



GENDERED REPRESENTATION IN ONLINE MARKETING: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of gender in online marketing through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The study aims to examine how men and women are portrayed in digital advertisements and to explore the underlying ideologies and power relations embedded in online marketing discourse. A qualitative research design was adopted, and purposefully selected advertisements from major digital platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and official brand websites, were analyzed using three-dimensional model of CDA. The findings revealed that women were predominantly represented in terms of beauty, attractiveness, self-care, and emotional expression, whereas men were portrayed as authoritative, successful, competent, and achievement-oriented. Although contemporary online marketing increasingly incorporates themes of empowerment, diversity, and inclusivity, traditional gender stereotypes continue to shape advertising discourse. This study concludes that online marketing remains a significant platform for the construction and reinforcement of gender identities, highlighting the need for more balanced and inclusive gender representations in digital advertising.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Digital Advertising, Gender Representation, Online Marketing.*

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1. Introduction

Digital communication technologies have had a tremendous impact on modern marketing. As one of the most powerful means for brands to reach customers, build a brand image and define cultural values. Thus, online marketing has become a fascinating part of the brand communication landscape. By utilizing social media channels like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X, businesses can implement more personalized and interactive advertising approaches that appeal to their audience. This has created a space for online marketing that is not just about selling products, but is a key area for the production and circulation of social meanings and social identities. One of the most relevant issues in this respect is the inclusion of gender in digital advertising content (Santonniccolo et al., 2023).

Representation of gender has been a central topic in the studies of media and communication since the advertising industry is not only a reflection of social reality but also a part in constructing it. Often, ads stereotyped women as women who were emotional, dependent, and attractive, while men were rational, strong, independent and successful. Social attitudes about gender equality have come a long way in the past few decades, but many of these stereotypical messages are still present in today's digital advertising landscape. However, recent research has shown that online marketing can actually reinforce traditional gender expectations while appearing to be progressive and inclusive (Rashid, Jabeen, Akhtar, & Ilyas, 2024; Wang, 2025).

As social media has become more influential, marketing discourse has become more dominating in public perceptions of gender. Online platforms are different from traditional media for they enable an advertiser to use a combination of visual, text and interactive material to effectively create a sales message. Brands convey different notions of femininity and masculinity in images, videos, captions, hashtags, comments, and through influencer partnerships. These representations give audiences a sense of "normality" in certain ways of appearing and acting and in certain social identities. Ikhlef and Awad (2023) argue that social media ads often use multimodal approaches to validate gendered presuppositions using linguistic and visual means.

Gendered representation is the way that people are represented in accordance to the expectations attributed to masculinity and femininity in society. These do not necessarily represent a neutral picture because they can be a representation of a general idea that is embedded in society. Women remain the target of beauty and fashion in many online ads, while men are often depicted as leaders, authorities, tech-savvy, strong and successful business men. These are recurrent trends that help to uphold the traditional gender norms and power imbalances that exist in today's society (Santonniccolo et al., 2023).

As influencer marketing becomes more prevalent, the situation of under-representation of the gender issue in digital environments is further complicated. Influencers act as the bridge between culture and product. They sell products and at the same time they sell idealized lifestyles and identities. Women influencers are usually expected to be beautiful, elegant,

young and emotional, whereas men influencers are expected to be entrepreneurs, fit, knowledgeable and successful in terms of financial performance. These images help shape the commercialization of identity, as gender becomes a product that is used to attract consumers, boost engagement rates (Singh & Lunyal, 2025).

Recent scholarship has highlighted that online marketing must be seen as a discursive strategy, a process of meaning creation within the society, as well as a business process. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach is suitable for a theoretical analysis of the social ideologies that are reproduced by language and visual communication. CDA sees discourse as an aspect of social practice in which power relations are negotiated, consolidated, and acknowledged. Thus, advertising discourse becomes a space in which dominant cultural and social understandings of gender roles are articulated as 'natural' and 'acceptable'. Advertising discourse, therefore, functions as a discursive space where dominant ideas about gender roles are advanced as natural, acceptable, or socially shared (Fairclough, 1992, 2013, 2023; Ismail, Farukh, & Ahmad, 2019). Often, audiences can take in certain ideas of masculinity and femininity without being aware of the processes of ideology (Fairclough, 1992, 2013, 2023).

