An analysis of television commercials during tennis grand slam finals: Does the equal prize money = gender equality in advertising?

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Abstract 320

Mass media plays a role in how individuals form views on societal norms. Individuals are affected by the images and text that the mass media choose to let them hear, see, and read (Riffe et al., 1998). Of all the socialization influences that work to shape the skills, values, norms, and behaviors of individuals, the mass media appear as one of the most prevalent and powerful (Pedersen, 2002). One of the most powerful forms of mass media is television and the advertisements that appear on this medium. Television is a main source for the coverage of sporting events and most major events are carried on large national networks. While studies have investigated the treatment of female athletes in television media (e.g. Billings & Eastman, 2002) few have looked at how television commercials during these broadcasts portray gender roles (Shani et al. 1992).

Various studies over the last two decades have found that images of women in television commercials are unrealistic and stereotypical (e.g. Kim & Lowry, 2005; Ganahl, Kim, & Netzley, 2003; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Lovdal, 1989; Gilly, 1988; Caballero & Solomon, 1984; McArthur & Resko, 1975). Many studies of television commercials in the recent past were efforts to find changes from previous decades (Allan & Coltrane, 1996; Caballero & Solomon, 1984; Ganahl et al., 2003; Lovdal, 1989; Pierracine & Schell, 1995; Scheibe, 1979). Although a number of these studies found some changes and improvements in terms of gender roles in advertising and stereotypes, researchers still concluded that gender roles in commercials continued to be unrealistic portrayals of the role of women in society.

Previous studies of gender roles in television advertising around the world (e.g. Kim & Lowry, 2005; Ganahl, Kim, & Netzley, 2003; Lovdal, 1989; Gilly, 1988; Caballero & Solomon, 1984) have illustrated that television commercials have been a lagging social indicator. According to Estes (2005) there are three types of social indicators: (1) leading indicators, which tend to show the direction of future economic or social activity; (2) coincident indicators, which tend to track social and economic cycles with comparatively little lag time; and (3) lagging indicators, which measure how the economy or society was rather than how it is or will be.

In 2007, for the first time, all four of the tennis grand slam events, Wimbledon, the French Open, the US open and the Australian Open, will be providing equal prize money for both the female and male champions (BBC Sport, 2007). This research will aim to determine if equalizing the prize money has prompted advertisers to follow suit and provide gender equal portrayals in the advertisements aired during these final matches. The research will investigate the depiction of women in television commercials airing during the final matches of the four 2007 tennis grand slams with an aim to identify if these roles are a leading, coincident or lagging social indicator of role changes in sport.

The main methodological tool that will be employed in this research is content analysis. Content analysis relies on coding of data classified in a conceptual framework driven by the objectives of the research questions. The coding process records the presence or absence of predetermined and strictly defined attributes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, Neuendorf, 2002). Coding necessitates a detailed description of the variables and the development of categories that are exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Neuendorf, 2002). Following the aforementioned approach, a data collection instrument using previous metrics (e.g. Kim & Lowry, 2005; McArthur & Resko, 1975) was created to analyze the content presented within the advertisements of the four finals. The results from this content analysis will be presented including the impact of prize money equalization on gender roles in commercials. Conclusions pertaining to gender portrayals during the advertisements contained in the televised tennis grand slam finals, including the type of social indicator represented will be made.

References:

