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Are Men for Pain and Women for Pleasure? Gender Representation in Personal Care and Pharmaceutical Advertisements and Audience Perception in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

Michael Dare Ogunniyi*

Communication Arts, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: michael.ogunniyi@bowen.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

This study examined gender representation in Nigerian personal care and pharmaceutical product advertisements and audience perception of such representations in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. Using a multi-method quantitative design combining content analysis 20 purposively selected Nigerian television and digital advertisements (10 personal care, 10 pharmaceutical) and a survey of 200 adult residents of Ibadan Metropolis. Content analysis findings revealed that women predominated as lead characters in personal care advertisements (8, 80%) in aesthetic, pleasure-centred roles (17, 85%), while men dominated pharmaceutical advertisements (7, 70%) in functional, pain-relief-centred roles (16, 80%). Female voiceovers dominated personal care advertisements (14, 70%) and male voiceovers dominated pharmaceutical advertisements (15, 75%). Chi-square tests revealed statistically significant gender differences among survey respondents on all three perception variables: awareness of gendered advertising patterns ($\chi^2(2) = 7.842$, $p = .020$, Cramér's $V = .20$), critical attitude toward gender stereotyping ($\chi^2(2) = 11.234$, $p = .004$, $V = .24$), and perceived self-image impact ($\chi^2(2) = 9.117$, $p = .010$, $V = .21$), with female respondents demonstrating higher awareness and more critical attitudes than their male counterparts. The study concludes that Nigerian consumer product advertising reproduces gendered binaries consistent with global patterns, associating femininity with bodily aesthetics and masculinity with pain management and productive functionality. It recommends that the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) and media regulatory bodies adopt gender-sensitive frameworks in advertisement production and regulation.

Keywords: Consumer Product Advertising; Gender Representation; Advertising Stereotypes; Personal Care Products; Pharmaceutical Product; Audience Perception

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Introduction

The relationship between advertising and gender is among the most scrutinised intersections in media and communication studies. Since Goffman's (1979) landmark analysis of visual advertising, scholars across disciplines have persistently documented how commercial representations encode, reflect, and reinforce societal expectations about masculinity and femininity. Advertising is not merely a commercial instrument; it is a cultural one, encoding social meanings that reflect and reinforce social reality (Jhally, 2006).

In Nigeria, these representational dynamics assume specific dimensions shaped by patriarchal cultural traditions, colonial media legacies, increasing digital penetration, and a rapidly evolving advertising industry. A preliminary, pre-theoretical observation of Nigerian consumer product advertisements suggests an apparent pattern, one this study sets out to systematically investigate, in which women are prominently and almost exclusively cast as the primary users and beneficiaries of personal care

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products, body creams, bathing soaps, moisturisers, and hair care items, while men are predominantly foregrounded in pharmaceutical product advertisements for pain relievers, analgesic balms, and cold remedies. This binary is so culturally normalised that it rarely attracts critical interrogation from audiences, practitioners, or regulatory authorities.

Yet the implications of this pattern are far from trivial. When advertising consistently positions women's bodies as aesthetic objects requiring constant care, beautification, and pleasurable maintenance, it communicates a powerful social message: that women's primary value lies in their appearance. When men are consistently positioned as functional beings whose bodies are sites of endurance, stoicism, and pain to be swiftly overcome, an equally restrictive message is encoded: that men must be useful, productive, and emotionally resilient. These representational logics, repeated across thousands of advertising exposures over a lifetime, contribute significantly to the formation and reinforcement of gender schemas (Bem, 1981) and, cumulatively, to the cultivation of gendered worldviews (Gerbner *et al.*, 2002).

While the global literature on gender in advertising is well-developed (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017; Eisend, 2019), the Nigerian context remains comparatively underexplored, particularly with respect to empirical audience reception studies. This study addresses that gap by examining selected Nigerian personal care and pharmaceutical product advertisements, combined with an audience reception survey among adult residents of Ibadan Metropolis. Ibadan, one of the largest indigenous cities in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria's most populous non-capital city, provides a productive and contextually meaningful setting for this inquiry. Its diverse population, varied media consumption habits, and proximity to major advertising markets make it a well-suited site for audience-based advertising research.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing global discourse on gender equity in media representation, Nigerian advertising continues to reinscribe traditional gender binaries with minimal scrutiny from regulatory bodies, the academic community, or practitioners. The apparent pattern of featuring women in personal care product advertisements and men in pharmaceutical product advertisements reflects a commercial worldview in which femininity is equated with bodily aesthetics and pleasure, and masculinity with functionality, pain, and productivity.

The consequences of this representational pattern extend beyond commerce. As media scholars have demonstrated (Gerbner *et al.*, 2002), repeated exposure to gender-typed media content shapes audience perceptions of appropriate roles and behaviours for men and women. Advertising, with its massive reach and high frequency of exposure, constitutes a particularly potent site of gender socialisation.

Despite the existence of a substantial international literature on gender in advertising (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Eisend, 2019), empirical studies that specifically examine Nigerian audience perceptions of gendered advertising representations remain scarce. Most existing Nigerian studies focus on media content rather than audience reception, leaving a significant gap in understanding how ordinary viewers receive and interpret the gendered messages embedded in consumer product advertising. Furthermore, the comparative dimension, which juxtaposes personal care and pharmaceutical product categories as gender-coded domains, has rarely been made an explicit analytical frame in Nigerian advertising scholarship. This study fills this dual gap by conducting a content analysis of advertisements in both categories and surveying Ibadan residents about their perceptions.

