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Trends in the Transformation of Gender Stereotypes: Representation of Women's Image in the Modern Media Space of Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to assess the transformation of women's image in the modern media space of Kazakhstan. Using a mixed research approach, including a literature review, analysis of advertising materials, and expert surveys, the authors determine the role of the media in shaping the image of women. The results demonstrate that despite the growing trend towards diversity in women's roles, traditional stereotypes persist, especially in the context of traditional gender roles. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing gender inequalities in different sectors, including politics, business, and public participation. The gradual transformation of women's roles reflects social shifts influenced by globalization, feminism, and technological advances. The study underscores the need for further efforts to combat gender stereotypes and promote diverse portrayals of women in mass

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media. Despite the progress achieved, continued research, political measures, and initiatives to promote media literacy are needed to create a media landscape that would foster gender equality and expand the rights and opportunities of women in all spheres of social life.

KEYWORDS

media space, gender stereotypes, female image, advertising, politics, social roles

Introduction

At present, the image of women in the contemporary media space is undergoing a major transformation (Park et al., 2023). Traditional gender stereotypes are gradually abandoned. This takes place, on the one hand, under the influence of globalization, the gender equality movement, the development of feminism, and other processes in modern society. On the other hand, due to the advancement of the Internet, representations of women in the media are expanding and becoming more complex (Cardella et al., 2020).

We believe that among the most critical factors in this change are the development of digital technology and the rising role of mass media (Popova & Balezina, 2015). Due to their broad distribution and accessibility, digital technologies are becoming an integral part of modern people's lives, substantially reflecting and shaping social norms, convictions, and values, as well as ideas about the world. Researchers suggest that verbal and visual representations in the media reflect the cultural image of society (Bui, 2021; Chahbane, 2023). Meanwhile, in contemporary information society, individuals are under continuous influence of the information flow that is broadcast by the media (Barone et al., 2015; Chiang & Knight, 2011; DellaVigna & Gentzkow, 2010). Social media, however, do not present an independent information source, as they contain built-in messages and narratives that contribute to the formation of social beliefs and norms, particularly with respect to gender norms. Primarily, they aggregate content from various external sources and users, leading to a mix of perspectives with inherent biases (Jiang et al., 2021). The content visibility on these social media platforms is largely governed by algorithms that prioritize user engagement, often promoting sensational or controversial content over unbiased information.

Furthermore, these algorithms can create echo chambers, where users are mainly exposed to opinions and information that agree with their existing beliefs. This limits the exposure to diverse and independent viewpoints. Additionally, as commercial entities reliant on advertising revenue, social networks may feature content that aligns more with advertisers' interests than with the goal of providing independent information.

The open nature of such platforms also allows for the easy spread of misinformation. With limited fact-checking mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2021), it is challenging to ensure the accuracy and independence of all shared content (Talwar

et al., 2020). Moreover, regulatory and political influences in various regions can dictate content moderation policies, further affecting the neutrality of information on these platforms. Thus, while social networks offer a range of voices and perspectives, these factors significantly put at risk their ability to serve as truly independent sources of information.

Ideas about one or another role of women in the media space often reinforce or perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, thereby shaping the way people perceive themselves and others in society. These stereotypes can also affect a variety of spheres, including education, career choices, and interpersonal relationships.

For example, mass media tend to depict women in roles that prioritize their appearance and household responsibilities, rather than intellectual abilities (Santonniccolo et al., 2023). As a result, young women can internalize the notion that academic achievement is not as important as conformity to traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, stereotypical representation of gender roles also has an impact on career choice. Women tend to be portrayed in low-status, low-paying jobs or as housewives, which can create the impression that some professions are unsuitable or unattainable for women. Therefore, women may face obstacles when attempting to enter male-dominated industries or leadership positions. The image of women in the media is context-dependent as it mirrors the unique societal norms, cultural values, and historical backgrounds of different regions. In media representation, cultural norms and values play a significant role (Shelomentseva et al., 2019). In societies with traditional views on gender roles, like Kazakhstan, women are often depicted in domestic or nurturing roles (Badiani et al., 2023). Contrastingly, in societies with progressive views on gender equality, women might be shown in a variety of roles, including leadership positions. Economic factors and media ownership also contribute to this context-dependency. Media outlets, influenced by their ownership and the economic conditions of their region, might portray women in ways that are consistent with the dominant economic activities or the interests of their ownership (Ward & Grower, 2020).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the issue and a striving for a more responsible presentation of the female image in the media (International Media Support, 2020). It is important to note the commercialization of media and its dependence on sponsors, ratings, advertisers, and trending topics. This aspect indeed exerts a significant influence on media content, often leading to the perpetuation of popular stereotypes to attract a broader audience.

