Kleitsch (2015) supports this idea with his claim that the use of hyperboles in an advertising discourse is a common strategy used to capture attention, insert humor in an argumentative discourse, and emphasize the emotions or product attributes. That is why the use of hyperbole is known among advertisement makers. Glamorization on the other hand is used in advertisements to give a distinctive touch of glamor to the product that was being advertised. With the aim to emphasize on the products, glamorization is used in advertisements by putting words that are not used in a daily basis (Melynda, 2017). These helps in making the products stand out more. Examples of glamorization in these advertisements are the use of the words *sweet escape, super card, milky sarap, hair bounce, impeccably smoothens, and etc.* Meanwhile, simple vocabulary is the factor that most advertisements use to simply communicate with their audience without any confusion about the definition of the words. Permatasari and Yulia (2013) stated that simplicity in the choice of words or vocabulary in advertisements makes people easily remember what the speakers have said. Considering the market to

be not familiar with the advanced English or Filipino, it is better to stick with simple vocabulary that can be easily understood by a wide variety of audience.

In terms of the syntactic features of advertisements, ambiguity and the use of imperative are commonly observe. Ambiguous statements in the dialogue from the Pepsi commercial for example; the first statement is ambiguous itself since the speaker did not specifically indicate what or where to look—although the boy had gestured where—making it ambiguous. Ambiguous statements will either depict positive or negative interpretations, and making use of them in advertisements will sometimes allow the audience to perceive it as something else other than what it originally meant. On the other hand, imperatives in advertisement according to Grey (2008) are used to make an order. The goal of imperative is to make the consumers act or do something such as buy or use the advertised product. This is evident in the phrases, *take the Pepsi Taste Challenge, mag-chowking halo-halo na, mag-McDo delivery, and get that confidence*, which all suggest the consumers to try the mentioned product. These imperatives are used to increase the willingness of the consumer to do something related to the marketing purposes of the advertisement company.

On top of these linguistic elements, the researchers analyzed the types of sexism through language in Philippine television advertisements as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Types of Sexism on Philippine Advertisements

Themes	Categories	Formulated Codes
Gender Dominance	Hypermasculinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy male exposure</li> <li>• Male portrayers are given the most lines</li> <li>• Male taking the lead role</li> </ul>
	Hyperfemininity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romanticizing women qualities</li> <li>• Unrealistic portrayal of feminine traits</li> </ul>
Gender Stereotyping	Marshal Sexism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong personality associated with men</li> <li>• Emphasis on prescribed gender-related professions</li> </ul>
	Presumptuous Sexism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejecting traditional gender roles</li> <li>• Associating inappropriate gender behavior</li> </ul>

Themes	Categories	Formulated Codes
Gender Representations	Antagonistic Sexism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexualizing women</li> <li>• Aimed to attract sexual interest</li> </ul>
	Benignant Sexism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women inferiority</li> <li>• Submissiveness</li> <li>• “Maria Clara” characteristics</li> </ul>

The researchers found out that sexism is present in Philippine advertisements. With the use of thematic analysis, the researchers formulated three main themes; gender dominance, gender stereotyping, and gender representation. Following Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase framework of thematic analysis, the researchers starts off with becoming familiar with the data gathered, followed by generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and lastly, writing up. Three general themes were formulated after analyzing the gathered data and it can be further divided into two categories under each theme. Hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity are categorized under Gender Dominance; Marshal Sexism and Presumptuous Sexism for Gender Stereotyping; and Antagonistic and Benignant Sexism under Gender Representation.

The linguistic elements are important features that must be considered accordingly when crafting an advertisement. The way these elements are used or depicted in every advertisement may influence the audience's perception and understanding of what they have seen. Other than these elements, the researchers found out that Philippine television advertisements do contain different types of sexism which when viewed by the general public can also influence their interpretation about certain gender roles and the society. Gender dominance, gender stereotyping and gender representation were the types of sexism evident in Philippine television advertisement.

Firstly, Gender Dominance, it suggests that men are naturally more dominant than women in terms of their speech patterns and behaviors, while women act in a less dominant way around men. The researchers further subdivided this theme into two categories: hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity. Hypermasculinity can be seen in some advertisements

which promote products that are exclusive for men to use. Although there are advertisements that are also applicable to the opposite gender and are with female casts, it seemed that men are depicted as dominant over women. Hyperfemininity is also observed in advertisements where women are usually portrayed and depicted. The downside is that women are often romanticized by the advertisers to attract the consumers and purchase the product.

Secondly, Gender Stereotyping pertains to the practice of ascribing an individual man or woman specified attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of his or her membership in the social group of men and women. It also means asserting supposedly appropriate and exclusive roles to both sexes, male and female. Marshal and Presumptuous Sexism were categorized under this theme. Marshal Sexism is present in some advertisements that present assertions about what a gender should normally do or act. This is mainly shown in advertisements that contextualized what men and women exclusively act or do such as their careers or professions. Meanwhile, Presumptuous Sexism can be observed when people assume the behavior a specific gender acts is inappropriate. This will allow people to think that they have the right or authority to correct what an individual should act that is deemed appropriate for their gender.

Lastly, Gender Representation is when people associate different characteristics, positive and negative, to a gender. The Antagonistic and Benignant Sexism are the coined categories where this theme is generated. Antagonistic Sexism is present when advertisers associate negative representations towards a gender such as manipulative and seductive. It can be seen on advertisements that often sexualize women's image to attract the target consumers of the product which is ideally men. Meanwhile, Benignant Sexism is seen in advertisements

that depict the image of women as innocent and soft-spoken. These advertisements normally suggest the inferiority of women whenever they are around men; showing possible dependence of one gender from another.

Indeed, advertisements can be used as a platform for sexism. Despite growing public awareness and policy efforts, gender equality has not yet fully established in different fields such as employment, labor market position, participation in decision-making positions, workshare in the household, etc. (Mastari et al., 2019). With the primary intention to promote a certain product or service, there are advertisements that unknowingly promoted sexism along with the product or service. Tesseras (2021) asserts that in spite of the widespread criticism, marketing is still inherently sexist. Advertisement brands fall back on the stereotypical idea of women. While much has been done to eliminate this phenomenon, they are still very much at play, although often now in a more subtle way.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that the way the linguistic elements are used and the types of sexism depicted in every advertisement may influence the audience's perception and understanding of what they have seen. These findings are supported by the idea presented in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory which emphasizes on the importance of unique human characteristics known as the symbolizing, self-regulatory, self-reflective, and vicarious capacities. Speaking about human cognitions, it suggests that different audiences with different mental capabilities might receive the messages conveyed in the advertisements differently. Furthermore, Social Cognitive theory states that when people observe someone performing a certain behavior and the consequences of that behavior, they memorize the sequence of events and use this information as guidance for their future behaviors. This theory further suggest that most social behavior is learned through direct as well as vicarious observations such as watching television. People model their behavior based on these observations and

these may include information about appropriate gender roles. Thus, Philippine television advertisements must be crafted accordingly and appropriately to prevent this event to happen.

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