Research Questions

1. How are male and female characters represented in selected Nigerian personal care and pharmaceutical product advertisements?
2. What differences exist in the framing of gender across both product advertisement categories?
3. What is the level of awareness of Ibadan residents regarding gender representation in consumer product advertising?

4. To what extent do gender differences exist in Ibadan residents' responses to and perceptions of gender stereotyping in advertising?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the inferential analysis:

H_1: There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in awareness of gender stereotyping in consumer product advertising.
H_2: There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in critical attitude toward gender stereotyping in advertising.
H_3: There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in the perceived self-image impact of gendered advertising.

Literature Review

Gender and Advertising: Global Perspectives

The study of gender in advertising has a rich and enduring scholarly history. Goffman's (1979) landmark work, Gender Advertisements, established the foundational argument that visual advertising systematically encodes gender hierarchies: women are shown in smaller, lower, or reclining positions, depicted as ornamental, emotionally expressive, and preoccupied with their appearance, while men are shown in positions of control, authority, and purposeful activity. Though produced more than four decades ago, Goffman's observations retain striking contemporary relevance.

Grau and Zotos (2016), in a comprehensive review of gender stereotyping in advertising research, confirmed that decades of cross-national studies consistently document the underrepresentation of women in authority and expertise roles, and their overrepresentation in domestic, beauty-centred, and sexualised contexts. They observed that the advertising landscape is gradually evolving, with increasing instances of counter-stereotypical portrayals in digital media, but that product-category gender associations remain among the most stubborn and persistent forms of stereotyping in advertising globally.

Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen (2017) introduced the concept of "femvertising", advertising that deliberately subverts conventional female stereotypes, and found that such advertisements generate more positive consumer responses, particularly among female audiences. Their work signals a commercial recognition that gender-progressive advertising can be strategically advantageous, even as mainstream advertising continues to rely on conventional gender codes. Eisend (2019), in a review article, confirmed that while overtly sexualised female portrayals have declined modestly over time, subtler forms of gender stereotyping persist, particularly in product-category associations and occupational portrayals. This subtler, structural stereotyping is the central concern of the present study.

Masculine Representation in Pharmaceutical Advertising

The framing of men in pharmaceutical advertising follows a distinct cultural logic. Advertising for pain relievers, antacids, analgesic balms, and cold remedies consistently portrays men as stoic, active, and temporarily impaired, needing the product not to improve their appearance, but to restore their productive capacity and return to action (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). This framing aligns with normative constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which discourage expressions of vulnerability and foreground physical endurance and functional utility. Male characters in Nigerian pharmaceutical advertising are typically shown engaged in physically demanding labour, sport, or intense professional work, experiencing pain as a temporary obstacle and using the product to overcome it efficiently. This pattern is examined empirically in the Results section below.

Feminine Representation in Personal Care Advertising

Women's dominant presence in personal care product advertising is equally well-documented. Mulvey's (1975) concept of the "male gaze", elaborated by Jhally (2006) into a critique of advertising specifically,

explains how personal care products are marketed through consistent promises of softer skin, enhanced luminosity, and heightened desirability, values culturally constructed as distinctively feminine. The ideological function of personal care advertising is to position the female body as a perpetual project, always improvable, always potentially more beautiful with the right product.

In the Nigerian context, this dynamic is compounded by the prevalence of skin-lightening cream advertising directed predominantly at women. As Charles (2020) and Adeyemi (2021) have documented, skin bleaching advertising in Nigeria combines gender stereotyping with colourism in ways that compound harm to female self-image. Brands such as *Carotone*, *Tura*, and Glow & Lovely occupy significant advertising space in the Nigerian personal care market, with messaging virtually always oriented toward female consumers.

Gender in Nigerian Advertising: Existing Studies

Nwakpu and Ofoego (2017) examined gender portrayals in Nigerian television commercials and found that women were significantly more likely to be depicted in domestic settings, in emotional or passive roles, and in association with home and beauty products, while men appeared predominantly in occupational, outdoor, and authority contexts. In the Nigerian advertising context, scholars have further observed that advertising borrows extensively from Western representational conventions while overlaying local patriarchal cultural scripts, including Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa gender norms onto imported advertising formats, intensifying the gendering of product representations (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2019; Nwakpu & Ofoego, 2017).

Nigerian media scholarship suggests that advertising and media more broadly perform a central role in gender socialisation, continuously shaping normative expectations about appropriate roles for men and women (Nwakpu & Ofoego, 2017; Oyero & Oyesomi, 2019), an argument closely aligned with Cultivation Theory. Oyero and Oyesomi (2019) studied media representations of women in Nigerian advertising and found that female characters were overwhelmingly portrayed in roles relating to beauty, domesticity, and emotional expressiveness, while male characters were featured predominantly in roles relating to professional achievement, physical action, and authority. Their findings provide an important empirical baseline for the present study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Gender Schema Theory

Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) proposes that individuals develop cognitive frameworks, gender schemas, through which they process and organise gender-related information. When people repeatedly encounter women in personal care advertisements and men in pharmaceutical advertisements, these associations become cognitively entrenched. The gender schema actively filters new information, making gender-consistent portrayals feel natural and gender-inconsistent ones feel incongruous. Advertising is thus not merely reflecting cultural schemas; it is actively constructing and consolidating them through repetition.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory (Gerbner *et al.*, 2002) holds that sustained exposure to media content gradually shapes audiences' perceptions of social reality. Applied to advertising, the theory predicts that consumers consistently exposed to gendered product-category representations will come to perceive these associations as natural reflections of social reality rather than as constructed commercial choices. It is important to note, however, that this study did not directly measure the relationship between exposure frequency and perception strength. The cultivation framework is therefore applied here as a descriptive lens for interpreting aggregate audience awareness findings, rather than as a causal model that the present design can formally test.

Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000) argues that gender stereotypes in society derive from the historical division of labour between men and women. Women, historically assigned to domestic and caregiving roles, are culturally associated with personal grooming, aesthetic maintenance, and bodily care. Men, associated with productive labour and public activity, are culturally associated with products that maintain their physical functioning, including pharmaceutical remedies. Advertising inherits these associations from existing social structures and then amplifies and commercialises them, producing a representational system that appears to reflect social reality while actively perpetuating it.

Postfeminist Theory and Intersectionality

A postfeminist perspective (Gill, 2007, 2016) is briefly noted here as a supplementary lens. Postfeminist media analysis observes that contemporary advertising has absorbed feminist language of empowerment and choice while continuing to position the female body as a site of aesthetic labour. This is particularly relevant to Nigerian personal care advertising, where campaigns for skin-lightening products may invoke women's right to "glow" and "choose confidence" while structurally perpetuating colourism. This intersectional dimension (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), where gender stereotyping compounds racial hierarchies, warrants dedicated empirical investigation in future research. The present study did not code for colourism or empowerment language in its content analysis, and therefore makes no empirical claims about these phenomena beyond noting their theoretical relevance as a context for Nigerian personal care advertising.

Methodology

Research Design

Following Creswell and Creswell (2018), this study adopted a multi-method quantitative research design combining content analysis of selected Nigerian consumer product advertisements and a survey of adult residents of Ibadan Metropolis. This design enabled the study to examine gender representation from both a textual and production standpoint (content analysis) and an audience reception standpoint (survey), generating complementary data that illuminate the relationship between what advertisers encode and what audiences perceive.

Population

The survey population comprised adult residents of Ibadan Metropolis aged 18 years and above. The metropolis, defined here as the five-core urban Local Government Areas (LGAs) plus two adjacent peri-urban LGAs, has an estimated adult population of approximately 2.5 million based on National Population Commission projections. The content analysis population comprised Nigerian consumer product advertisements for personal care products and pharmaceutical products broadcast or distributed on Nigerian television and digital platforms between 2020 and 2025. Advertisement pooling from brand YouTube channels, official Instagram pages, and NTA/DSTV broadcast archives yielded a total population of approximately 60 eligible advertisements across both product categories from which the purposive sample was drawn.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A non-probability sampling procedure was employed for the survey, combining purposive and quota sampling (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Ibadan Metropolis was used as the geographic frame; from this, three Local Government Areas, Ibadan North, Ibadan South-West, and Oluyole, were purposively selected to represent the northern, southern, and peri-urban zones of the metropolis, respectively. Ibadan North and Ibadan South-West fall within the five-core urban LGAs, while Oluyole is largely peri-urban; this combination was chosen to capture diverse advertising exposure environments. Within each LGA, quota sampling was used to select a total of 200 respondents, 100 male and 100 females, ensuring the gender balance required for the comparative analysis. Respondents were further stratified by educational level for descriptive purposes. Final selection within each stratum was by convenience, ensuring participation

was voluntary. A sample size of 200 is consistent with precedents in Nigerian advertising audience studies (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2019). Given the non-probability design, findings cannot be generalised to the population of Ibadan Metropolis; they are descriptive and exploratory.

The questionnaire was administered through two modes: face-to-face distribution (n = 136 questionnaires distributed) and Google Forms (n = 80 distributed), yielding 200 valid returns from a combined distribution of 216 (return rate: 92.6%). Sixteen questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses.

Table 1. Quota Selection of Respondents from LGAs by Gender

LGA	Female	Male	Total
Ibadan North	33	34	67
Ibadan South-West	34	33	67
Oluyole	33	33	66
Total	**100**	**100**	**200**

Source: Research design, 2025

For content analysis, twenty Nigerian consumer product advertisements were purposively selected: ten personal care product advertisements and ten pharmaceutical product advertisements, drawn from Nigerian television broadcasts and digital/social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, and official brand websites) covering 2020 to 2025. Selected personal care brands included *Lux*, *Carotone*, *Dove*, *Tura*, and *Oriflame* (two advertisements per brand); and pharmaceutical brands included *Panadol*, *Alabukun*, *Aboniki Balm*, *Emzolyn*, and *Procold* (two advertisements per brand). These brands were selected on the basis of their widespread national recognition, high advertising frequency, and sustained visibility across both television and digital advertising platforms. Where multinational brands (*Dove*, *Lux*, *Oriflame*) were included, only their Nigerian market versions, as broadcast on Nigerian television channels and distributed via Nigerian digital platforms, were selected for analysis. The full list of the 20 advertisements, including specific titles, broadcast dates, and channels, is provided in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Content Analysis Advertisement Sample