The audience's preferences are evolving, with an increasing number of consumers seeking content that promotes equality and social justice (Gohary et al., 2023). This shift in consumer sentiment can pressure media companies to alter their content to reflect these values, thereby serving both commercial interests and social causes.

In practice, however, this change progresses unevenly and with difficulties. While some countries have substantially succeeded in promoting gender equality and

inclusion, others still struggle against entrenched gender stereotypes and unequal representation. In essence, a large part of economic and political factors is obvious for each region, and their influence is difficult to overcome, which is why researchers strive to explain how this influence can be curbed. The reality is that the media may prioritize sensationalism and objectification in mainstream content or proceed from certain ideological goals, thus affecting the way women are presented in certain contexts (Rohman, 2020; Zubanova, 2008).

In our belief, the challenges at the heart of gender dynamics in various cultural, social, and political contexts are inextricably linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals on gender equality. First, the goals highlight the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. This refers not only to direct discrimination but also to the subtle biases embedded in social structures and media representations (United Nations, n.d.). By combating discrimination and gender-based violence and promoting fair representation in the labor market, mass media can serve as a powerful tool in changing social norms and building a world, in which women are depicted and viewed as equal in all aspects of life.

Literature Review

To outline the focus of our study, we first need to establish what is included in media space and how it affects the formation of the image of a woman in today's world. The most common definition of a media space was formulated by Stults (1986) in the mid-1980s:

An electronic setting in which groups of people can work together, even when they are not resident in the same place or present at the same time. In a media space, people can create real-time visual and acoustic environments that span physically separate areas. (p. 20)

Media space incorporates traditional mass media, such as television, radio, papers, and journals, along with digital media platforms, e.g., the Internet, social networks, and streaming services. Nim (2013) defined media space as both a cultural and social system, which plays an increasing role in the dynamics of modern sociocultural processes, with a system of values being developed and broadcast, orienting mass consciousness towards the adoption of universal, sometimes stereotypical, norms.

The media space created by electronic communication means is becoming the leading channel for transmitting national culture and its values; hence, it comes closest to the phenomenon of media culture. At the same time, the network media space is seen as an additional channel for preserving the values of ethnic cultures and spreading cultural heritage (Blokhin, 2016; Dzialoshinskii, 2013; Kirillova, 2020; Korobkova, 2019).

Thus, media space is not simply a reflection of reality, but an image of the world that is constructed socially and, in turn, reflects and constructs the social space.

In general, there are several key points in the understanding of media space. First, at its core are the means of mass communication, or mass media. Second, the media itself, and thus the media space, is an active subject in the formation of other spaces: social, cultural, political, and educational. Third, social change necessarily causes changes in the media space, which reflects the primary trends of social development. Fourth, the media space creates an image of the world that is beyond the individual's sensory experience. Fifth, the media space presents a system that has a certain set of interconnected structural components (Couldry & McCarthy, 2004; Monastyreva, 2010).

As emphasized by Maksimova (2011), gender is one of the characteristics that most comprehensively describes a person's essence in society, while gender identity, which touches upon the deepest layers of personality, is the chief aspect in its formation. In this light, the issue of the formation of a modern woman's image in contemporary media and the production, use, and manipulation of this image through mass media is acute at both the regional and global levels.

Women's image is constantly influenced both by cultural norms that establish what women should do and by social information that instills in people what a big difference there is between women and men (Baron, 2006; Xuan, 2022). Gender roles, which exist in society and are reflected in the media space, serve as socially imposed directives for women with respect to their appearance, interests, skills, behavior, self-esteem, and self-perception (Bobodzhanova, 2006; Mendes, 2011; Sokolova, 2013a, 2013b).

