Examining How Political Affiliation and Sex-Role Attitudes Relate to Perceptions of

Gendered Advertisements

Gracie Guy

Angelo State University

Abstract

Advertisements are often gender-stereotyped or perceived to be by consumers, and gender stereotyping can negatively affect advertisement perceptions. Perceptions of gender-stereotyped advertisements might also be affected by a person's political affiliation or endorsement of traditional sex roles. As such, the aim of this research was to understand the perceived credibility of advertisements featuring either a man or woman influencer and how the political affiliation and sex-role attitudes of participants relate to advertisement perceptions. A total of $N = 255$ U.S. adults were recruited to view a gendered advertisement and complete self-report measures of the credibility of the person (i.e., influencer: man or woman) in the advertisement and the advertisement itself, intentions to engage in the advertised behavior (i.e., camping), political affiliation, and sex-role attitudes. Results showed that participants rated the advertisement displaying a man promoting camping as better made, and the man as more of an expert than the woman. However, gendered advertisements did not affect camping interests or intentions, and political affiliation did not moderate any of these effects. Results did show that as, endorsing traditional sex roles increased, perceived credibility of the influencer and advertisement, as well as camping intentions, all increased for those who viewed the advertisement showing the woman advertising camping. The pattern of results observed in this study is inconsistent with previous research and with the hypotheses. As such, results from this work raise many questions for future research.

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With the rise of feminism, brands are at a crossroads in terms of how they market their products: continue marketing women and men in their traditional roles or move forward and break boundaries. Many advertisements contain gender stereotypes, but research shows that people often have less favorable attitudes toward advertisements containing gender stereotypes (Huhmann & Limbu, 2014). Perceptions of gender-stereotyped advertisements can also differ by gender; for example, women react in a more negative way when other women are stereotyped in advertisements than men do when men view stereotyped advertisements (Huhmann & Limbu, 2014).

Group-based stereotypes also influence how people view a specific product being marketed to them (e.g., Akestam, 2017; El Hazzouri, 2019). For example, people in ethnic minority groups tend to show less intent to purchase or endorse a product when the advertisement features people from their own minority group (El Hazzouri, 2019). This is also observed in relation to gender stereotypes in advertising. When women are given an advertisement that features a female stereotype (e.g., concepts surrounding jobs and role behaviors that differentiate women from men), they are less likely to endorse, or want to buy, the product (Akestam, 2017). Considering these findings, it might make sense for advertisers to create advertisements that promote women and men as equals or do not illustrate gender at all.

Creating advertisements that are received well by the public is critical for brands, meaning that understanding the perceived credibility of advertisements and advertisers is also important. In recent years, brands have capitalized on social media to market their products in new ways, such as through social media "influencers," who play an integral role in how various

companies and brands market their products today (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers are online "contributors [who] attract a mass audience, build a fan base, and become a source of advice for their followers" (Vrontis et al., 2020). Most of the time, influencers are normal people who have grown their online audience to anywhere from a few thousand to millions of followers on different social-media platforms. They then get brand deals with different companies and are paid to promote a certain product or ideal.

When someone is promoting a product or lifestyle choice to a group of people, the seller's credibility is a factor in how likely the consumer is to buy the product or agree with the ideal (Traberg & van der Linden, 2022). The more an influencer can convince their followers that they are genuine, real, and someone with whom their followers should agree, the more likely those followers are to buy the product (Johnson et al., 2021). There are numerous women and men who are considered influencers. Some of these influencers are more popular and trusted than others. One reason for that may be that advertisements from these influencers may be perceived as gendered, given that they are presented by a real person (i.e., the influencer) who presents as either a woman or a man.

With the popularity of influencer culture and its current hold on society and consumers, it is important to understand how influencer advertisements are perceived by the public. Accordingly, the present study followed existing research on influencers, marketing, and advertisement credibility, with a specific focus on the extremely popular trend of influencer advertising. In this work, I focused on the use of social-media influencers in advertising and how their perceived credibility (i.e., influencer credibility) may differ depending on their gender. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to observe how gendered advertisements affect people's perceptions of different kinds of advertisements to determine if the gender of the

influencer advertising a kind of behavior, camping, will affect how credible consumers think the advertisement is (i.e., advertisement credibility), as well as to examine if the gender of the influencer relates to the consumer's interests and intentions to engage in the behavior (i.e., camping intentions). People's personal values and views also might impact how they view gendered advertisements (Morrison & Shaffer, 2003); to explore this, I also tested whether participants' political affiliation and endorsement of traditional sex roles would moderate how credible they think the person in the advertisement was or influence their motivation to engage in the behavior advertised to them.