S/N	Brand	Product Category	Format	Platform/Channel	Period
1	*Lux*	Personal Care	Television	NTA/DSTV	2020–2025
2	*Lux*		Digital	YouTube/Instagram	2020–2025
3	*Carotone*		Television	NTA	2020–2025
4	*Carotone*		Digital	YouTube	2020–2025
5	*Dove*		Television	DSTV	2020–2025
6	*Dove*		Digital	YouTube	2020–2025
7	*Tura*		Television	NTA	2020–2025
8	*Tura*		Digital	YouTube/Instagram	2020–2025
9	*Oriflame*		Digital	YouTube/Instagram	2020–2025
10	*Oriflame*		Digital	YouTube	2020–2025
11	*Panadol*	Pharmaceutical	Television	NTA/DSTV	2020–2025
12	*Panadol*		Digital	YouTube	2020–2025
13	*Alabukun*		Television	NTA	2020–2025
14	*Alabukun*		Television	NTA	2020–2025
15	*Aboniki Balm*		Television	NTA/DSTV	2020–2025
16	*Aboniki Balm*		Digital	YouTube	2020–2025
17	*Emzolyn*		Television	NTA	2020–2025
18	*Emzolyn*		Television	NTA	2020–2025

S/N	Brand	Product Category	Format	Platform/Channel	Period
19	*Procold*		Television	NTA/DSTV	2020–2025
20	*Procold*		Digital	YouTube	2020–2025

Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire and a structured coding sheet were the instruments used. The questionnaire comprised three sections: (A) Demographic information, including gender, age bracket, educational level, and media consumption channels; (B) Advertising exposure, including frequency of exposure to television and digital advertising; and (C) Perception of gender representation in advertising, assessed through 15 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Selected advertisement screenshots and brief descriptive stimuli were embedded in the questionnaire as anchoring materials (see Priming Limitation below). The instrument was adapted into Yoruba for respondents who preferred it, with translation and back-translation reviewed by a bilingual communication scholar to ensure semantic equivalence. Administration was through face-to-face and Google Forms distribution.

The three perception sub-scales were: awareness of gendered advertising patterns (5 items), critical attitude toward gender stereotyping (5 items), and perceived self-image impact (5 items). Composite scores for each sub-scale were computed as the mean of the constituent items. Following Neuendorf (2017), the content analysis coding sheet was developed to assess each advertisement according to seven variables: (a) gender of the lead character; (b) role portrayed, aesthetic/pleasure-centred versus functional/pain-relief-centred; (c) body parts or features foregrounded; (d) gender of the voiceover narrator; (e) primary emotional tone; (f) dominant setting, domestic/social versus occupational/outdoor; and (g) nature of product interaction. Two trained coders who had completed a one-hour briefing using a coder training manual independently coded all 20 advertisements. All 20 advertisements were double-coded.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis varied by variable. For lead character gender (Figure 1) and dominant setting (Table 4), the advertisement itself served as the primary unit of analysis (n = 10 per category). For role type portrayed (Figure 2) and voiceover gender (Figure 3), individual character role instances and voiceover instances within each advertisement were coded, yielding up to two coded instances per advertisement (n ≤ 20 coded instances per category). It is acknowledged that the variable "role portrayed" is partly determined by product category (a pain reliever advertisement is by definition about pain relief), making the comparison of dominant role type across categories partly circular; this finding should therefore be interpreted as confirming the product-category framing rather than as independently establishing it.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was face-validated by two Mass Communication experts and pilot-tested with 20 respondents outside the main sample. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.81$ was obtained for the overall perception scale, with sub-scale alphas of .78 (awareness), .82 (critical attitude), and .79 (self-image impact), indicating high internal consistency. Inter-coder reliability for the content analysis was assessed separately for each variable using Cohen's Kappa. Kappa values ranged from $\kappa = .75$ (body parts foregrounded) to $\kappa = .83$ (product category and lead character gender), with an overall mean $\kappa = .79$, all within the acceptable range for communication research (Neuendorf, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

All survey respondents provided informed consent prior to participation, and the anonymity and confidentiality of responses were assured. Participation was entirely voluntary; no incentives or coercive procedures were employed.

Data Analysis

Content analysis data were tabulated and analysed using frequency counts and percentages, with counts (n) reported alongside all percentages. Fisher's exact test was used to assess statistically significant differences in content analysis variables across product categories, given the small sample sizes (n = 10 per category for advertisement-level variables), and phi (φ) coefficients were computed as effect size indicators. Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) using IBM SPSS Statistics (Field, 2018). For inferential analysis, Pearson's Chi-Square test was used to determine whether male and female respondents' perceptions of gender stereotyping in advertising differed significantly. Response categories were collapsed a priori into three groups, Agree (Strongly Agree + Agree), Undecided, and Disagree (Strongly Disagree + Disagree), producing 2 × 3 contingency tables (gender by collapsed response) with df = 2. Cramér's V was computed as the effect size measure for each chi-square result. Cross-tabulations by respondent gender are reported to show the direction of significant effects, as chi-square does not indicate directionality.

Results and Findings

Table 3. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	100	50.0
	Female	100	50.0
Age	18–25	72	36.0
	26–35	68	34.0
	36–45	38	19.0
	46 and above	22	11.0
Educational Level	Secondary school	45	22.5
	Undergraduate	98	49.0
	Postgraduate/Professional	57	28.5
Primary Ad Exposure Channel	Television	63	31.5
	Social media	89	44.5
	Both equally	48	24.0

Source: Field survey data, July–September 2026

Table 3 reveals that respondents were evenly split by gender. A majority (70.0%) fell within the 18–35 age bracket, reflecting the demographic profile of urban Ibadan. Most respondents had at least an undergraduate education (77.5%), and a plurality (44.5%) identified social media as their primary advertising exposure channel, contextualising the study's inclusion of digital advertisements alongside television commercials.

Research Question 1: Lead Character Gender Representation

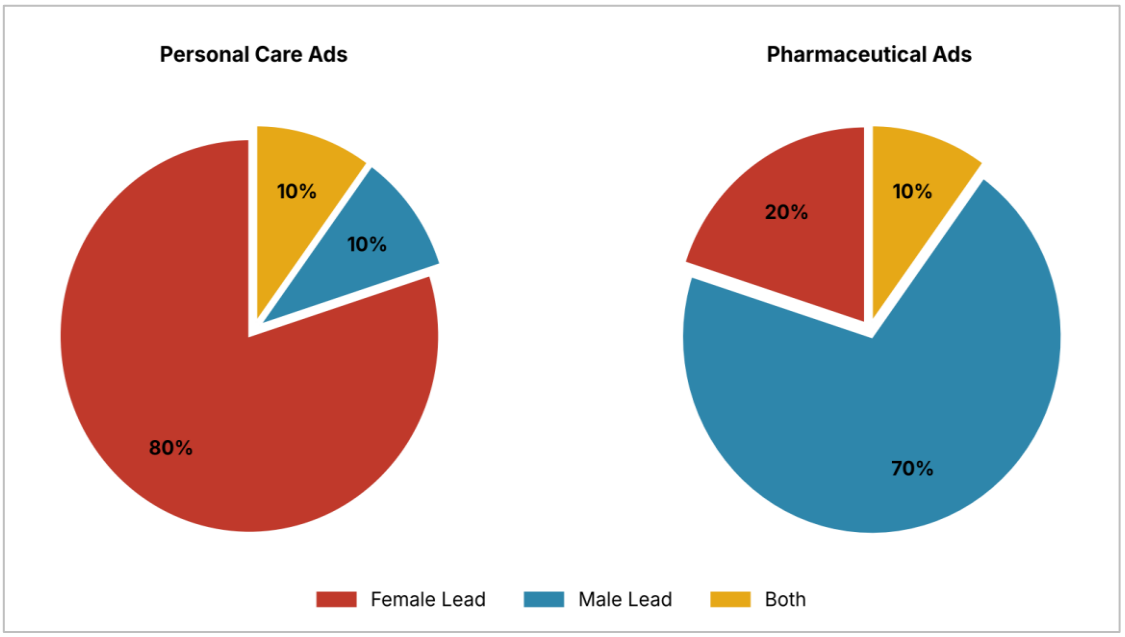

Figure 1. Gender of Lead Characters in Personal Care and Pharmaceutical Advertisements

Figure 1 reveals a pronounced gendered pattern in lead character selection. In personal care advertisements, 80% (n = 8) featured female lead characters while only 10% (n = 1) featured male lead characters; 10% (n = 1) featured an ensemble or no clear lead. In pharmaceutical advertisements, the pattern was substantively reversed: 70% (n = 7) featured male leads and only 20% (n = 2) featured female leads. Fisher's exact test confirmed a statistically significant difference in female lead character representation across the two product categories (Fisher's $p = .023$, $\varphi = .60$), indicating a large effect. These findings confirm a significant gender-based difference in lead character selection between personal care and pharmaceutical product advertisements in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: Gender Framing across Product Categories

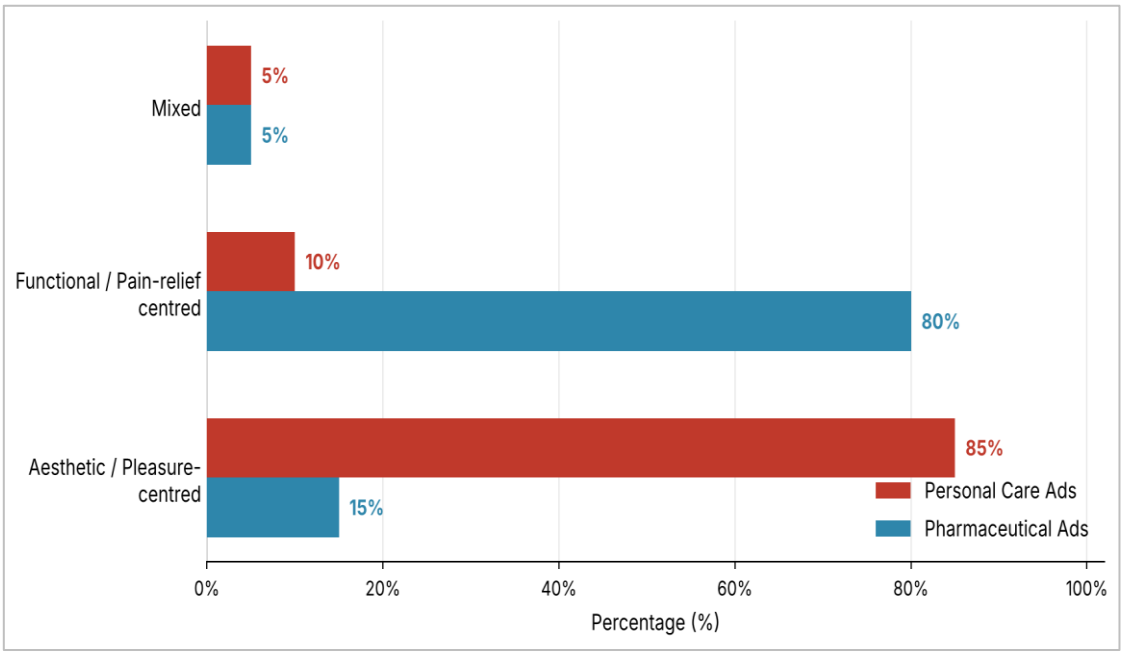

Figure 2. Role Type Portrayed Across Product Categories

Figure 2 shows the distribution of role types coded across both product advertisement categories (unit of analysis = coded character role instances; n = 20 per category). Aesthetic and pleasure-centred portrayals were overwhelmingly concentrated in personal care advertisements (n = 17, 85%), while functional and pain-relief-centred portrayals dominated pharmaceutical advertisements (n = 16, 80%). Fisher's exact test confirmed a statistically significant difference in aesthetic role portrayal across categories (Fisher's $p < .001$, $\varphi = .70$), indicating a large effect. This confirms that the binary of "pain for men, pleasure for women" is systematically encoded in Nigerian consumer product advertising at the level of character role as well as character selection. It is acknowledged, however, that this comparison is partly circular, since a pain reliever advertisement is by definition concerned with pain relief.

