

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PRESERVING THE ROMANIAN IDENTITY IN LOCAL ADVERTISING

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Abstract:

The following paper intends to reveal the involvement of women into coining efficient communication campaigns for different product categories promoted on the Romanian market. Product consumption explicitly depends on target interests and social integration considering its division into two directions according to age groups (the old generation and the young, "new media generation") after the 1989 Revolution. Our main purpose consists in identifying female profiles in Romanian advertising starting from Geert Hofstede's theory. He created a five-dimension model (power distance, individualism/collectivism, gender of nations, uncertainty avoidance, long/short-term orientation) of national culture, by analyzing local and global brands, on the one hand, and different product categories (dairy, coffee and chocolate, drugs, banks and insurance, mobile phones, home appliances), on the other.

This paper will apply the content analysis method, whose purpose is to reveal the Romanian identity promoted by the female characters of at least 50 TV commercials. In order to get a wealth of information, this study focuses on important aspects such as tradition, independence vs. involvement in family responsibilities, authority vs. subordination, living environment (city or countryside), as well as relationships with men and children. At the end of this research, we expect to reach two important goals. The first one is to establish a relationship between product categories, local identity, and the Romanian target, which is still in transition after the Anti-Communist Revolution. As for the second goal, we hope to discover some female patterns which are very well exploited in Romanian advertising based on cultural and social background. The hypothesis that strongly supports this research is that women have an essential role in preserving local identity, appealing to the Romanian consumer in commercials created especially for them.

Keywords: women, advertising, profiles, identity, Romanian market.

Introduction

The present paper is concerned with the relationship between women and national identity, which is often visible in the advertising field because consumers project their image on products and preserve brand retention. We strongly believe this article is equally important for advertising and gender studies, because the sample belongs to the first category, while female role is an issue under constant investigation. This research is essential for gender studies from several points of view, such as associating women with the Romanian local identity, recognizing female involvement in preserving the Romanian roots and understanding the reason why they are so frequently present in commercials, regardless of brand or product categories. The main purpose of this study is to create a connection between product features and Romanian female identity. The second goal is to find an advertising profile of the Romanian woman, based on their involvement in family and social life. Our starting point focuses on the simple idea that the role of women is more relevant in local commercials in comparison to the role of men, because of family portrayals social responsibilities and female power.

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The best way to reach all these research goals is to analyze aspects such as tradition, independence vs. involvement in family responsibility, authority vs. subordination, living environment, as well as relationship with men and children, by applying content analysis. The second step is to check the validity of Geert Hofstede's theory, which presupposes to identify the features of five-dimension models of the Romanian national culture in local advertising and the role of women in each case.

The role of women in promoting brand values is tightly connected to stereotypes, sexuality, and representations of male-female relationships. Erving Goffmann (1979) is one of the researchers who believed that gender relationships are socially constructed and that women are presented in ads as weak and sensitive. He developed several codes of understanding female semiotics in ads. Lindner² also states that since the 1950s there has been a shift in the depiction of women in advertising. Women are less often portrayed in traditional roles as housewife or mother and more often in professional roles. A contemporary researcher, Tom Reichert³ wrote a very inspired book of advertising history, based on the feminist evolution. Analyzing the image of femininity over the ages, he concluded that advertising paid more attention to some categories, such as fragrances, coffee, travel agencies, cosmetics, given the connection between the female personality and the features of these products and less to women in connection to national or cultural identity.