One of the biggest changes in modern advertising is the rise of campaigns that concentrate on empowering customers. There are some brands these days that use messages of empowerment and self-expression for women, female independence, and confidence to attract contemporary consumers. This approach is known as 'femvertising' and it seems to be challenging the traditional stereotypes of women as weak and dependent. But, according to academics, these campaigns often turn feminist ideals into marketing tools that are marketed for their primary purpose of contributing to brand value and consumer loyalty. The concept of empowerment discourse can thus turn into a marketing tool that seeks to maximize profit rather than be a real strategy for social change (Dhanesh & Marschlich, 2025).

Online marketing also has a strong visual aspect, which reinforces the gender stereotype. Today's advertisements use multimodal communication, involving text, imagery, color, body language, camera angles and symbols. The meanings of these visual resources are frequently ideology-based and they may be conveyed more explicitly than in writing. Studies suggest that advertisers use gender-specific visual strategies to appeal to male and female consumers to reinforce assumptions about gendered interests, activities, and social roles. These visual constructions contribute to the maintenance of gendered expectations in consumer culture (Ikhlef & Awad, 2023).

With the rise of digital advertising, new issues surrounding gender representation in digital marketing have emerged. AI, data analysis, and custom recommendation systems are increasingly employed for online advertising systems to target audiences with content. While these technologies are often promoted as neutral and objective, researchers caution that digital systems can reinforce social inequalities as they are based on historical data that contain preexisting social inequalities. Consequently, gender stereotypes can be reinforced in

automated advertising systems, affecting both the produced ads and the identities that are promoted (Yin & Abdullah, 2024).

One of the other key elements of online marketing is audience involvement. The digital consumer is no longer a passive recipient of advertising messages but an active interpreter, consumer, shared, and challenged consumer of the messages. Many social media users express negative attitudes toward advertisements perceived as sexist and discriminatory. These have led many companies to rethink their ad campaign approaches and turn to more representative advertising methods. However, such persistent re-telling of stereotyped narratives indicates that commercial interests still prevail over the desire for real change in society. So, online marketing is still a battleground where old and new gender narratives are still in conflict (Dhanesh & Marschlich, 2025).

The gender dynamics in online marketing are a consistent and dynamic phenomenon as shown by recent research appeared during 2020-2025. Although an increasing number of advertising campaigns promote diversity, inclusiveness, and empowerment, a substantial proportion still adhere to conventional notions of masculinity and femininity. Women are still portraying in a gender-biased manner emphasizing their looks while men are often linked to authority and professional success. In an era of social conversations about equality and representation, these patterns highlight the ongoing presence of gender ideologies in the discourse of digital advertising (Rashid et al., 2024; Wang, 2025).

As online marketing becomes a significant aspect of the social lives of modern people, critical insight into gender identity formation and expression through digital advertisement practices is warranted. CDA offers a suitable analytical tool to reveal the ideology arising in marketing texts and images. The present study is aimed at understanding the connection between discourse, power and representation in the internet marketing, taking into consideration the role of language, images and communication strategies in the construction of gendered identities. The analysis is significant as it helps in the larger contextualization of gender equality, media ethics, consumer culture, and social justice in the digital age (Santonniccolo et al., 2023; Singh & Lunyal, 2025).

1.1. Problem Statement

Although greater awareness of gender equality and representation of inclusiveness exists, online marketing still reinforces clichés about men and women in language, images, and marketing stories (Eisend, 2010; Gill, 2007; Grau & Zotos, 2018). There are many brands that talk about empowerment and diversity, but the assumptions of genderization are still very much present in the discourse of advertising (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Becker-Herby, 2016). Therefore, it is important to critically examine the ways in which gender identities and power dynamics are being created and/or legitimized through online marketing in the digital age (Lazar, 2007; Machin & Mayr, 2023).

1.2. Research Questions

1. How are men and women represented through linguistic and visual elements in online marketing discourse?
2. What ideologies and power relations are reproduced or challenged through gendered representations in online marketing content?