Method

Participants

A total of $N = 299$ adults in the U.S. were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for a study on their social thoughts and opinions. Forty-four participants were excluded from analyses for failed attention checks, technical issues, not believing the advertisements, or disparaging comments about the study itself or aspects of the study. The final sample consisted of $N = 255$ participants (129 Female, 126 Male; Age: $M = 43.32$, $SD = 12.94$; Race: 70.6% European American/White, 9.8% Asian American, 8.6% African American, 4.3% Hispanic/Latino, 3.5% Mixed/More than one race, 2.4% Native American/Indian, and 0.8% Other). The study took about 15 minutes to complete; upon completion of the study, participants were paid $0.60.

Measures

Participants viewed an image of an advertisement for camping, and they were asked to indicate their perceptions of the advertisement. The main variables of interest in this study were perceived influencer credibility, motivation to endorse the behavior advertised, and the

participants' political affiliation and sex-role attitudes. Participants also completed a measure of demographics.

Gender-Based Advertisement Manipulation. Participants viewed an image of an advertisement for a particular behavior, in this case, camping. There were two versions of the same camping advertisement; one version showed an image of a man promoting camping and the other version showed an image of a woman promoting camping. Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the two advertisements and then they answered questions about the advertisement they viewed (see below).

Influencer Credibility. After viewing their assigned advertisement, participants completed two 5-item subscales of a larger credibility measure (Johnson et al., 2021). These subscales assessed how credible participants thought the person (i.e., influencer) was in the advertisement. Specifically, participants completed measures of both trustworthiness (5 items; e.g., "The person in this advertisement is reliable.") and expertise (5 items; e.g., "The person in this advertisement is an expert.") of the influencer promoting camping in the advertisement. Participants responded using a scale from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*) to all items. Higher scores on each subscale reflect that the influencer was rated as more trustworthy (M = 5.18, SD = 1.15, α = .94) and having more expertise (M = 5.01, SD = 1.24, α = .95), respectively.

Advertisement Credibility. After viewing their assigned advertisement, participants completed three items assessing the extent to which participants found the advertisement to be of good quality. Participants responded to items such as "The advertisement as a whole is good." on a scale from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*). Participants also responded to one item assessing the extent to which participants thought the advertisement was well-made (i.e., "The advertisement as a whole is well-made.") on a scale from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly*

agree). These items were drawn from a larger influencer/advertisement credibility measure (Johnson et al., 2021), and scores were calculated such that higher values on each assessment reflect that the advertisement was rated being of greater quality ($M = 5.62$, $SD = 1.34$, $\alpha = .95$) and well-made ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.44$), respectively.

Camping Intentions. To measure camping intentions, participants responded to items about the extent to which they would like to partake in camping and their intentions to go camping. Specifically, participants also responded to one item on a scale from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*) to assess their interest in engaging in the advertised activity, camping (i.e., "I would like to partake in this activity."; Johnson et al., 2021). Participants also responded to a 7-item measure to assess intentions to engage in camping in the next three months (adapted from Cruwys et al., 2012). Participants responded on a scale from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*) to items such as: "In the next three months, I intend to go camping." Higher scores on each assessment indicate a greater interest in going camping ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.66$) and greater intentions to camp ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.03$, $\alpha = .86$), respectively.

Political Affiliation. Participants indicated whether they identify as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or No Political Affiliation in response to the standard demographic question "What is your political affiliation?"

Traditional Egalitarian Sex-Roles Attitudes (Larsen & Long, 1988). Participants completed a 20-item measure of sex-role attitudes including items such as "Ultimately a woman should submit to her husband's decision." and "Men make better leaders." All items were rated on a scale from 1(*strongly agree*) to 5(*strongly disagree*) and an overall score was calculated by summing participant responses, with higher values meaning more traditional sex-role attitudes; $M = 44.34$, $SD = 17.99$, $\alpha = .94$.

Demographics. Participants reported their sex, gender identity, age, weight, height, and race/ethnicity.

Procedure

Participants signed up to complete the study through MTurk and the survey was administered online using Qualtrics survey software. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to view one of the advertisements and answered questions about their perceptions of the person presented in the advertisement (influencer credibility: trustworthiness and expertise), the advertisement itself (advertisement credibility: quality and well-made), and their motivation to engage in the behavior (camping intentions: camping interests and intentions to camp). Participants also completed self-report measures of political affiliation and sex-role attitudes. All measures were presented in randomized order. After completing the study measures, participants provided standard demographic information and were presented with an online debriefing statement.