2. Content:

2.1. Statistical data about men and women in Romania

Before we start approaching our research hypotheses, it is essential to emphasize the balance between men and women in Romania, according to the statistical data provided by the population censuses, registration from civil register evidence, and other administrative sources collected in 2008 by The National Institute of Statistics⁴. According to quantitative results, population reports showing gender and area prove women are dominant both in cities and in the countryside, with a greater difference margin in the rural area. Therefore, women's presence justifies their involvement in various activities and their role in preserving family values. Another very important issue that helps this paper reach its purpose, is the historically analyzed rate of living in the urban and rural areas. A chart provided by the same survey showed a very steady percentage of people living in cities and in the countryside, between 1990 and 2008. For example, in 1990 45.8% of the Romanian population lived in the urban area, and 54.2 % in villages, while in 2008, 55% of respondents lived in cities and 45% in the countryside. These data highlight the stability of life-styles and a conservative society that does not suddenly change its structure of family and gender roles.

In 2008 and 2009 (before the economic crisis started), The National Institute of Statistics came up with additional data about the population's involvement in economic activities based on gender and living area which proves the male dominance on the market, despite of the fact that men are less represented demographically.

2.2. Theoretical framework

Geert Hofstede carried out a model based on five dimensions of national culture that considerably helps analyze the differences and similarities between cultures: power distance, individualism/collectivism, gender of nations, uncertainty avoidance, long-short-term orientation. Extremely important is that Hofstede validated those two models by analyzing television commercials and print advertisements as a first research method.

² Katharina Lindner, "Images of Women in General Interest and Fashion Magazine Advertisements from 1955 to 2002," *Sex Roles* 51 (2004): 409-420.

³ Tom Reichert, *The Erotic History of Advertising* (New York: Prometheus Book, 2003), 13-19.

⁴ http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/Anuar%20statistic/02/02%20Populatie_ro.pdf, p. 2, accessed January 21st.

Power distance⁵ reveals consumer difference in communication behaviour and the main values promoted in advertising reflect both authority and social status. This research strives to prove that local brands are less powerful, while global ones seem to be independent and influence the former. Global brands bring to light social status in high power distance cultures. The power distance influences not only consumer image within a society, but also brand perception. This concept was interestingly related to other research terms such as cultural paradox, values, and authority, by other researchers over the years. “Authority” and “celebrity” are keywords that help define power distance as the degree of understanding life differences between the powerful and the less fortunate.

The model of individualism versus collectivism⁶ debates the relationship between cultures individually focused on their values as well as cultures preoccupied by social integration and harmony. In the first case, people are concerned with being unique by relying on themselves. Obviously, in terms of advertising, individual culture rejects global brands more than the collectivistic one, considering that consumers are more connected with their local context. Thus, the other side of the coin involves accepting and adapting to the universal brand image while understanding the common values.

The third model approaches the so-called “gender of nations”, which is very well related to the successful societies, to the winner profile and his or her mentality. This brings to light the specificity of any nation either oriented to masculinity or femininity. Given this perspective, gender roles are clearly defined and consumption depends on society dynamics. We do believe this model reflects the relevance of some product categories connected with lifestyles and specific consumer behaviour. There are societies in which the household is more important than professional performance and femininity plays the main role -considering family a priority- whereas male-oriented societies are meant to focus on success, lots of work, and less affectivity. Advertising analyzes this balance and appeals to consumers relying on this overview of the gender nations, which is very difficult to change over the years.⁷

The next model developed by Hofstede is called “uncertainty avoidance” and refers to the way people accept and adopt innovation, and are not afraid of ambiguity and unexpected situations.⁸ A society led by strict rules prefers stereotypes and likes to follow old customs, and, for this reason, either global brands adapt to its values, or local values become more important. On the other hand, a society, which is very open to changes and media innovation does not discriminate brands, and advertising uses synergetic strategies to promote them. Long-/short-term orientation explains differences in using certain product categories and considering them a consumerist or spiritual/abstract culture. For the long-term orientation culture, pragmatism and perseverance are vital and people are mainly preoccupied by concrete sciences. For the short-term orientation culture, tradition, popular culture, and folk wisdom top of their preferences.

Hofstede’s theory had a great impact and was improved in 1996 by adding another 15 West European countries. Consequently, it concluded that many research topics could be influenced and developed according to it. Based on this theory, we chose to apply these models on our quantitative data to get a profile of the Romanian women, in terms of studying specificity and the relationship between local and global features.