1.3. Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on a specific period of time (from 2020 to 2025) and a specific type of content (online marketing) that is published on specific social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, brand's websites). The study is focused on representations of men and women, and it takes into account textual, visual and multimodal features in selected advertisements.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender Representation in Advertising Discourse

The representation of gender is one of the most widely examined themes in media, communication, and discourse studies specifically because advertising functions as a powerful social institution that shapes public perceptions and cultural values. Advertising helps to create meanings around identity, social roles and power relations (Ismail et al., 2019), and it does not just promote the products. Modern researchers maintain that ads play a big role in normalizing gender stereotypes and expectations, as they constantly showcase men and women in specific roles and ways of symbolizing them. While there is significant progress to be made on gender equality issues, recent research shows that stereotypical representations still persist in digital and traditional advertising (Santonniccolo et al., 2023).

The various studies carried out in the recent few years suggest that the representation of women is still predominantly in terms of beauty, emotions, domestic spheres, while men are largely placed in the domain of authority, professionalism, rationality and economic success. These are often integrated into the visual and verbal aspects of advertising discourse. Even when modernized and technologically advanced forms of communication are used, advertising continues to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes (Spasova, 2025). These depictions can reinforce social norms including the social expectations of gendered roles, which can be seen as natural.

As a result of the social implications, gender stereotyping in advertising has garnered the attention of scholars. Research indicates that repeated exposure to stereotypical media representations affects perceptions of what is acceptable, what 'status' it has, and how identity is shaped. Women are often judged by appearance while men are judged by competence/achievement. These representations help create gendered social perceptions and reinforce gendered power dynamics in society (Dai, Zhu, & Guo, 2025).

2.2. Gender Representation in Online Marketing

With the expansion of social media platforms, advertising has become an extremely interactive and personalized medium of communication. Unlike a traditional advertisement, online marketing combines all elements of text, visuals, audio and interactive elements. Gender

identities are created and shared in promotional imagery on social networking platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube. Brands can directly connect with consumers by collaborating with influencers, creating sponsored content, short videos, hashtags, and targeted advertising campaigns on these platforms (Dhanesh & Marschlich, 2025).

While many digital marketing campaigns seem to be inclusive, recent research has found online marketing often re-enacts the traditional gender norms. Men are expected to be leaders, independent, strong and successful in their careers, while women are viewed as attractive, fashionable, nurturing and expressive. These depictions are strategically used to match products with gender identities and the expectations of consumers within the context of the society. Therefore, online marketing tends to reinforce the assumption of masculinity and femininity that is traditionally held rather than challenging it (Ikhlef & Awad, 2023).

Influencer culture has also reinforced the gendered marketing. Social media influencers serve as a middleman between brands and their audience and showcase products in a seemingly authentic context of life. But often, influencer marketing relies on models of gender. In general, female influencers are expected to be beautiful, elegant, and relatable, while male influencers are likely to be experts, entrepreneurs, fit and authoritative. Thus, the gender itself is turned into a salable product, which is used to boost involvement and retain customers (Singh & Lunyal, 2025).

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis and Gender

CDA has become one of the most prominent methods in the field of studying language, ideology and power. CDA is based on the notion that discourse is not neutral, but rather, it reflects and reproduces social structures and inequalities. In Fairclough's (1992, 2013, 2023) model of CDA, the intertwining of the features of the text, the discourse strategies being applied, and the broader socio-cultural context should all be taken into account. In advertising research, CDA can be used to explore the ideological embeddedness in advertising messages and representations.

CDA has now been increasingly used as a means to study the construction of gender identities in advertising discourse. The language, the sequence of events in an ad and the use of the visual and persuasive elements all convey specific definitions of masculinity and femininity. Such representations tend to be naturalistic and intuitively understandable, making them hard to see as ideologies. Therefore, CDA aims to bring hidden power relations in the media text to the fore and uncover how the dominant social group exercises influence through discourse (Iyer & Dani, 2025).

Recent research using CDA to advertising has shown that there is often gendered language that reflects unequal power structures. Women are frequently positioned as objects of the gaze, and desire, whereas men are typically portrayed as active, authoritative, and controlling figures who occupy positions of power. These are patterns that help to sustain the ideology of patriarchy as everyday media content normalizes unequal gender relations (Rashid et al., 2024).

2.4. Multimodal Representation of Gender in Digital Media

Modern advertising is based on multimodal communication, that is, the production of meaning is achieved in the interaction between language and images, color, typography, sounds, gestures and visual layout. To address this, researchers have turned to the use of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) as a complementary method to CDA in studying gender images in digital worlds. The multimodal approaches acknowledge that the visual components can express ideologies more effectively than written components (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021).

