

Media Research Assignment 4: Content Analysis

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Assignment 4:

Content Analysis of Television Car Commercials

Media Research

New York Institute of Technology

Submitted By:

Group C

## Media Research Assignment 4: Content Analysis

### Abstract

A content analysis was conducted to determine the existence of gender bias and stereotypes in car commercials aired on television during prime time viewing. The results of our content analysis demonstrated that gender biases and stereotypes involving roles of males and females as well as age discrimination do exist in prime time television car commercials. These stereotypes were found to exist with all manufacturers of cars and across both cable and network channels.

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Goal: To determine if gender stereotypes exist in automobile commercials.

Rationale: Automobile manufacturers invest billions of dollars each year on television advertising. These figures suggest that advertising on television is a dominant medium which is capable of influencing people's attitudes and choices about which car to purchase. Advertisers use a particular path of influence depending on their target audience.

### Literature Review

Car makers go to surprising lengths to turn the heads of potential customers. Major manufacturers are making a major play for female buyers and although their tools to attract women may be stereotypical or even patronizing, it is clear that more and more women are making the buying decisions and automakers, realizing the fact, are aggressively courting them.

According to automotive market research firms R.L. Polk and J.D. Power, roughly a third of new car sales contracts and registrations have a woman's signature at the bottom. Another third of new car purchases are made by men on behalf of women (wives, mothers, girlfriends) who will be doing the actual driving. According to Road and Travel, even when men buy a set new car for

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themselves, they will consult with one or more of the women in their lives about the purchase 90 percent of the time. (Voight, 2006)

The buying power of women has grown over the last five years and automakers are capitalizing on it. According to national statistics, women account for 80 percent of vehicle purchases. Auto-makers are trying to make vehicles more appealing to women while at the same time not turning off men. Women are being sought after by automakers that are creating special features in the latest cars to appeal to women, from the vehicle's style to its color to extra interior space, certain features are attractive to women and car manufacturers are reaching out more to that market. Automakers are doing so without ignoring male consumers. (Moore, 2007)

Researchers in the United States have been interested in the portrayal of men and women in television commercials for over 25 years. Studies conducted over a 15-year period found men and women appeared equally often as central characters but that 90% of all narrators were male. Fewer females were depicted as employed, while women were still more likely than men to be seen in domestic settings, advertising products in the home. Women were more likely to have a dependent role (53%) compared to men (27%)  
Professional roles were more

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often presented by men (21%) than women (11%) and males were more likely to be portrayed as celebrities and professionals while females as interviewer/demonstrator, parent/spouse, or sex object/model in daytime television. Males were less likely than females to be portrayed as spouse or parent. (Furnham & Moore, 1999)

When people are processing advertising messages, congruency between product image and both real and ideal self image can affect their responses to a brand. Individuals with different levels of masculinity formulated brand judgments in divergent ways; specifically, only individuals high on masculinity took product function beliefs into account when they evaluated products. (Chang, 2006)

### Content Analysis

Content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw

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inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998).

For this assignment our sample was limited to prime time and weekend automobile television commercials. To get a fair representation of advertisements, all car manufacturers were included. Each group analyzed the commercials appearing on a pre-assigned channel. Major networks and cable channels were included. The group member then analyzed the commercials according to the following six coding categories:

- **Gender:** Male/Female
- **Role:** parent (mother/father), professional (any type of working condition), narrator, student.
- **Location:** showroom, home, highway, rugged outdoors.
- **Age:** younger than 25, 25-35, 36-50, over 50
- **Argument for Purchasing Car:** safety, economy, status, speed

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Data:

Data was collected by observing car commercials during prime time viewing (8-11PM) on network and cable channels. A total of forty commercials were observed from car manufacturers that included the following: Toyota, Dodge, Lincoln Mercury, Mercedes Benz, BMW, Lexus, Honda and Chevrolet. The commercials were observed on CBS, NBC, Fox, CNN and the SciFi channel.

The data was collected and coded using the following matrix:

Observer's matrix example:

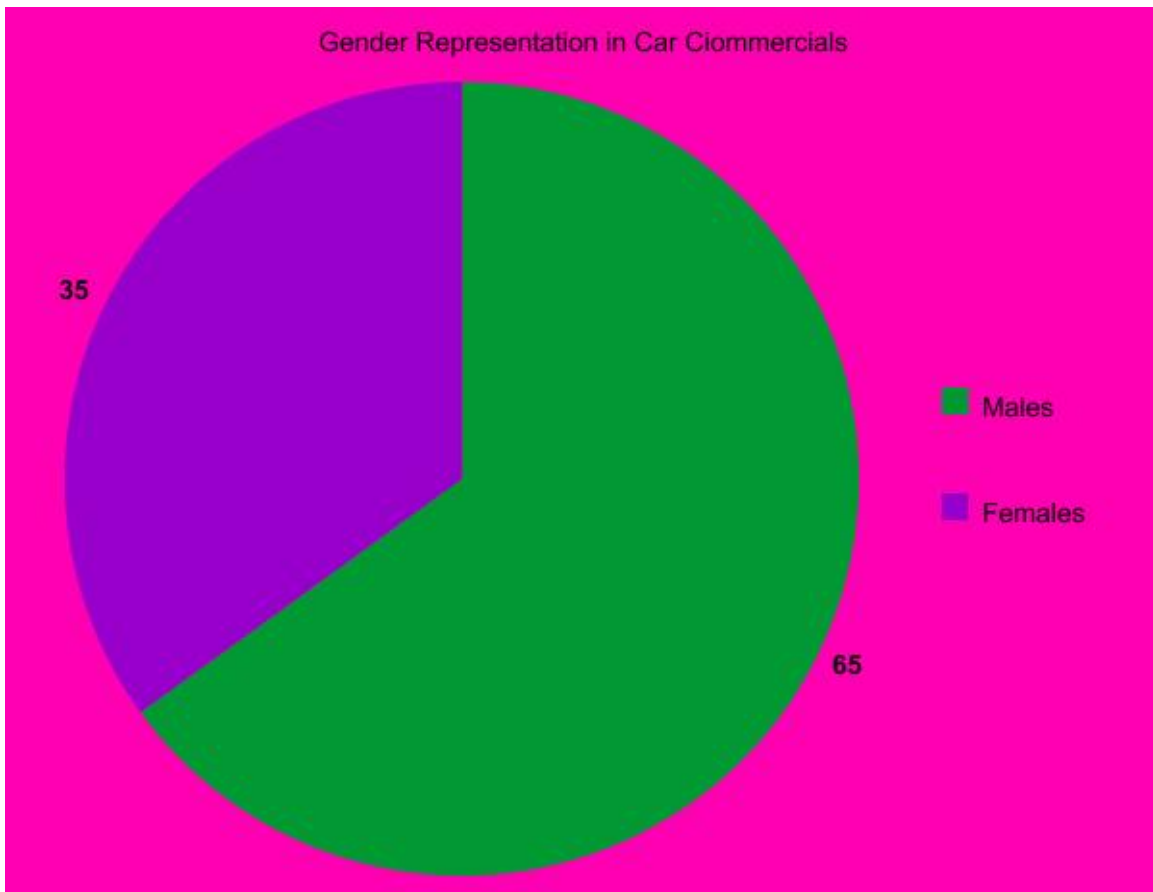
Indicate Channel

Check appropriate box

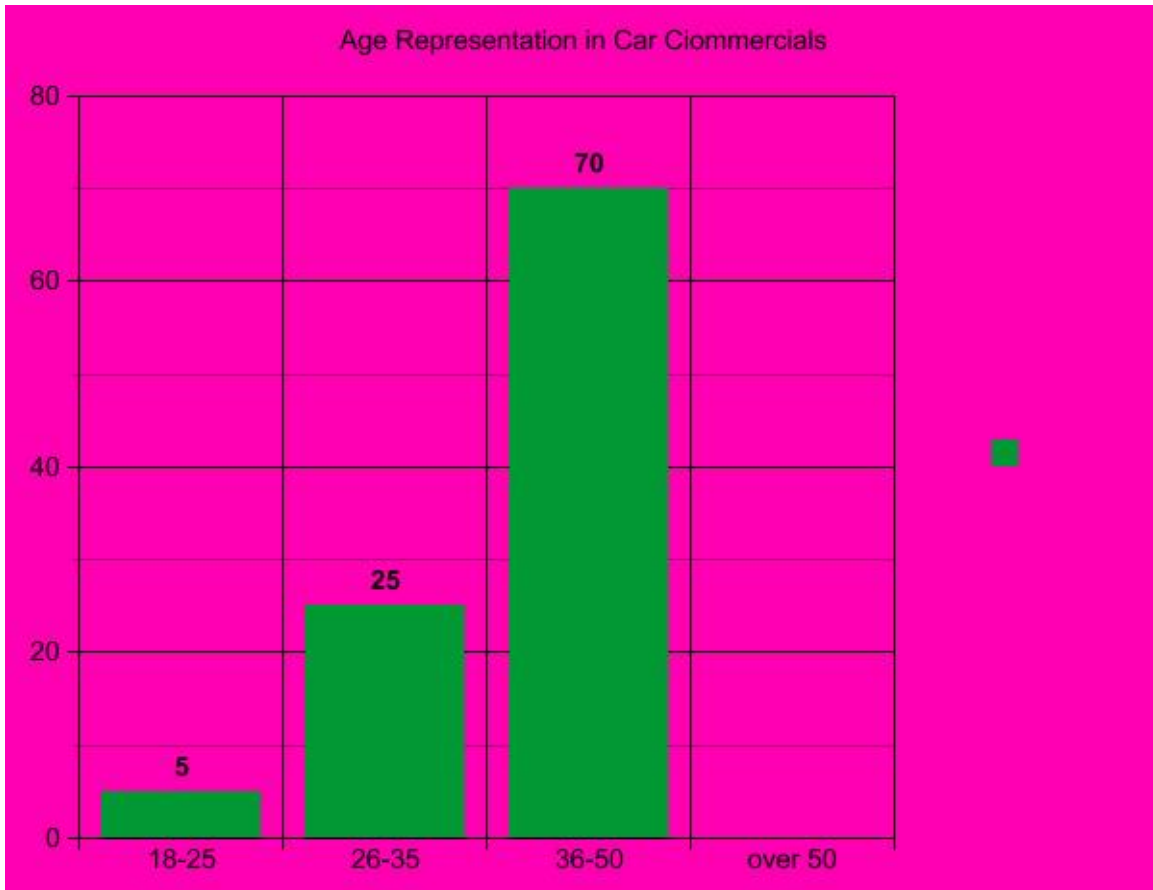
Gender	male	female		
Role	Homemaker	Working/professional	Student	Parent(mother or father)
Location	Showroom	Home or neighborhood	highway	Rugged outdoors
Age	18-25	25-35	35-65	Over 65
Argument/reason for purchase	Safety/security	economy	status	speed

