



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN WOMEN'S  
MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS COMPARISON  
BETWEEN HER WORLD AND WANITA**

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**By**

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Gender stereotyping is one of the dilemma that still exists and is prevalent in the advertising industry in Malaysia. Advertisements tend to represent women in limited roles. Advertisements generally depict women as homemakers or mothers or show them as sex objects or sexually provocative figures. Seldom women are shown in work settings, business roles, or in position of responsibility and authority. Since women are always portrayed as decorative objects by media, women's magazines should take the lead to prevent this culture from being practiced continuously.

The overall objective of this study is to do a comparison between Her World and Wanita advertisements on the portrayal of women for the year 1997. Data was collected using content analysis. They were 184 advertisements in Wanita magazine and 344 advertisements in Her World magazine. Descriptive statistics and chi-square test were used to analyze the data. The result showed that, most of the advertisements in Her World and Wanita were in bleed pages and in full color, placed at the upper half of the magazine. The result also indicated that advertisers preferred general settings with at least one female portrayal to promote their product. Both magazines were very keen in portraying women in characterization stereotypical positions. Besides this, casual wear was the most frequently used attire in both Her World and Wanita advertisements. Both magazine also emphasized more on emotional appeals to gain attention of the readers. In terms of advertising execution, both magazines preferred factual message to place their women portrayal advertisements. The results also indicated that Her World advertisements emphasized more on personal care products whereas Wanita advertisements focused more on cosmetics advertisements. The Chi-square test results indicated that there were significant differences in the portrayal of women between Her World and Wanita in terms of advertisements placement, color of the advertisement, role of women portrayal, advertising execution, types of attire and also the types of product.

Overall, this study revealed that advertisers, especially in women's magazines do more damage to the portrayal of women by placing them in inaccurate positions. Women portrayal is mainly used to gain attention of the readers. Most of the time, the presence of pretty women has no relevance to the quality of the product that is being advertised. Advertisers also use women as sex symbols to gain attention of the readers. Since women magazine advertisements had failed to acknowledge the current status of women, there should be more research, talk, seminars, and guidelines to tackle this issue.

Abstrak kajian yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains.

**PENONJOLAN WANITA DI DALAM IKLAN MAJALAH WANITA  
TEMPATAN: PERBANDINGAN DI ANTARA  
HER WORLD DAN WANITA**

Oleh

**KALAIYARASI KATHIRAVELOO**

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Masalah stereotaip wanita di sektor pengiklanan masih wujud dan sangat ketara di Malaysia. Sektor pengiklanan di Malaysia masih menggambarkan wanita dalam kerja-kerja tertentu sahaja. Biasanya wanita digambarkan sebagai ibu, surirumah atau sebagai simbol sex. Wanita jarang digambarkan dalam suasana kerja di pejabat, urusan perniagaan, ataupun dalam situasi bertanggungjawab dan berkuasa. Memandangkan media massa di Malaysia masih memaparkan wanita sebagai daya tarikan seks semata-mata, penerbit majalah wanita di negara ini diharapkan dapat mengorak langkah untuk mengubah imej wanita dalam sektor pengiklanan negara ini.

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji penonjolan wanita dalam iklan majalah Her World dan Wanita bagi tahun 1997. Data dikumpul dengan menganalisis isi kandungan iklan. Sebanyak 184 iklan daripada majalah Wanita dan 344 iklan daripada majalah Her World digunakan sebagai sampel kajian. Data kajian dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan ujian khi-kuasa dua.

Hasil kajian mendapati kebanyakan iklan penonjolan wanita menggunakan iklan berwarna yang dimuatkan pada bahagian hadapan majalah. Iklan-iklan ini juga didapati menggunakan keseluruhan mukasurat ataupun 'bleedpage'. Selain daripada itu, kebanyakan iklan dalam kedua-dua majalah ini menggunakan hanya seorang model wanita dalam suasana umum. Iklan-iklan dalam kedua-dua majalah ini memaparkan wanita dalam keadaan stereotaip. Kajian ini juga mendapati, kedua-dua majalah ini menggunakan wanita sebagai hiasan ataupun tarikan seks sahaja. Pakaian kasual telah menjadi pilihan di iklan-iklan penonjolan wanita di kedua-dua majalah ini. Kedua-dua majalah yang dikaji menggunakan pendekatan emosi dalam iklan penonjolan wanita. Iklan-iklan yang mengandungi mesej-mesej berbentuk informasi juga menjadi pilihan para pengiklan dalam iklan penonjolan wanita. Kajian juga mendapati, Majalah Her World memberi tumpuan kepada barangan penjagaan diri manakala majalah wanita telah memberi tumpuan kepada barangan kosmetik. Ujian khi-kuasa dua di antara Majalah Her World dan Wanita menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam aspek-aspek seperti kedudukan, warna, pendekatan, kreativiti, jenis pakaian, dan juga jenis produk yang digunakan dalam iklan.