Researchers agree that the images of women presented in mass media shape and normalize ethnic, political, and gender roles and social relations, i.e., the "natural" occupations and tasks, responsibilities, desires, relations, ideas of success, and appearance of women (Azhgikhina, 2000; Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019), although what may appear "natural" is in most cases related to ideology and culture (Kochetkova, 2015; Zelova, 2017). Thus, the issue is how the dominant ideology determines the policy of representation and interpretation of women, the formation of whose image is influenced by cultural norms, historical peculiarities, and religious and everyday traditions of each country (Khabibullina, 2021).

Our study is focused on the representation of the image of a woman in the modern media space of Kazakhstan. In current understanding, Kazakhstan has been an independent state for only 30 years, different from its previous existence as part of the USSR. These changes in political status have caused a transformation of cultural identity. The nation is oriented towards the legacy of Soviet culture but is building its own cultural structure at the same time. In addition, since Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic country that encompasses several religious beliefs, the religious landscape plays a key role. For example, the most widespread religions in the country are Islam (70.19%) and Christianity (26.17%). Smaller religious communities, such as Buddhists, Jews, and others, also contribute to the cultural and religious dynamics of the country. The coexistence of different denominations and their traditions, in turn, has a greater impact on gender dynamics, as the portrayal of women can vary considerably in these cultural contexts.

By analyzing women's images and the context, in which they are depicted, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of certain social relations, identity, and gender practices that determine the image of women and their status in a particular culture. This necessitates studying the transformation of the women's image in the modern media space of Kazakhstan.

To address this issue, it is important to note that globalization, feminism, and technological progress have significantly influenced the transformation of women's roles in Kazakhstan. The influence of global media and cultural exchanges has introduced new ideas about women's rights and gender equality, challenging traditional norms (Iqbal et al., 2022). The feminist movement, both globally and within Kazakhstan, has played a crucial role in empowering women. An example of this is the growing number of women-led NGOs and advocacy groups in Kazakhstan, which work towards gender equality and women's rights, mirroring global feminist agendas (Nadirova et al., 2022). Technological progress, especially through digital platforms, has given women in Kazakhstan a powerful tool to express themselves, share experiences, and mobilize for change. Women in Kazakhstan actively engage in creating their visibility regimes, using platforms like blogs and public forums to discuss issues like work-life balance, career development, and gender equality (Lövheim, 2013). For instance, online campaigns or articles written by Kazakhstani women that highlight the challenges and successes of balancing professional and personal life provide insights into their evolving roles (V Almaty sostoialisia forum, 2023).

Thus, the present study aims to assess the transformation of the image of women in the contemporary media space of Kazakhstan.

Methods

In connection with the purpose of the study, we adopted a mixed approach to the research. The study of the women's image transformation in the modern media space of Kazakhstan was conducted from August to December 2022 in several stages.

The first stage involved the analysis of literature and documents. Its primary purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research on the topic. It sets the stage for the current research by summarizing and synthesizing previous studies, identifying gaps in the existing body of knowledge, and demonstrating the relevance and necessity of the current study. The data for the study were selected and grouped by the document type. The first group of documents comprised sociological surveys available on the official websites¹ of state bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The second group of documents consisted of 55 scientific articles and conference papers by researchers from around the world (interviews, short report articles, and research papers that have been published in journals indexed in Scopus² and Web of Science³ databases for the last 10 years).

¹ For example, <https://halykfinance.kz/>, <https://www.zakon.kz/>, <https://tengrinews.kz/>.

² <https://www.scopus.com>

³ <https://www.webofscience.com>

At the second stage of the study, we recruited 25 experts to participate in the survey. The sampling criterion for experts was that they had at least three articles on the topic under study, published in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. The experts were sent emails asking them to assess the reliability of the selected materials. The experts were also informed of the topic of the present study. The survey used a questionnaire containing questions and ranks in descending order (Table 1). The questionnaire was accompanied by a list of sources, with a number assigned to each source. The experts rated the sources on the Harrington scale by marking them in the Source No. field.

Table 1
The Expert Survey

Source No.	Rank	Nominal scale
	10	Central source on the topic
	9	Very important
	8	Important
	7	Needs to be considered
	6	Interesting source, to be considered only if the authors deem it necessary
	5	Interesting source, but does not need to be considered, as it goes beyond the research topic
	4	Not too important
	3	Unimportant
	2	Supplements the sources already noted
	1	Out of discussion

The questionnaire was compiled in two languages (Russian and Kazakh) and was to be filled in by the experts within 20 calendar days. These terms ensured equal opportunities for experts thus providing them with the same information interval of incoming information when answering the questions.

The third stage involved processing the collected information, its classification by significance, and interpretation of the results. The sources that were not described as significant enough were excluded.

The fourth stage consisted of a formalized analysis of advertisement texts (Voskresenskaia, 2019) based on the information selection procedure: (a) analysis scheme, (b) definition of units for analysis, and (c) definition of counting units.

The object of the study was the leading electronic editions of Kazakhstan. In total, the study monitored 11 electronic periodicals released in the first half of 2016 and 2022. To determine the transformation of the image of women in the modern media space of Kazakhstan, we analyzed 660 website-days, of which 330 occurred in the six-month period from January 1 to June 30, 2016 and 330 occurred in the six-month period from January 1 to June 30, 2022 (Table 2).

Table 2*Sampling of Website-Days to Quantify the Representation of Women in Electronic Media*

Type of mass media	Electronic periodicals	Number of website-days	
		2016	2022
Online versions of printed media	Kazakhstanskaya Pravda ⁴	30	30
	Liter ⁵	30	30
	Time.kz ⁶	30	30
	Karavan ⁷	30	30
	Novoe pokolenie ⁸	30	30
	Respublika ⁹	30	30
	TengriNews ¹⁰	30	30
Online media	NUR.KZ ¹¹	30	30
	Zakon.kz ¹²	30	30
	Sputnik ¹³	30	30
	Bizmedia.kz ¹⁴	30	30
Total		330	330

An additional unit of analysis was the number of female advertising images, which enabled their quantitative assessment. For this, we calculated the frequency of the content categories and the intensity of manifestation of their features in the website's advertising materials.

In the text of the selected electronic publications, we analyzed all advertising and information-analytical materials. The choice of publication days was based on the principle of step-by-step selection, i.e., the websites were analyzed one by one, one website per day.

The study focused on two types of advertising texts:

- verbal advertising materials presenting images of women;
- photographic advertising materials presenting images of women.

⁴ <https://kazpravda.kz>

⁵ <https://liter.kz>

⁶ <https://time.kz>

⁷ <https://www.caravan.kz>

⁸ <https://www.np.kz/>

⁹ <https://respublika.kz.media/>

¹⁰ <https://tengrinews.kz/>

¹¹ <https://www.nur.kz/>

¹² <https://www.zakon.kz/>

¹³ <https://ru.sputnik.kz/>

¹⁴ <https://bizmedia.kz/>

Women's images in advertising were recorded in the following types of advertising material: politics and governance; professional orientation (business, labor relations); household (everyday life), culture, tourism, healthcare, education, and services. In addition, we recorded advertising contexts that referred to female representatives of different spheres: business, industrial, domestic, leisure; social participation; and material contexts. Photographs and drawings of female characters in advertisements were also documented in relation to the specific sphere and context.

Results

The analysis of the sources shows that one of the main goals of Kazakhstan is to make significant progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to gender equality. One of the tasks in gender equality is the *elimination of all forms of discrimination*: Kazakhstan's commitment to gender equality is evident through its participation in international conventions, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN Women, n.d.). This includes regular reporting to the UN Committee and responding to recommendations on key issues, such as women's access to justice and combating gender discrimination (Tekkas-Kerman & Ozturk, 2022).

The next objective is to *counter gender-based violence*. The efforts of Kazakhstan to combat gender-based violence are reflected in the adoption of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 214-IV *O profilaktike bytovogo nasillia* [On the Prevention of Domestic Violence] (2009) and the harmonization of Kazakhstan's legislation with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, n.d.). The country's determination to expand crisis centers and explore the possibility of criminalizing domestic violence reflects a dedication to protecting the rights and well-being of victims, which is an important step toward addressing this pervasive problem.

Another task consists in *eliminating discrimination against women in the labor market*. While Kazakhstan's labor legislation upholds the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination, it does recognize the challenges women face in the labor market. Noticeable progress has been made in increasing women's participation in various sectors. For example, the State Statistics Service indicates that the wages of women are 20.0%–21.3% lower than those of men. That notwithstanding, in recent years, women's activity in business has grown considerably, and about 28% of managers of small, medium, and large enterprises in Kazakhstan are women. One in four (23.1%) peasant and agricultural farms is headed by women, and in trade unions and scientific production associations, women hold 32.4% of leadership positions. Kazakhstan's emphasis on updating the list of jobs that prohibit female labor demonstrates a proactive approach to ensuring gender parity in employment. Nowadays, with the development of technology and the automation of production processes, the list of professions prohibiting the use of women's labor is being shortened. In 2018, the list of these professions was cut from 287 to 187 (Khamenova, 2018).