The research on social media adverts shows that gendered meanings are often embedded within the visual structure. Facial expressions, clothes, body positions, colour combinations, location and spatial composition are all factors that help to build femininity and masculinity. Women are typically depicted in soft colours with passive poses and beauty aesthetics, whereas men are depicted in dominating poses, work settings and symbols of authority. These visual approaches indirectly promote social norms around gender roles and identities (Ikhlef & Awad, 2023). However, Wang (2025) concluded that while women are seen as more diverse in current advertisements than they were during the 20th century, there are still advertisements that use appearance-based stories. Women are often portrayed as powerful, but empowerment is often associated with changes to the body rather than equality in the structures. This implies that today's advertising might be re-presenting old clichés in a new empowered language.

2.5. Femvertising and the Commercialization of Empowerment

Femvertising is one of the biggest things that has happened in modern advertising and marketing and is defined by marketing messages that promote the idea of female empowerment, confidence, independence and self-expression. Feminist language and imagery have become increasingly prevalent in branding as socially conscious consumers show growing interest in messages that promote gender equality and empowerment. Femvertising promotes the perception of women as strong, capable, and independent, breaking away from traditional gender stereotypes (Dai et al., 2025). But there is no consensus among scholars about the effectiveness of empowerment based advertising. Many empowerment campaigns turn feminist values into commercial goods, goods to make money, rather than to bring real social change. Empowerment is often sold in contemporary advertising as empowerment through consumerism, implying that personal freedom can be realized through the purchase of products (Angel, Bathran, & Goswami, 2026). These images are likely to strip the feminist movement of its revolutionary character and instead position it as an advertisement.

In addition, empowerment stories tend to focus on specific and limited notions of womanhood that are synchronized with beauty ideals, youth, and consumerism. Therefore, the promotion of certain identities remains prevalent in advertising, with diverse gender experiences still being overlooked. This paradox reveals the ambiguity in the current

representation of gender in online marketing and emphasizes the importance of studying the concept of empowerment.

2.6. Gender Bias and Digital Culture

With the advent of artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems in online marketing, there are new concerns about gender representation. Digital advertising platforms are very data centric, and they use data to personalize ads based on consumer preferences, behaviours, and demographics. While such technologies are often seen as transparent, there is debate that algorithms can reflect social biases that exist in historical data sets that are used for training (Cai et al., 2024). Digital communication literature shows that there is growing gender bias in the digital systems and visual-linguistic models. Such biases affect the ad users, as well as the identities they are encouraged to perform on the internet. Research focusing on social media platforms reveals that women often feel a lack of visibility and receive an evaluation based on their appearance in addition to being objectified more often than men. According to these results, the digital environment can exacerbate inequalities even if this is not its intended purpose, as there is a discourse of neutrality (Golovchenko et al., 2023; Yin & Abdullah, 2024).

2.7. Research Gap

Existing literature shows that the underrepresentation of gender is still an issue of concern in advertising and digital communication studies. Gender stereotypes, multimodal representation, influencer culture and empowerment discourse have been extensively studied in advertising. But many of the latest studies have concentrated on the traditional advertising or on a singular social media platform. There is a lack of research that utilizes CDA to analyze the integration of language and images in the construction of gender identities in modern online marketing context. Additionally, there is little research that examines the co-existence of empowerment discourse with traditional gender stereotype in digital advertising discourse. In light of this, the present study aims to fill this gap by critically analyzing the portrayal of gender in online marketing using CDA.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative research design, with CDA serving as the primary analytical approach. A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate because the study seeks to examine the representation of gender identities and the ways in which power relations and ideologies are embedded within online marketing discourse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lazar, 2007). Fairclough's (1992, 2013, 2023) three-dimensional framework of CDA, comprising the textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions, was adopted to guide the analysis. This framework enabled a critical examination of the linguistic and visual elements employed in online marketing messages and their role in constructing and reinforcing gendered meanings, as well as reproducing broader social ideologies and power relations (Machin & Mayr, 2023; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

3.2. Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of online marketing advertisements posted on major digital platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and official brand websites between 2020 and 2025. The advertisements were selected using purposive sampling, that is, a technique commonly employed in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). Advertisements were included if they explicitly portrayed men and/or women and contained substantial textual and visual content related to gender representation. A sample of 27–30 advertisements from well-known, high-visibility brands was deemed sufficient to generate rich and meaningful discourse data, consistent with qualitative research principles that prioritize depth of analysis over sample size (Creswell, 2019; Patton, 2015). The selection of social media and digital advertising content is also appropriate for examining contemporary discourses of gender because these platforms have become central sites for branding, identity construction, and audience engagement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2023).