Besides this theory, another aspect that immediately deserves more attention is the concept of identity with the double advertising meaning of brand image and local identity. Advertising creates a synergy between these two perspectives, considering local brands are oriented towards national identity. Therefore, a certain brand reputation reflected a certain country image and no confusion was

⁵ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 60-64.

⁶ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures*, 90-99.

⁷ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures*, 137-146.

⁸ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures*, 187-190.

possible. Meanwhile, advertising became a channel to communicate similar values by buying and using the same brands. Dealing with conceptualizing national identity, Anderson (1991) argues that nations are “imagined communities,” and we believe advertising encourages the construction and deconstruction of identities. Actually, he said that “communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”⁹ Commercials create real consumers’ communities relying on product features and they build an imagined consumerist world.

The relationship between women and men has very often been approached by researchers during the last few decades, and their findings highlight various female roles, such as: *housewife, decorative elements, sex objects*, and *someone reliant on men*¹⁰ (Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, 1990); *housewives, someone concerned with physical attractiveness, sex objects, the career women*, and the *neutral women*; (the *alluring object of sexual gratification*)¹¹ (Mayne, 2000); and *erotic and suggestive stimuli* (Henthorne and LaTour, 1995)¹². Those roles are very well connected to social behaviour and emotional involvement, but not with cultural implications. In terms of globalization, these models are available everywhere, but differences arise from local identity. Most of research was carried out in the American world, where the image of women changed quickly. Definitely, local identity has a huge influence on the female image promoted by advertising.

2.3. Research sample and method

The main corpus of our research consists of 50 TV commercials broadcast on the Romanian market and completely dedicated to local brands. The selection was made according to several criteria which are very important for the purposes of the present study. First, there are various product categories that may receive more credibility by emphasizing the local identity. Second, ads had to include a female hero to identify one of the possible roles in preserving Romanian identity in local advertising. Third, we tried to strike a balance between older commercials (created after the 1989 Revolution) and new ones because we believe the image of femininity progressively changed. Fourth, it was essential to select commercials where women were presented in relation to men and children, basically in slice- of- life setting, not testimonials or simple demonstration. Therefore, our sample consists of only 50 ads, because all these criteria involved had to be achieved simultaneously.

The following table briefly presents the product categories and brands involved in this study:

Nr.	Product categories	Brands	Number of ads
	Phones and Communication	Romtelecom	3
	Alcoholic drinks (beer and wine)	Bucegi, Timișoreana, Murfatlar	4
	Non-alcoholic drinks	Giusto, Adria	2
	Mineral water	Izvorul Minunilor, Biborțeni	2
	Cars	Dacia	3
	Dairy	Napolact, Covalact	4
	Chocolate and cookies	Rom, Măgura	5
	Banks	CEC, Banca Transilvania	2
	Cooking oil	Untdelemn de la Bunica, Floriol	4
	Detergent	Dero	2

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. A Brilliant Exegesis on Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

¹⁰ Jill Hicks Ferguson, Peggy J. Kreshel and Spencer F. Tinkham. "In the Pages of Ms.: Sex Role Portrayals of Women in Advertising." *Journal of Advertising* (19,1990): 48.

¹¹ Iris Mayne, "The Inescapable Image: Gender and Advertising.", *Equal Opportunities International* (19, 2000):57.

¹² Tony L. Henthorne and Michael LaTour, "A Model to Explore the Ethics of Erotic Stimuli in Print Advertising." *Journal of Business Ethics* (14, 1995): 562 - 563.