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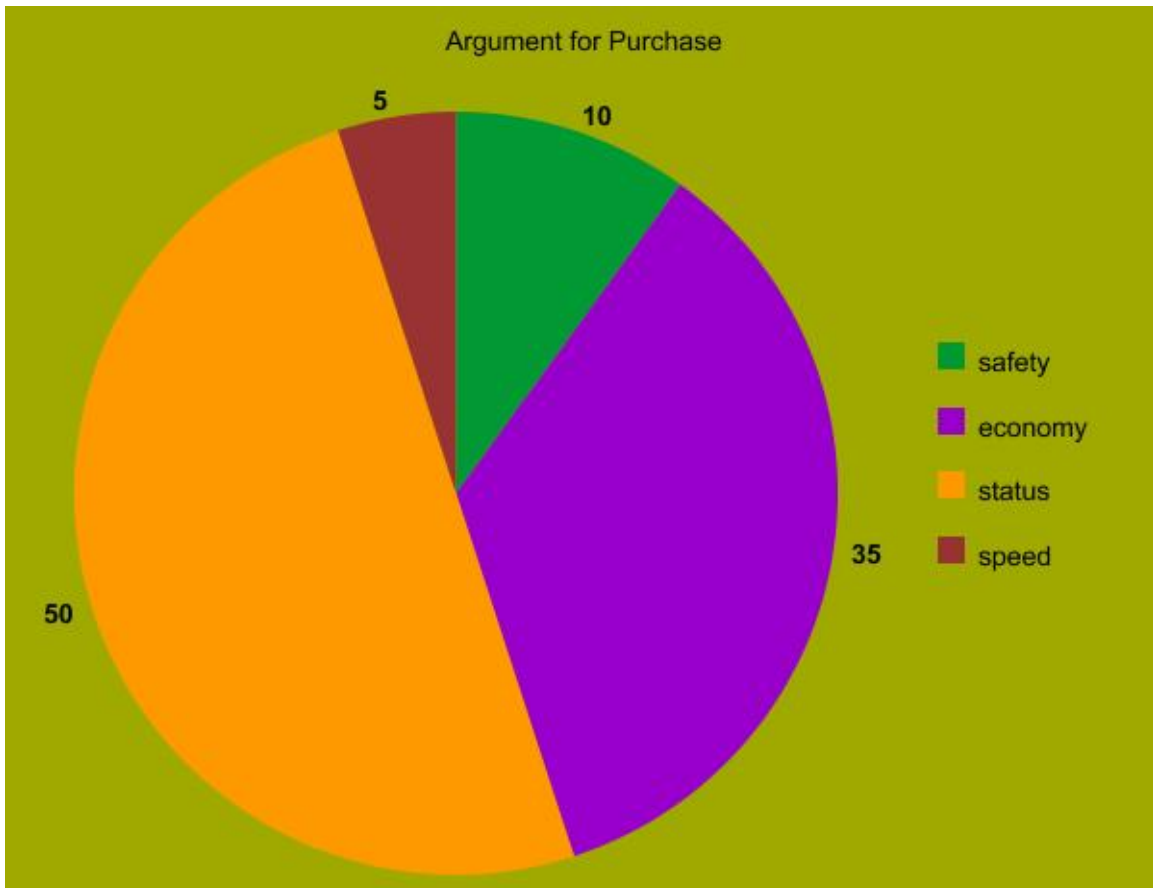
Analysis of Data:



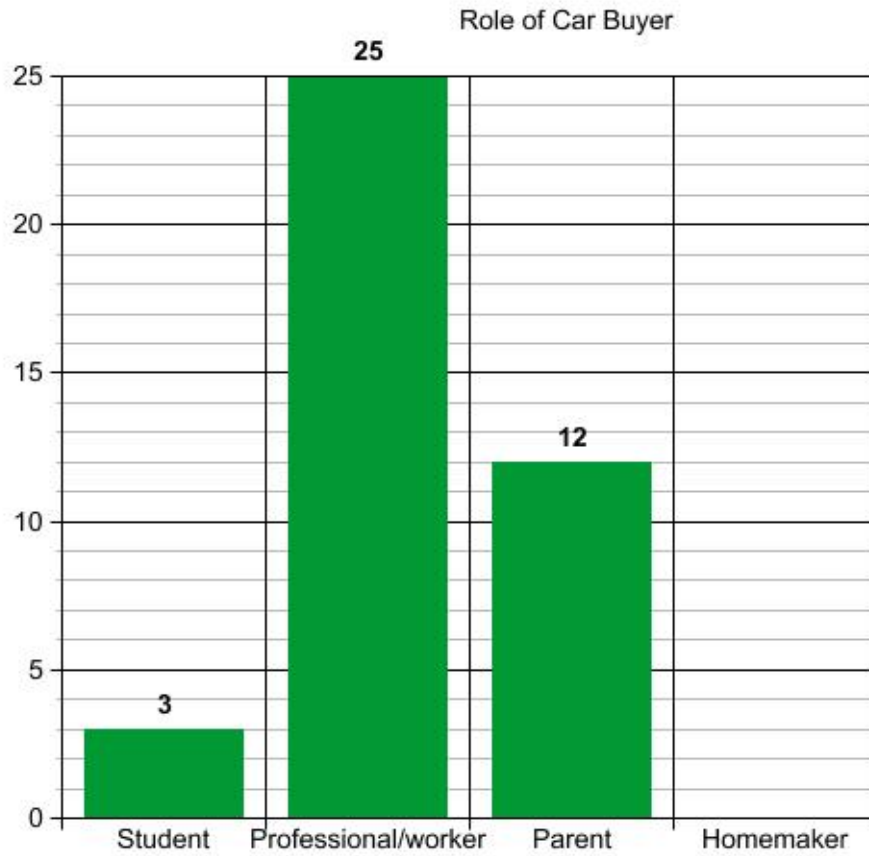
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### Discussion of Data:

Gender stereotypes still pervade the advertising industry. The findings of the present study indicate that television commercials may be more irrelevant to female consumers today than they were 20 years ago because their characters are so out of date. It should not be necessary to persuade advertisers to be socially responsible and avoid

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inaccurate characterizations of women and girls. This fact is undeniable: Women are better target market prospects for most products that are purchased.

It seems that advertisers are content to forget financially mature potential customers who have more than 25 years to spend money on themselves and their families. The lack of older women and men in the commercials was consistent with the findings of other researchers, but contradictory to the U.S. Census (2000) numbers. Women over the age of 50 years were the most ignored target market prospects in the prime time viewing audience.

Commercials must be relevant to a potential consumer's everyday lifestyle to be effective, and a good way to be relevant is to show television commercial characters interacting with the product that are similar to the target market prospects. The commercials we analyzed did not accurately reflect those who do the shopping and make the purchasing decisions in the real world.

Our data showed that gender representation in automobile commercials was disproportionate in favor of men, 36-50 years of age. In addition to the overwhelming majority of male drivers, we also found that the gender of the voiceover in these commercials was almost exclusively male. Although one interpretation is that this gender discrepancy reflects gender bias in the advertising industry; we believe that this finding suggests that males, 36-50, are the demographic group targeted in these commercials.

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Women were typically seen in supporting roles and homemakers were not represented in any of the observed commercials. When a parent was a portrayed role, it was typically male.

Our content analysis did demonstrate that women are not represented equally as the primary purchasers in car commercials. Most commercials were aimed at a male audience, 36- 50 years of age with status being the main argument for the purchase. The home or neighborhood was most frequently identified as the location but women were also not well represented in these locations. Individuals Over 50 were not represented in any of the commercials observed.

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