3.3. Data Collection

Non-participant document analysis method was used for the collection of data. Advertisements were selected and then downloaded, archived and sorted by platform, brand, publication date and by marketing category. Images, captions, slogans, hashtags, promotional narratives, and audiovisual elements were collected (both the visual and textual elements of the advertisements). The study was conducted on ads from publicly accessible advertisements that appeared between 2020 and 2025. The collected data was the main corpus for discourse analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed using the three-dimensional framework of CDA (Fairclough, 1992, 2013, 2023) presented in Figure 1. The first step involved a textual analysis of the vocabulary, language choice, slogans and narrative structures employed to represent gender identities. The second stage involved a discursive analysis of the practices, to gain insight into the processes of creating marketing messages and sharing them via digital media. The third stage of the process involved sociocultural analysis, which aimed to uncover wider ideologies, gender norms and power dynamics in the ads. The multimodal discourse approach was also employed in analyzing the visual features, including images, body language, clothing, colour schemes, and camera positioning, to gain a holistic view of the representation of gender in online marketing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2023).

The overall model (Figure 1) contains three levels of analysis, namely, textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and sociocultural practice analysis. The selected ads were systematically applied to each level, which was used to address the research questions and meet the study objectives.

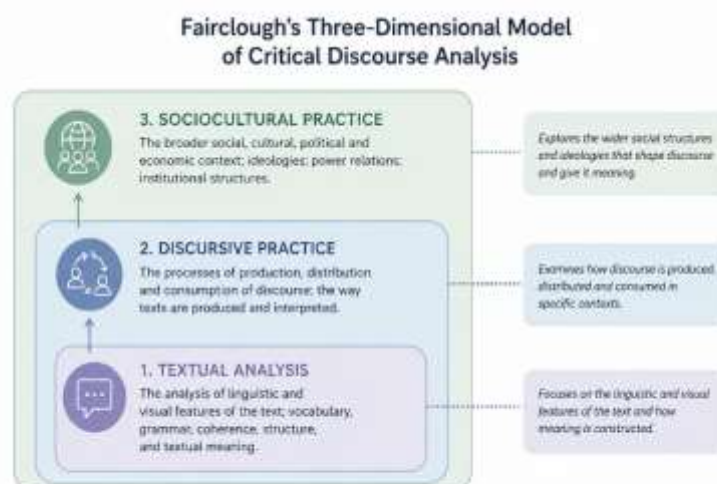


Figure 1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Note: Adapted from *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (3rd ed.), by N. Fairclough, 2022, Routledge.

4. Textual Analysis

The first phase concerned with the textual and visual features of the ads. At this stage, the analysis was conducted to explore word choice, slogans, captions, hashtags, sentence length, use of descriptive adjectives and persuasive language within the marketing content (Shah & Ahmad, 2020). Moreover, the multimodal discourse analysis was used to analyze the visual phenomenon, including body posture, clothing, facial expression, direction of gaze, color scheme, camera angle, and distance from the body. This phase was designed to scan the language and imagery of online marketing discourses to find the distinctions between the ways in which men and women are portrayed. The results of this level directly addressed the Research Question 1.

4.1. Discursive Practice Analysis

The second phase focused on the processes of the creation, dissemination, and consumption of gendered meanings in digital marketing contexts. The focus at this stage was on branding approaches, audience targeting, influencers, storytelling for promotion and platforms communication. The analysis examined how advertisers strategically used the notions of gender to engage viewers, to define brands and to sell products. Special attention was given to the beauty narratives, the empowerment narratives, the narratives of the domestic role, and the narratives of professional success. This stage clarified the process of how gendered meanings were created and reinforced in the practice of online marketing at the time.

4.2. Sociocultural Practice Analysis

The third stage was devoted to the social and ideological environment of the advertisements. At this level, the study focused on how the identified representations were linked to, supported, negotiated and/or challenged dominant social narratives about gender roles and power. Themes of patriarchy and gender stereotyping, objectification of women, empowerment, consumerism, beauty standards, and social norms of masculinity and femininity

were especially highlighted. This phase allowed the researcher to identify the ideologies underlying the advertisements and determine if the advertisements reinforced old or provided a more inclusive representation. This level directly answered Research Question 2.