Cumulatively, these efforts demonstrate Kazakhstan's commitment to achieving gender equality by addressing discrimination, countering gender-based violence, and striving to eliminate gender inequality in the labor market. According to the experts' evaluations, the selected documents were distributed as follows: on average, the documents were evaluated at a high level (according to the Harrington scale evaluation criterion, the "High" value starts from 0.64–0.80).

The summarized results from the expert survey on the reliability of selected documents are as follows: out of 25 proposals that were sent to experts, 21 completed questionnaires were returned. This indicates a good response rate from the experts. The survey revealed that the average reliability score assigned to statistical data within the documents was 0.81 points. This suggests that the statistical data is considered highly reliable. On the other hand, the average reliability score for analytical data was 0.69 points. This lower score implies that, although the analytical data is deemed reliable, it may not be viewed as robustly as the statistical data. These findings provide a snapshot of the experts' assessments concerning the reliability of both statistical and analytical data in the documents evaluated.

According to sociological surveys (Uskembraeva et al., 2016), most people in Kazakhstan believe women should necessarily participate in politics, although 22.7% believe they should not, and 19.0% do not have their own opinion on this issue. The region of residence also influences attitudes to women's involvement in politics. Residents of megacities (69.2% in Astana and 63.25% in Almaty) are more tolerant of women's political activity than residents of provincial cities. Meanwhile, women themselves are more confident in the need for women's participation in politics (64.5%) than men (49.3%).

Of note are also age differences. Older respondents (45–60 years old) are more convinced of the importance of women's participation in politics than other age groups (73.2%). It is noteworthy that young people (18–30 years old) are most confident that women have no place in politics (26.8%). Among the representatives of the oldest age group (over 60 years old), the greatest number (34.8%) doubt the need for women's political participation.

Representatives of Russian nationality are more inclined to agree with women's engagement in politics (67%) than Kazakh (56.5%) and other nationalities (51%). Among those who advocate for women's presence in politics, 39.5% believe it will make the state's social policy more effective, and 32.6% consider women more informed about pressing social problems. Notably, 43% of women believe that "women are needed in politics because they are more cunning and resourceful than men." At the same time, 38.2% of men are convinced that the social policy of the state is more effective when women participate in politics.

Among those who have a negative attitude to women's political activity, 14.4% consider it impossible because of the incompatibility of this occupation with family and motherhood; 9.4% believe that politics is too complicated for women; 6% think that "politics is the men's domain."

The sociological survey results thus demonstrate the overly traditionalist attitudes of Kazakhstani citizens regarding the possibility of women's

participation in politics. The results of analysis of materials on the representation of the image of modern women in advertising also confirm that mass media most often offer depictions of women in stereotypical roles. This not only reinforces traditional gender norms but also emphasizes the prevailing societal perception that women have primary responsibility for the domestic and emotional aspects of life (Table 4).

Table 4

Representation of the Image of a Modern Woman in Advertisements, Depending on the Type of Advertising Content

Advertising context type	Number of advertising materials, pcs.	
	The year 2016	The year 2022
Politics and governance	23	49
Professional direction (business, labor relations)	48	67
Housekeeping	214	198
Healthcare	57	61
Education, culture, tourism, sports	74	81
Service industry	147	138
Total	563	594

It can be stated that the portrayal of women in advertising in Kazakhstani media predominantly revolves around a limited set of social roles and functions. That is, advertising in electronic media reproduces the traditional version of the gender order as the dominant one. These are often the upbringing, educational, and family roles and functions, as well as the role of a consumer of goods and services. In addition, women are depicted as experts in social matters, persons emotionally engaged in public or personal events, as well as mothers and guardians of the hearth (Kabzhaliyeva, 2023).

For a comprehensive analysis of the figurative characteristics of women in advertising, the visual materials presented in the online media advertising messages under study should be noted. This attention owes to the fact that the visual presentation of information is one of the most impactful ways to influence the audience’s perception (Belkovskii & Savinova, 2017). The distribution of visual images of women in advertising by spheres of employment confirms the previously derived trend. In general, across all the considered female images in advertising, about a third refer to the household sphere, about as much relate to the service industry, around a quarter are connected with culture, education, tourism, and sports, and other areas of women’s employment are represented insignificantly (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1*The Image of a Woman in Education Advertising**Note. Source: Dostizheniia studentov (n.d.).***Figure 2***The Image of a Woman in Household Advertising**Note. Source: Samsung Kazakhstan (2019).*

On the other hand, our findings point to a gradual transformation of the image of women in advertisements. In particular, the presence of women in political advertising has more than doubled (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Women in Political Advertising



Note. Source: Partia "Ak zhol" (2019).

An important aspect in recording the advertising images of women in the media is the context in which they are mentioned regardless of affiliation to one or another social sphere (Table 5). The context points not so much to the formal affiliation of characters with a certain sphere, as to the semantic and, to some extent, stylistic features of their presentation (Pashinian, 2012). For each sphere of activity, we have specified the following main contexts:

- business—if the advertising character is depicted in any sphere in connection with professional work or performing their job responsibilities;
- household, leisure—the advertising character is portrayed out of work and out of any important business, or in connection with purely domestic, communal matters;
- the context of public participation applies to advertisements covering some active public actions, expressing and defending one's positions on improving public life, etc.

It is important to note that contexts are not strictly distinct meaning categories and can well intersect or overlap. Therefore, the same character in each reference may be presented in different contexts or may not fall into any of the above-mentioned ones. Overall, female characters are portrayed in online media advertising mainly in the household and leisure contexts.

Table 5

Representation of the Image of a Modern Woman in Advertisements, Depending on the Type of Media Context

Media context	Number of advertising materials, pcs.	
	The year 2016	The year 2022
Business	43	125
Production	68	77
Household	228	231
Leisure	217	201
Public participation	38	94
Material context	17	18

At the same time, there has been a significant rise in the image of a modern woman in the business context, presented, first and foremost, as a structural-status unit participating in social production and meaningful professional and labor activity. In this way, Internet advertising shows a gradual transformation of the female image. The image of a working woman is gaining importance. However, the focus of specific publications stimulates their saturation with other parity images. For example, the context of public participation of women is clearly presented in social advertising on the website NUR.KZ with high shares of public context.

To summarize the research results, we conclude that advertisers prefer to place photos of cultural and sports stars and women in non-production settings in advertising messages. That is, the world of culture and recreation is seen in advertising as more acceptable for the visual portrayal of women to their audiences.

An important characteristic of women's visual images in advertising is their age. This factor majorly differentiates female images. Overall, more than half of all women's images in advertising are young women (57%), which is far beyond the share of mature (36%) and older women (7%). The obtained data evidence that advertisements most often use the images of young women, meaning that this figure is believed by advertisers to be the most attractive to the audience.

The peculiarities of reference to the image of women in advertising in electronic publications are summarized as follows. In terms of frequency, young women in advertising are most often found in "Culture," "Household," and "Sports" settings, while mature women are presented in "Culture" and "Household" contexts, and older women are presented in the "Household."

Discussion

In this study, we sought to determine whether there are only traces of gender stereotyping in Kazakhstani media, whether it is fully manifested here, or whether the publications studied show a clear focus on overcoming gender stereotyping.

We conclude that the roles and situational contexts, in which women are predominantly shown in advertising, can be categorized as follows:

- inclusion in “serious affairs,” i.e., advertising images of women actively engaged in “serious” affairs and proud of the fact that they succeed in something are presented;
- a woman as a guardian of the hearth, who is not so much a high professional as a hostess who helps in difficult moments and heals and restores the human soul.

Thus, our research findings suggest that female role stereotypes are gradually blurring and being supplemented with new advertising images, e.g., women’s participation and presence in politics, production, and everyday life, as well as in the context of public participation. Although the most traditional image of a woman in advertising remains to be that in the household associated with the context of home, family, and children, as corroborated by Naisbaeva (2017).

Our findings align with the conclusions of Beisenova and Imambaeva (2016) noting that in most cases, Kazakh advertisements portray the man as a successful businessman, specialist, leader, and the head of the family, while the woman is depicted as a happy housewife, model, or subordinate worker. In addition, the images of women are used predominantly to advertise cleaning products, laundry detergents, hair care products, and dairy products. The constant depiction of women in a household setting is supported by the findings of Ward and Grower (2020), which show that despite all the achievements, household roles continue to be the common topic for women in media narratives across cultures.