Table 4. Table of Dominant Advertisement Settings by Product Category

Setting	Personal Care Ads n (%)	Pharmaceutical Ads n (%)
Domestic/Social	7 (70%)	2 (20%)
Occupational/Outdoor	1 (10%)	7 (70%)
Mixed/Ambiguous	2 (20%)	1 (10%)

Source: Content analysis data, 2026

Personal care advertisements predominantly featured domestic and social settings (70%, n = 7), reinforcing associations between femininity and the private sphere of home, beauty ritual, and social interaction. Pharmaceutical advertisements more commonly used occupational and outdoor settings (70%, n = 7), consistent with masculinity norms oriented toward public productivity and action. Fisher's exact test on dominant setting type (domestic/social versus occupational/outdoor) approached significance (Fisher's $p = .038$, $\varphi = .61$), indicating a large effect size.

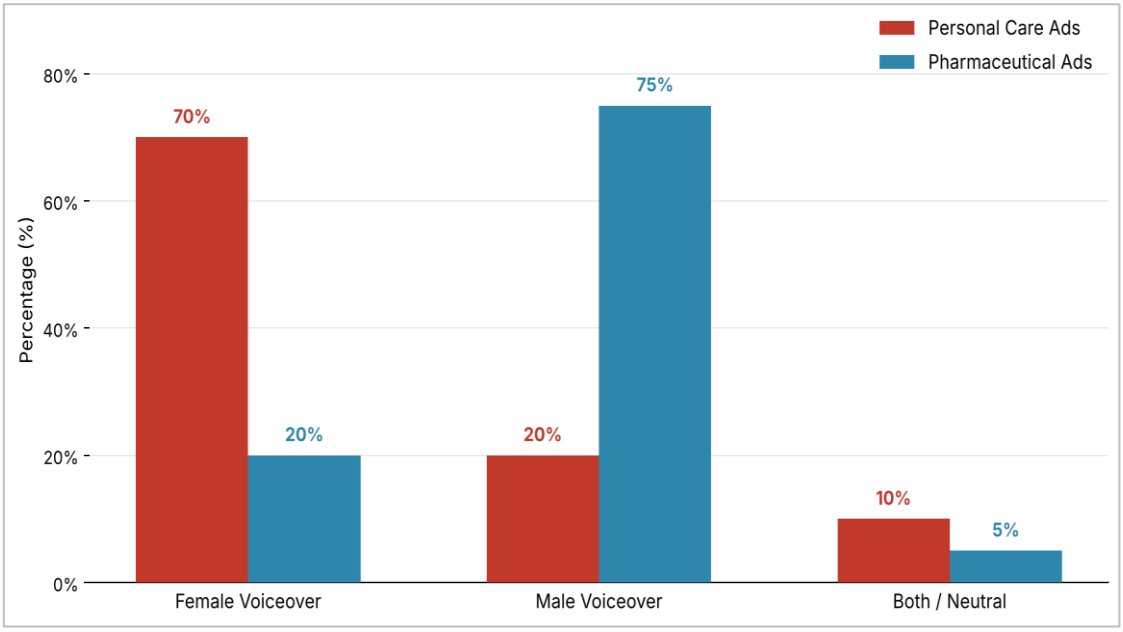

Figure 3. Voiceover Gender by Product Category

Figure 3 shows voiceover gender distribution by product category (n = 20 coded voiceover instances per category). Female voiceovers dominated personal care advertisements (n = 14, 70%), while male voiceovers predominated in pharmaceutical advertisements (n = 15, 75%). This confirms that gendered framing extends beyond the visual to the auditory dimension. Fisher's exact test confirmed a statistically significant difference in female voiceover use across categories (Fisher's $p < .001$, $\varphi = .67$), a large effect. As Grau and Zotos (2016) observe, male voiceovers carry institutional authority and expert credibility, while female voiceovers carry aspirational intimacy and pleasurable invitation, extending the visual gendered binary into the domain of sound.

Research Question 3: Audience Awareness of Gendered Advertising Patterns

Table 5. Respondents' Awareness of Gendered Patterns in Consumer Advertising

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
Women are mostly used in personal care product ads	52	35	5	5	3	4.28	0.98
Men are mostly used in pharmaceutical/pain relief ads	48	36	8	5	3	4.21	0.99
I noticed this pattern before being asked	41	33	12	9	5	3.96	1.16

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Source: Field survey data, July–September 2026

Table 5 reveals a high level of audience awareness of gendered advertising patterns. Mean scores of 4.28 (SD = 0.98) and 4.21 (SD = 0.99), respectively, indicate strong agreement across the full sample that women dominate personal care advertising and men dominate pharmaceutical advertising. A combined 74% of respondents reported noticing this gendered pattern, though given the priming effect of the advertisement stimuli, this figure should be interpreted as confirmatory recognition rather than independent prior awareness.

Research Question 4: Gender Differences in Perception of Gendered Advertising

Table 6. Respondents' Attitudinal Response to Gendered Advertising

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
Gendered advertising reinforces harmful stereotypes	45	30	10	10	5	4.00	1.18
It is appropriate to use women mainly for beauty product ads	20	22	15	25	18	3.01	1.41
Advertising should feature both genders equally across all product categories	55	28	7	5	5	4.23	1.10
Gendered advertising affects how I perceive myself	33	29	18	13	7	3.68	1.25

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Source: Field survey data, July–September 2026

The sample was divided on the appropriateness of conventional gender casting (mean: 3.01, SD = 1.41), with 42% agreeing and 43% disagreeing, indicating a genuinely divided audience rather than a consensus rejection of such casting. By contrast, strong endorsement of equal gender representation across product categories was evident (mean: 4.23, SD = 1.10), with 83% in agreement. A substantial proportion (62%) agreed that gendered advertising affects their self-perception (mean: 3.68, SD = 1.25), consistent with Cultivation Theory's prediction of media influence on real-world attitudes.

Table 7. Chi-Square Test, Respondent Gender and Perception of Gendered Advertising

Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Cramér's V	Decision
Awareness of gendered patterns	7.842	2	.020	.198	Significant
Critical attitude toward stereotyping	11.234	2	.004	.237	Significant
Perceived self-image impact	9.117	2	.010	.213	Significant

Level of significance: $p < .05$. Cramér's $V = \sqrt{(\chi^2/(n \times \min(r-1, c-1))}$.

Response categories collapsed: Agree (SA+A), Undecided, Disagree (D+SD).

Table 8. Cross-Tabulations of Gendered Advertising Perception by Respondent Gender

Variables		Response	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
Variable 1 *$\chi^2(2) = 7.842$, $p = .020$, Cramér's V = .198 (small–medium effect)*	Awareness of gendered patterns	Agree	80 (80.0%)	62(62.0%)	142 (71.0%)
		Undecided	12 (12.0%)	23 (23.0%)	35 (17.5%)
		Disagree	8 (8.0%)	15 (15.0%)	23 (11.5%)
		Total	**100 (100%)**	**100 (100%)**	**200 (100%)**
Variable 2 *$\chi^2(2) = 11.234$, $p = .004$, Cramér's V = .237 (medium effect)*	Critical attitude toward stereotyping	Agree	82 (82.0%)	60 (60.0%)	142 (71.0%)
		Undecided	10 (10.0%)	25 (25.0%)	35 (17.5%)
		Disagree	8 (8.0%)	15 (15.0%)	23 (11.5%)
		Total	**100 (100%)**	**100 (100%)**	**200 (100%)**
Variable 3 *$\chi^2(2) = 9.117$, $p = .010$, Cramér's V = .213 (small–medium effect)*	Perceived self-image impact	Agree	74 (74.0%)	55 (55.0%)	129 (64.5%)
		Undecided	16 (16.0%)	28 (28.0%)	44 (22.0%)
		Disagree	10 (10.0%)	17 (17.0%)	27 (13.5%)
		Total	**100 (100%)**	**100 (100%)**	**200 (100%)**

Source: Chi Square Test, 2026

Chi-square tests revealed statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on all three perception variables ($p < .05$). Table 7 confirms that female respondents demonstrated consistently higher awareness of gendered advertising patterns (80% vs. 62% agree), more critical

attitudinal responses to stereotyping (82% vs. 60% agree), and greater self-reported impact on self-perception (74% vs. 55% agree) compared to male respondents. All three null hypotheses are accordingly rejected. Effect sizes (Cramér's V) ranged from .198 to .237, indicating small to medium effects (Cohen, 1988). These gender differences are consistent with the literature on female consumers' critical reception of gender stereotyping in advertising (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Discussion

The content analysis findings confirm and extend existing literature on gendered product-category representation. The dominance of female characters in personal care advertisements (80% of sampled ads) and male characters in pharmaceutical advertisements (70%) reflects the binary documented by Goffman (1979) and substantiated by Grau and Zotos (2016). That comparable patterns emerge in Nigerian advertising confirms that this representational logic transcends specific cultures while assuming local texture through patriarchal norms.

The concentration of domestic and social settings in personal care advertisements (70%) reproduces what Eagly, Wood, and Diekman (2000) describe as the representational legacy of the social role division of labour. The prevalence of occupational and outdoor settings in pharmaceutical advertisements (70%) constructs masculine identity around productive engagement, consistent with Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity. The gendering of voiceovers (Figure 3) also merits explicit attention: male voiceovers dominate pharmaceutical advertisements (75%) while female voiceovers dominate personal care advertisements (70%). As Grau and Zotos (2016) observe, male voiceovers carry institutional authority and expert credibility, while female voiceovers carry aspirational intimacy and pleasurable invitation, extending the visual gendered binary simultaneously into the domain of sound, at a level audience may not consciously register.

A critical engagement with the most plausible counterargument is necessary: one might argue these casting patterns simply reflect rational market targeting, since women purchase more personal care products and men more pharmaceutical products. This argument has commercial plausibility but is theoretically insufficient. As Gill (2007) argues, even where advertising targets documented consumer behaviour, the specific representational choices made, settings, narrative roles, body parts foregrounded, and voiceover gender, exceed demographic targeting and actively construct gendered subjectivities.