<div align="center">

Results

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Correlations among all study variables are presented in Table 1. The hypotheses were tested via independent samples *t*-tests, factorial analyses of variance (ANOVA), and multiple regression analyses. Results of independent samples *t*-tests showed significant differences between the advertisement with the man versus the woman in the perceived expertise of the person in the advertisement and the advertisement being well-made. Specifically, participants who were shown the advertisement of a man rated his expertise as higher ($M = 5.20$, $SD = .09$), compared to those shown the advertisement of a woman ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.34$), $t(253) = 3.04$, $p = .003$; they also rated the advertisement showing the man as better made ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.22$) than the advertisement with a woman ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.64$), $t(253) = 2.20$, $p = .029$).

Contrary to my hypotheses, none of the moderation hypotheses including political affiliation were supported (See Table 2). However, the gender of the person in the advertisement and holding traditional values about sex roles did interact to predict all of the dependent variables of interest; specifically, as participants' endorsement of traditional sex roles went up, they perceived the woman's advertisement to be better in all of the variables of interest and had higher intentions to go camping upon viewing the woman's advertisement.

Influencer Gender and Sex Roles Predicting the Dependent Variables of Interest

Influencer Trustworthiness. The overall model including the gender of the influencer in the advertisement (influencer gender: man versus woman), traditional sex-role attitudes, and their interaction predicting influencer trustworthiness was statistically significant ($R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 251) = 4.27$, $p = .006$), with both traditional sex roles ($\beta = .34$, p $< .001$) and its interaction with influencer gender ($\beta = -.29$, p $= .003$); influencer gender was not statistically significantly associated with trusting the influencer ($\beta = .00$, $p = .976$).

Influencer Expertise. The overall model including influencer gender, sex roles, and their interaction predicting influencer expertise was statistically significant ($R^2 = .097$, $F(3, 251) = 8.98$, $p = .000$), with traditional sex roles ($\beta = .39$, $p = .000$), its interaction with influencer gender ($\beta = -.27$, $p = .004$), and influencer gender ($\beta = .19$, $p = .002$) predicting influencer expertise.

Advertisement Quality. The overall model including influencer gender, sex roles, and their interaction predicting advertisement credibility was not significant ($R^2 = .029$, $F(3, 251) = 2.48$, $p = .062$), nor was influencer gender ($\beta = .05$, $p = .389$). Traditional sex roles ($\beta = .25$, $p = .012$) and its interaction with influencer gender ($\beta = -.22$, $p = .024$) were both statistically significant, predicting advertisement credibility.

Advertisement Well-Made. The overall model including influencer gender, sex roles, and their interaction predicting if the advertisement was well-made was statistically significant ($R^2 = .075$, $F(3, 251) = 6.80$, $p = .000$), with traditional sex roles ($\beta = .36$, $p = .000$), its interaction with influencer gender ($\beta = -.21$, p = .029), and influencer gender ($\beta = .36$, $p = .000$) predicting the advertisement being well made.

Camping Interest. The overall model including influencer gender, sex roles, and their interaction predicting if the participants wanted to go camping was statistically significant ($R^2 = .069$, $F(3, 251) = 6.18$, $p = .000$), with traditional sex roles ($\beta = .37$, $p = .000$), and its interaction with influencer gender ($\beta = -.30$, p = .002) predicting camping desires; influencer gender ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .058$) was not statistically associated with camping desires.

Intentions to Camp. The overall model including influencer gender, sex roles, and their interaction predicting intentions to engage in camping was statistically significant ($R^2 = .052$, $F(3, 251) = 4.55$, $p = .004$), with traditional sex roles ($\beta = .34$, $p = .000$), and its interaction with influencer gender ($\beta = -.20$, p = .036) predicting camping desires; influencer gender ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .808$) was not statistically associated with camping intentions.

Discussion

The goals of this study were to examine the possible moderating effects of political affiliation and sex roles on perceiving influencer and advertisement credibility, as well as camping intentions, following viewing of gendered camping advertisements. The predictions that political affiliation would moderate the effects of influencer gender on perceived credibility and camping intentions were not supported. The analyses of traditional sex roles as a moderator of these effects showed that, as holding traditional sex roles increased, viewing the advertisement showing the woman promoting camping resulted in significantly greater perceived

trustworthiness and expertise of the influencer (i.e., influencer credibility), perceived quality of

the advertisement and the extent to which the advertisement was well-made (i.e., advertisement

credibility), and camping interests and intentions (i.e., camping intentions). Together, these

results raise many interesting questions for future research.

Somewhat consistent with my hypotheses, men were perceived as having more expertise,

and the advertisement with the man was perceived as more well-made across participants. This is

consistent with past research showing that gender stereotypes play a role in advertisement

perceptions and that men are typically seen as leaders and, by extension, better experts (e.g.,

Akestam, 2017; Heilman, 2001). A potential reason for a lack of significance with influencer

trustworthiness as the variable of interest is that both the man and woman depicted in the

advertisement seemed equally trustworthy due to the composition of the advertisement and the

nature of the study (e.g., participants may have trusted both the man and woman because the

advertisements looked realistic and/or because participants trusted the study or experimenters).