Kesimpulannya, para pengiklan majalah Wanita dan Her World masih menganggap wanita sebagai sumber tarikan seks untuk menarik perhatian para pembaca. Kadang-kala gambar wanita yang digunakan dalam iklan penonjolan wanita tiada kaitan dengan produk yang diiklankan. Gambar-gambar wanita dalam iklan-iklan penonjolan wanita semata-mata menjadi bahan perhiasan sahaja. Memandangkan wanita masih digambarkan sebagai perhiasan dalam majalah wanita utama tempatan pelbagai usaha harus dilakukan untuk mengubah imej wanita ke arah status sebenar dalam masyarakat. Kajian-kajian secara lebih terperinci, seminar dan kempen kesedaran harus dijalankan bagi menimbulkan kesedaran masyarakat umum tentang status wanita yang sudah berubah.



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the study**

In the past twenty years, the world has been advancing in the field of communications and multimedia. When advances in computer technology , satellite, cable television, and global access to information is used democratically , it continues to increase and expand new opportunities for the participation of women in communications and media (Murray,1992). However all these developments bring about new threats to women.

The present global situation shows that media perpetuate and reinforce negative images of women in the advertisement. Advertisement does not provide an accurate or realistic picture of women's multiple roles and contributions of women to the changing world. A more serious situation is the use of women's body as a sex reflect or as a sex symbol (Lawrence, 1997). Most of the time advertisement reflects negatively on the existing cultures and prevailing values of women in our society.

While the Malaysian government is trying to address women's concerns, on the negative side, gender stereotyping is still perpetuated. Sharifah Zarah (1999) said that society's perception of women and the down playing of their important roles stem from

cultural and traditional norms which are beyond the reach of laws and policies. According to her, there is a definite need to pay special attention to women's issues and the importance of integrating gender perspectives in the development plans and programs of the country. The Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000) included measures and strategies that should be taken by the government to promote the advancement of women in Malaysia.

Gender stereotyping is one of the dilemma that still exists and prevails in the advertising industry in Malaysia (Lim Siu Ching, 1997). What are the images that advertisements present? Most of the time, advertisements tell us what it means to be a desirable man or woman. Advertisements paint limited images of what men and women can be. Because advertisements are everywhere in our society, these limited images sink into our conscious and unconscious minds. In this way, advertisements actually limit our understanding of ones worth and full potential.

Advertisements tend to represent women in limited roles. Girls and women in advertisements always show concern about their bodies, their clothes, their homes, and the need to attract a boy or man. Seldom are women shown in work settings, business roles, or positions of responsibility and authority. Our society recognizes many valid roles for women, but this isn't always reflected in the advertisements. Advertisements generally depicts women as homemakers or mothers or shows them as sex objects or in sexually provocative figures (Kilbourne, 1995).

Advertisements often help to reinforce stereotype images of women as vain and seductive, as sex objects, as emotionally, intellectually and physically dependent, as dull-witted, passive, insecure and in constant needs of approval (Utusan Konsumer, 1990). More often than not, advertisements show women engaged in jobs of a menial nature and in some form of housework. The impression given by the advertisement is that housework is what women are best at.

Besides this stereotyping, the advertising approach that have received the most criticism of being in poor taste are those using sexual appeals and nudity. These techniques are often used to gain consumer's attention and may not even be appropriate to the product that are being advertised (George, 1998). Advertisements for cosmetics, lingerie, beer and liquor are among the most criticized for their portrayal of women as sex objects.

If we take a look at some of the advertisements, women are still portrayed in products that are not related to them. We often see scantily dressed women sitting on a top of a display of hi fi sets, used as background to a bottle of beer or lying inside a brand new car. Of course, the presence of pretty women has no relevance to the quality of a hi fi set, or the taste of beer, or the safety and durability of a car. Women's portrayal is mainly used to gain attention of the consumers (Michael, 1993).

Sexist advertising also takes the form of cinema posters and calendars. Almost all the daily papers carry film advertisements showing scantily clad women in sexy



poses to attract patrons. Calendars also make use of half-dressed women in provocative poses (Mohd. Idris, 1986).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

In the new era, participation of women in the labor force and women's contribution in the society is increasing. In our society women have become a major labor force as professionals and essential homemakers. Today, status of women in our society is changing and women are being respected by the society. Despite of the new image of women, advertisements tend to sell the supplemental images of women as beauty of ornaments and sex symbols.