Moreover, Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) describes how the association between women and personal care consumption, once normalised through advertising, shapes purchasing patterns, which advertisers then cite to justify the targeting, a self-reinforcing ideological cycle that market data alone cannot dissolve. The colourism dimension further demands intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991): the female target of skin-lightening cream advertising in Nigeria is not simply a woman but a Black African woman being invited to pursue a racialised beauty ideal. A postfeminist reading (Gill, 2007, 2016) reveals that this compounded ideal is framed as an act of empowered personal choice, the most distinctively Nigerian contextual dimension of personal care advertising, though it is important to note that colourism was not operationalised in this study's coding scheme, and therefore claims about its prevalence remain observational rather than empirically established by this data.

Survey findings indicate that Ibadan residents are not passive recipients of these representations. High awareness scores (mean: 4.28, SD = 0.98 for women in personal care advertising; mean: 4.21, SD = 0.99 for men in pharmaceutical advertising, whole-sample means from Table 5) suggest that sustained advertising exposure has produced a recognisable, legible representational landscape for audiences. The finding that 83% of respondents endorsed equal gender representation across product categories indicates growing consumer demand for equitable advertising practice. The statistically significant gender differences in Table 6 show that female respondents demonstrated higher critical awareness and more negative attitudinal responses toward gendered advertising on all three measured variables ($p < .05$; Table 7). As female consumers grow more critically aware, advertising that continues to rely on conventional stereotypes risks brand equity erosion among the very demographic it primarily targets (Grau & Zotos, 2016). These gender differences are consistent with international audience research; Åkestam *et al.* (2017) similarly found that female consumers responded more positively to advertising

that disrupts, rather than reinforces, conventional gender scripts, suggesting that the gap in critical awareness between male and female consumers has practical commercial implications.

Limitations

This study was subject to a few limitations. First, the survey was conducted exclusively in Ibadan Metropolis, limiting the geographic generalisability of the audience perception findings. Other Nigerian cities and regions, particularly rural areas, may exhibit different patterns of advertising exposure, gender norm internalisation, and critical awareness. Also, the absence of a qualitative reception component, such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, means that the deeper interpretive processes by which Ibadan residents make sense of gendered advertising representations remain largely unexplored. Finally, as noted in the Methodology, the role type variable is partly circular, since a pain reliever advertisement is definitionally about pain relief; the comparison of dominant role type across categories thus partly confirms the product-category framing rather than providing an independent finding.

Conclusion

This study has generated preliminary empirical evidence, from a purposive advertisement sample and an Ibadan audience survey, that Nigerian consumer product advertising exhibits a consistent gendered pattern: personal care products are coded as feminine, associated with bodily pleasure, aesthetic maintenance, and social desirability, while pharmaceutical products are coded as masculine, associated with physical pain, stoic endurance, and productive restoration. This pattern is encoded at multiple intersecting levels, in character selection, role portrayal, environmental setting, and voiceover gender, and is recognised by a significant proportion of Ibadan's adult population, particularly women, who demonstrate significantly higher critical awareness and more negative attitudes toward these representational patterns.

The findings are consistent with gender stereotyping in advertising being grounded in historically constructed social role associations (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000), reinforced through repeated exposure (Gerbner *et al.*, 2002), and cognitively processed through gendered schema formation (Bem, 1981). In the Nigerian context, these global patterns are amplified by patriarchal cultural norms and by the additional contextual dimension of colourism embedded in personal care advertising, dimensions that future research should operationalise and measure directly. The small and purposive advertisement sample (n = 20) means these conclusions are preliminary and should be treated as evidence supporting the need for larger, more systematic studies rather than as definitive accounts of Nigerian advertising practice.

The study further indicates that Ibadan audiences, particularly women, are alert to these patterns and hold critical views of them, a finding consistent with international audience research and suggestive of growing consumer receptivity to more gender-equitable advertising. Whether this critical awareness translates into purchasing behaviour change remains a question for longitudinal inquiry, but the attitudinal data alone are sufficient to signal both an ethical imperative and a potential commercial opportunity for Nigerian advertisers willing to move beyond stereotypical defaults.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **For Advertisers and Creative Agencies:** Advertising practitioners should consciously resist default gender casting across all product categories. Men can compellingly and effectively be shown caring for their skin; women can powerfully manage pain, lead teams, and restore their professional capacity. Counter-stereotypical representation is not merely a moral choice; as Åkestam *et al.* (2017) demonstrated, it is also a commercially advantageous one with measurably positive audience reception outcomes.
2. **For APCON:** The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria should develop clear, enforceable gender-sensitive advertising guidelines that discourage stereotypical gender role assignments and mandate more equitable gender representation across product categories. The United Kingdom's

Advertising Standards Authority prohibition on harmful gender stereotyping in advertising (ASA, 2019), enforced from June 2019, offers a valuable international regulatory precedent.

3. **For Media Organisations:** Nigerian television broadcasters and digital media platforms should develop content policies encouraging gender-progressive advertising and create incentive structures for brands demonstrating commitment to equitable gender representation in their campaigns.

4. **For Future Research:** Subsequent studies should: (a) extend this inquiry to rural and peri-urban Nigerian audiences; (b) employ larger and more systematic advertisement samples with rigorous random or systematic sampling procedures; (c) explore qualitative methods such as focus groups and in-depth interviews to investigate deeper interpretive processes; (d) test the exposure–perception relationship empirically using exposure frequency measures; and (e) operationalise and code for colourism and empowerment language in Nigerian personal care advertising.

5. **Academic Curriculum:** Gender representation in advertising should be substantively incorporated into Mass Communication, Advertising and Public Relations, and Media Studies curricula at Nigerian universities, equipping future practitioners and researchers with critical gender literacy.

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