Contrary to my expectations, political affiliation did not moderate the effects of the

influencer's gender on influencer credibility, advertisement credibility, or camping intentions.

This result is not supported by past research, as the literature frequently shows a strong

correlation between political affiliation and traditional attitudes regarding gender stereotypes and

sex roles (e.g., as someone is more conservative, they hold more traditional sex-role attitudes;

Lye & Waldron, 1997). Considering this, I would expect that people of different political

affiliations would view the woman's advertisement differently. However, a possible explanation

for these null findings may be overall attitudes toward men versus women in the population,

regardless of political affiliation. For example, as society has progressed, gender attitudes have

slowly progressed to a more egalitarian attitude, which may help explain the lack of difference

between political affiliation groups (Cotter et al., 2011). Additionally, the lack of interaction of the influencer's gender and participant political affiliation on camping intentions could have been observed because camping is a somewhat neutral activity that is perceived as genderless, or because people have the same attitudes toward camping regardless of their political affiliation. In any case, these unanticipated results suggest more research on these findings may be needed.

Interestingly, the woman's advertisement was found to be more well-made, and the woman was perceived as more credible, as sex roles increased. There is little-to-no research explaining or supporting these results. Further research is needed to understand why this effect was found in the present study. Participants were also more interested in camping after viewing the woman's advertisement as sex roles increased. This is also not supported by past research, as the literature tends to show a trend of trusting men more as traditional gender attitudes increase (Dutta et al., 2021). One potential reason for these unanticipated findings may be that people with more traditional sex roles view women as more nurturing, and therefore more trustworthy or honest; however, additional research will be needed to investigate this possibility.

One limitation of this study is the created advertisements, which utilized models from real-world images found online. Because the model images were pre-existing, matching the advertisements on all features of the models (e.g., type of clothing, facial expression) was challenging. To address this, future research could create advertisements that look more similar (e.g., a man and woman that look the same/have the same race/etc.).

In conclusion, the implications of this study are primarily related to future research. Because most of the results were inconsistent with past literature and with my expectations, follow-up research is needed to determine the validity of the effects found in the present study and to attempt to understand them. If the results of this study were to replicate in future research,

the implications would be interesting. It could mean that society now sees men and women as more equal than has been shown in past research, or that people with different political affiliations are more similar than today's culture tends to think. This could eventually cause a cultural shift in the way people view those who have differing political or sex-role attitudes than their own. More research will be needed to investigate these interesting possibilities.

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Table 1.

Correlations among all study variables.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Influencer Credibility:					
1. Trustworthiness					
2. Expertise	.74***				
Advertisement Credibility:					
3. Ad Quality	.62***	.60***			
4. Ad Well-Made	.53***	.55***	.74***		
Camping Intentions:					
5. Camping Interest	.27***	.22***	.23***	.14*	
6. Intend to Camp	.42***	.44***	.38***	.29***	.40***

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Table 2.

Moderation results for influencer gender, political affiliation, and their interaction predicting the outcome variables of interest.

	Influencer Credibility		Advertisement Credibility		Camping Intentions	
	Trustworthiness	Expertise	Ad Quality	Ad Well-Made	Camping Interest	Intend to Camp
Influencer Gender (IG)	$F(1, 238) = .62$ $p = .433$	$F(1, 238) = 3.77$ $p = .053$	$F(1, 238) = .04$ $p = .847$	$F(1, 238) = 1.63$ $p = .204$	$F(1, 238) = 6.47$ $\boldsymbol{p = .012}$	$F(1, 238) = 1.70$ $p = .194$
Political Affiliation (PA)	$F(2, 238) = .28$ $p = .760$	$F(2, 238) = 1.42$ $p = .242$	$F(2, 238) = .14$ $p = .870$	$F(2, 238) = .19$ $p = .825$	$F(2, 238) = 1.36$ $p = .260$	$F(2, 238) = 4.27$ $\boldsymbol{p = .015}$
IG x PA	$F(2, 238) = .96$ $p = .385$	$F(2, 238) = .33$ $p = .718$	$F(2, 238) = .62$ $p = .541$	$F(2, 238) = .69$ $p = .501$	$F(2, 238) = 1.29$ $p = .278$	$F(3, 238) = 1.61$ $p = .203$

Note. Significant differences are bolded. The overall pattern of results revealed that political affiliation was not a statistically significant moderator of the effects of gender of the influencer in the advertisement on any of the influencer credibility, advertisement credibility, or camping intentions dependent variables.