4.3. Coding and Theme Development

After the analysis, there were repeated pattern across the advertisements which were coded and classified into major themes. The coding procedure used multiple readings and viewing of the data collected in order to identify similar and different representations of gender. Themes that appeared were the discourses of traditional femininity, traditional masculinity, beauty and appearance discourse, professional identity discourse, empowerment discourse, objectification, domestic representation, and gendered power relations. Themes were used for the interpretation and discussion of the findings.

4.4. Presentation of Findings

The results are reported in Fairclough's (1992, 2013, 2023) three-dimensional model. Firstly, there is discussion of the representation of gender in texts and images. Secondly, the creation and dissemination of gendered meanings in online marketing practices is explored. Finally, the implications of these representations in terms of their broader ideological and sociocultural meanings are examined. This is a structure that allows for a systematic and coherent examination of gendered representation in online marketing and also stays consistent with the research objectives and questions of the study.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Textual Representation of Gender

The analysis of the selected online ads has shown differences in the language used for the representation of men and women. Lexical items connected with beauty, looking after one's self, confidence, elegance, attractiveness and emotional well-being were often used in advertisements aimed at women. Frequent phrases were 'Be your best self,' 'Discover your beauty,' and 'Feel confident every day'. This language placed women in the appearance-related and self-improvement discourses, with a focus on physical beauty as an important aspect of the female identity. Ikhlef and Awad (2023) similarly conclude that beauty-based stories are used in fashion and lifestyle ads on social media.

On the other hand, men's ads concentrated on achievement, leadership, performance, innovation, strength, and success. In technology, auto and financial marketing campaigns the word 'power' was used many times, often followed by 'power' or 'pump' or 'lead' or 'perform' or 'achieve' or 'dominate'. These linguistic decisions have helped build masculinity as an active, ambitious, achievement-oriented individual. The results suggest that online marketing still reinforces the stereotype of the man as the authority and competent and the woman as appearance and emotional expression. These depictions reinforce traditional gender norms in spite of the progressive and contemporary image that digital marketing portrays.

5.2. Visual Representation of Gender

The visual analysis showed that gendered meanings were effectively conveyed in images, movement, colour and space. Close-ups of female models showcasing their facial beauty, fashion, make-up and bodies were commonplace. Advertisements targeting female consumers frequently employed soft color schemes, happy facial expressions and passive body positions. These visual decisions were part of building up the notion of femininity as ‘sweet’, and ‘winning’.

On the other hand, it was common for men to be portrayed in broad shots, at work, in sports, and as leaders. Strong, independent, and controlling body postures, confident facial expressions, and darker colour schemes were often used to represent strength, independence, and control. This visual depiction is consistent with earlier studies which found that current ads still involve men as the active decision maker and women as a visual target (Santonniccolo et al., 2023).

These results indicate that visual communication has a considerable contribution in reinforcing gender stereotypes, as it can imply other meanings than the verbal content. Despite the presence of ads depicting women in professional roles and women in leadership positions, the themes that focused on appearance were predominant in most of the ads analyzed.

5.3. Discursive Construction of Gender in Online Marketing

Analysis of the discursive practices showed that the online marketing constructs, strategically, the gender identities to enhance the interactions of audiences and to reinforce the connection between brand and consumer. Advertisers used gender based stories to target the socially accepted stereotypes of men and women. Beauty brands, for instance, were often seen as brands that championed women empowerment through categories of self-care, looks and personal change. Likewise, tech and financial companies were commonly associated with innovation, leadership and work success, that is, traits that were considered masculine.

Gendered meanings were produced and circulated through the process of ‘influencer marketing’ in particular. While most female influencers were typically seen as lifestyle experts, beauty advisors and fashion icons, male influencers were often seen as entrepreneurs, athletes, technology experts or business professionals. The patterns suggest that online marketing is used in a way that is dependent on existing gender norms to build narratives that are relatable and commercially successful.

In addition, the digital platforms enable the speedy dissemination of these representations by sharing, liking, commenting and algorithmic promotion. This has allowed the construction of gendered discourses to be reinforced and normalized in online spaces. The results corroborate the notion that discourse is not only a communicative process but also a process of social identity construction and consolidation (Ismail et al., 2019).