In our view, gender stereotypes in advertising have a particularly destructive impact on young audiences with unstable opinions and underdeveloped personal viewpoints. This belief is shared by Santoniccolo et al. (2023) who stress the importance of early media coverage in the establishment of children’s perceptions of and attitudes to gender roles. The researchers argue that the inability of such a young audience to have critical thinking or awareness of the ambiguity of reality makes it more receptive to information. For this reason, the media literacy programs are becoming more essential. For example, programs that address gender inequality and the misrepresentation of women in the media are beginning to emerge. Such programs help people to analyze media messages instead of passively consuming content and potentially receiving misinformation, enabling them to identify gender stereotypes.

Nevertheless, women remain the primary object of gender discrimination associated with gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes have a detrimental effect on women’s position in society and limit their opportunities. This ultimately leads women to experience social discontent and curbs their involvement in the development of effective economic and political models of the country’s governance and development. Nonetheless, political, economic, and social initiatives facilitate the development of democratic institutions, along with a higher level of culture and tolerance in society (Hu & Lee, 2018; Podobnik et al., 2019).

The importance of rejecting gender stereotypes in advertising is reaffirmed by existing international standards. In particular, the Recommendation on Gender Equality and the Media adopted in 2013 by Council of Europe declares gender equality

a prerequisite for achieving social justice and true democracy (Council of Europe, 2013). Media representatives are offered recommendations on the creation of internal self-regulation and oversight mechanisms for media market players, as well as on the adoption of an ethical code and media coverage standards to promote gender equality and prevent the distribution of gender discrimination content, as well as the objectification and stereotypical images of women and men in advertising.

As of today, the negative impact of gender stereotypes is also acknowledged by some transnational companies. For instance, one of the largest consumer goods producers in the world, Unilever¹⁵, after a series of studies, has decided to refrain from using stereotypical images of men and women in promoting their products. Furthermore, in the summer of 2017, Unilever, in partnership with UN Women, and with the support of other industry leaders, announced the creation of the Unstereotype Alliance. The leading goal of the Alliance is to bring about positive cultural change through realistic and non-stereotypical depictions of women and men in advertising (Unilever, 2017).

Conclusion

The conducted study of the representation of women's image in the modern media space of Kazakhstan offers the following conclusions. It is important to note that despite the major changes that today's media space of Kazakhstan is undergoing considering globalization processes, the struggle for gender equality, and so on, advertising still preserves traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, a positive shift is observed in the increasing representation of women in such spheres as politics and production, which reflects the growing recognition of women's contribution beyond traditional gender boundaries.

Despite the influential role these achievements have in the creation of the image of a woman, research stresses the urgency of eliminating the leading gender biases that continue to shape media narratives.

The novelty of the study lies in its specific focus on the evolving portrayal of women in the media landscape of Kazakhstan, a relatively underexplored area in gender studies. It integrates the impact of globalization, feminism, and technological advances on this transformation, offering a unique perspective that combines sociological surveys and analysis of advertising materials.

The study on the transformation of women's roles in Kazakhstani media offers significant theoretical implications across various academic disciplines. It enhances gender studies by providing a unique regional perspective, contributing to a more global understanding of women's evolving roles. In media representation theory, the study sheds light on how different cultural contexts influence the portrayal of women in media, thereby affecting societal perceptions and gender norms.

The research underscores the importance of intersectionality, emphasizing how factors like culture, religion, and socio-economic status interplay in media

¹⁵ Unilever® is a trademark of Conopco, Inc. <https://www.unilever.com>

representations. This aspect is particularly relevant for understanding the complex dynamics of gender portrayal.

With the ongoing development of Kazakhstan, promoting media literacy and cooperation with international organizations is becoming an important strategy. Offering people, especially the younger generation, tools for critical analysis of mass media messages and developing social support programs can help foster a generation of insightful consumers less susceptible to the preservation of stereotypes.

Thus, while providing people, especially the younger generation, with tools to critically analyze media messages along with developing social support programs can help foster a generation of discerning consumers who are less susceptible to perpetuating stereotypes.

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