Many believe that women are negatively stereotyped by the advertisements in both the electronic and print media. Advertisements still portray men and women in different roles. Men are most often portrayed as authoritative figures and giving instructions to women. Women are still portrayed in traditional roles as mothers, housewives and sex objects (Kilbourne, 1988).

If we open a magazine either it is targeted to a male or female, we could easily observe that women are still portrayed as the inferior lesser half of humanity and as objects of sexual pleasure. Besides this, marketing strategies have also helped to

reinforce images of women as ornaments of beauty and sensuality, which degrades and denies women of their self respect, dignity and their humanity (Mohd Idris, 1986).

There are many organizations including women's organizations which are striving for women's rights but the advertising industry does not reflect the significant strides made by woman in the past two decades into the workforce. The portrayal of women in advertising is not only potentially debilitating and demeaning, but they are also inaccurate. Women today, are considerably more than flawless decorative objects, and depending upon men. (Hellwig, 1986).

Suprisingly, despite the barrage of sexist advertisements in Malaysia, the Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice has nothing to say about or against them. The only control is from the Home Affairs Ministry and it is only on the print media in the form of a set of a guideline prohibiting the use of revealing pictures in the press advertisements. Even so our advertisers often break these guidelines.

Besides these government guidelines, media owners and magazine publishers should also take some serious action from this phenomenon's being practiced continuously. Since women are always portrayed as decorative objects especially in woman's magazines, publishers of women's magazines like Her World and Wanita should take the lead to prevent this culture from being practiced continuously.

Her World is a monthly women's magazine and it was first published in July 1960. Berita Publishing, located at Jalan Klang Lama, Kuala Lumpur, is publishing this magazine. This magazine is 20cm in width and 30cm in length and is being delivered nationwide. Wanita magazine, which was first published in 1969 is the leading women's Malay magazine in Malaysia. This magazine is being published by Utusan Publication located at Petaling Jaya, Selangor. This magazine is 20cm in width and 30cm in length and is being published monthly.

Her World and Wanita magazines were chosen based on the circulation of the magazines. According to the Survey Research Malaysia (SRM) Adex 97, Her World is the leading women's English magazine whereas Wanita magazine is the leading Malay women's magazine in Malaysia. Besides this, these two magazines also were chosen based on their readers profiles and editorial content. According to Survey Research Malaysia (SRM) Adex, 2001 Wanita readers are mostly Malays from the age group of 30-39, earning around RM1001-2000 monthly. Beside this, most of the Wanita readers are also from rural areas. Whereas Her World readers are mostly Chinese and Indians from the age group of 35-39, professionals, earning above RM4000 monthly. Her World readers are mostly from urban center. In terms of editorial content both magazines cover articles which are related to health, beauty, new product launches, and other women issues.

Due to this notion, researcher had chosen the topic of “ Portrayal of Women in Women's Magazine Advertisements : Comparison between Her World and Wanita magazine “. This study involves three research questions as below: -

1. How are women being presented in the women's magazine advertisements?
2. What are the advertising appeals and advertising executions used in presenting women in the women's magazine advertisements?; and
3. What categories of products usually portray women in the women's magazine advertisements?

### **Objectives of the study**

The overall objective of this study is to do comparison between Her World and Wanita magazine advertisements on their women portrayal. Specifically, this study involves four objectives as below: -

1. To determine the portrayal of women in terms of role and attire in Her World and Wanita magazines advertisements.
2. To determine the types of advertising appeals used to portray women in Her World and Wanita magazines advertisements.
3. To determine the types of advertising execution used to portray women in Her World and Wanita magazine advertisements.
4. To determine the types of products that portrayed women in Her World and Wanita magazines advertisements.

### **The Importance of the Study**

There are a number of studies done on women portrayal in magazine advertisements, but most of them are being done abroad. Gender studies within Malaysia is quite new, thus this study would provide a better opportunity to fill this gap. Besides this, this study is also aimed to find or detect the women status in magazine advertisements, which are being printed locally.

The results of this study is expected to highlight the present scenario of women in magazine advertisements especially woman's magazine advertisements. The findings are also expected to create a lead to women's magazine publishers from further damaging the portrayal of women in the advertisements.

The findings of this study also expected to provide directions and guidance to women magazine publishers from misusing women portrayals in their advertisements. Beside this, the findings also should give some guidelines to government, private sectors, women organizations, and other parties concerned to come up with some guidelines for women in the advertisements, not only for press but for all types of media.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study only involves Her World and Wanita magazine advertisements of the year 1997. These two magazines were chosen based on their circulation, readership, readers profile and editorial content. This study only involved magazines advertisements of half page and/or more with the at least one women portrayal. The results of this study is expected to reflect the portrayal of women in Her World and Wanita magazines advertisements only and it might not be suitable for other magazines advertisements.