5.4. Gender Ideologies and Power Relations

The sociocultural analysis identified a number of assumptions about gender roles and power dynamics within the society. Women were often seen as beautiful, emotional, caring and consuming, while men were seen as leaders, productive, knowledgeable, and decision makers.

Such depictions mirrored wider structures of patriarchy which persist in media and advertising. While there was little overt sexism in the ads, there were subtle differences of inequality. Women empowerment was frequently presented in terms of consumerism, implying that confidence and success is gained by buying certain products. These depictions drew women attention to their role as consumers, not as independent social actors. By contrast, successful men were often portrayed as highly accomplished in their work, having wealth, and being good. These findings show that online marketing often reinforces traditional gender hierarchies in new and socially acceptable ways. This aligns with the ideas of Fairclough (1992, 2013, 2023) who states that discourse helps to validate dominant discourses as positive and factual realities.

5.5. Empowerment versus Stereotyping in Contemporary Digital Advertising

One of the most important results of this study was the presence of empowerment discourse and gender stereotyping in the same advertisements. This was one of the most important results that came out of this study; empowerment discourse and gender stereotyping were both present in the same advertisements. There were many campaigns with messages of confidence, independence, diversity and self-expression, especially the advertisements directed at women. These stories seemed to contradict the stereotype of a woman by portraying women as ambitious, capable, and empowered people.

But when examined more closely, empowerment often happened to be associated with physical appearance, beauty standard and consumption. Cosmetics, fashion items and lifestyle services were encouraged for women to gain confidence. Empowerment has consequently become commercial and turned into a marketing tool to improve the brand value and consumer loyalty. Femvertising has been recently discussed in studies that draw parallels from the appropriateness of feminist language in commercial advertising, but with a traditional commercial goal.

This analysis therefore indicates that the current online marketing has a duality of representation and stereotype. As advertisers speak of equality and empowerment, they do so in the language of the times, but they often sound just as preachy about their own implicit understanding of gender roles. This paradox is indicative of the dynamic character of digital marketing, in which commercial interests and social values are always in interplay and competition.

Overall, these results show that online marketing is still an important place to negotiate and construct gender identities. However, linguistic selections, visual strategies, discursive practices, and messages of ideology continue to influence public understandings of masculinity and femininity, and thus the ongoing challenge and reinforcement of social norms.

6. Conclusion

In this study the CDA approach was used to analyze the gendered representation in online marketing. The results indicated that online marketing is still shaping gender identities by language and image, which are often based upon traditional notions of man and woman. While the male character was often described as being confident, successful, authoritative and

professionally competent, the female character was generally described in terms of beauty, attractiveness, self-care, and emotional expression. The analysis additionally revealed that these representations are supported by visual components including body posture, clothing, colour scheme and camera positioning, which help to normalize certain gender roles and expectations as part of digital culture.

The study also identified that empowerment, diversity, and self-confidence messages are becoming a more common presence in contemporary online marketing messages; however, many of these messages are still wrapped up in commercial and consumer messages. This can lead to traditional stereotypes occurring alongside what might be seen as ‘progressive’ depictions. Using Fairclough's (1992, 2013, 2023) three dimensional approach, the review identifies how online marketing can not only be used as a marketing tool but also as a discursive practice, which can affect social perceptions, reproduce ideologies, and create understandings of gender in the context of today society. Thus, more focus should be put into ensuring that gendered representations are more balanced, inclusive, and equitable in the digital advertising context.

7. Recommendations

1. Digital marketing and advertising agencies/campaigners should strive to promote more balanced and inclusive gender representation in their advertising by avoiding gender stereotyping and sticking to a more balanced representation of women in advertising (carrying more characteristics of beauty and men more of authority and success). Marketing campaigns need to mirror the complexity of male and female roles and identities in today society.
2. Organizations should audit and consistently assess their internet advertising messages to make sure that language and images do not reinforce gender stereotypes or imbalanced power dynamics. Adopting gender-sensitive guidelines for communication can contribute to more ethical and socially responsible marketing practices.
3. Based on the findings, future research is recommended to carry out comparative and audience-based research on different social media platforms and cultural context to understand consumer interpretation of gendered marketing messages and the impact of marketing messages on the perception of gender roles and identities.

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