	Medicines and pharmacy	Carmol, Catena	2
	Home appliances (Electronics)	Arctic, Altex	4
	Bakery products	Boromir, Pretzel of Buzău (Covrigii de Buzău)	2
	Meat products (paté)	Pate de Sibiu, Pate Ardealul, Cris-tim	4
	Media	Antena 1, Adevărul	2
	Cosmetics	Gerovital, Farmec	2
	Retail Construction	Dedeman	2
	Petrol	Petrom	1

Content analysis was the method we choose to provide quantitative data. The data were further developed in a qualitative manner based on the main goals of this research. The quantitative analysis was carried on according to the following variables, which can very well be understood by answering the following questions:

What is the living environment of women involved in the commercial message?

What kind of responsibilities do women who appeared in the selected ads have?

What is the relationship between women and men and/or children?

What is the balance between authority and subordination in women' relationship to men and/or children during the commercials?

What is the balance between individualism and collectivism regarding the values encouraged by the women presented in these commercials?

What do women strive for -innovation or tradition?

2.4. Findings

What is the living environment of women involved in the commercial message?

Analyzing the living area where women play their roles involves more than making a distinction between rural and urban environment, and implies discovering a connection between products and the female profile. In this case, the urban background represents the main direction of 29 commercials in comparison with only 9 ads shot in the countryside. Only two examples describe women acting in both the urban and rural environment, which reveals that this issue is less important for female profiles. These three categories were easily identified, given the visual background and several aspects of women's lifestyles. Additionally, ads show women only in their domestic environment, preoccupied by family and specific activities. The last living area is not significant for the role of women, considering the entire plot fantasy, and the character is an Empress. Before jumping to the next quantitative issue, we may conclude that the urban environment emphasizes the role of women in preserving local identity more than the rural one. This result cannot be contested or considered irrelevant because the product categories (18) involved in this research are very diverse and are not directly linked to femininity.

2.4.2. What kind of responsibilities do women who appeared in the selected ads have?

Looking for the main responsibilities of female heroes in the selected sample, we discovered a various palette of activities, which proves that gender stereotypes have been already outbalanced or at least ignored. The following table highlights this variety and offers a complete overview on this issue by using general words that synthesize women responsibilities according to different criteria such as family status, lifestyles, beauty patterns, relationships, main activities.

No.	Responsibilities	Number of ads
	Household (specifically mother and wife)	24
	Good professionals or ex-professionals	8
	Girl-friend	5
	Storyteller-Granny	4
	Sexual object and “decorative” women	3
	Friends and colleagues	2
	Multiple responsibilities	1
	“Shopping” girl	1
	“Party-girl”	1
	Empress	1

Women as wives and mothers are at the top of this list, which is quite usual for any country and identity in the world. Obviously, this top should be connected with product categories to have some relevance for this research. Therefore, we noticed female household responsibility was used in ads created for phones, cars, dairy, chocolate, oil and meat products, a fact that helps recognize the role of women in creating a brand image. Seductive and so-called “decorative” women emphasize men’s power in commercials dedicated to wine, cars and chocolate. There exists an association between product qualities and the female image, a strategy of coining the message based on irresistible attraction. In one of the TV ads for Dacia, three women follow a car (Dacia) driven by an alluring man, who tries to get home to his family. The final message is “Girls, he’s taken” referring to the man’s wife. This commercial shows a change of roles: the guy represents the attraction for women, and the car is a way to get home faster and escape temptation. To sum up, this issue regarding responsibilities points out the implication of women in the family and at professional level, regardless of product category or brand.

What is the relationship between women and men and/or children?

Going further, the previous conclusion implies finding out the specificity of female behavior in relation to men or children. The results are quite simple here, since there are only three possibilities revealed by the analysis: the aggressive (conflicting) relationship, the amiable one, and the undecided attitude towards people. In 28 ads of the entire sample the behavior is non-conflicting, (in 18 commercials this attitude has been noticed as directed towards men, while in 9 situations it is directed towards children and only in one case towards other women). The conflicts are oriented towards men in 18 ads for different reasons such as family disagreements, excess of authority, different perspective on the relationship between tradition and innovation. Only in 4 situations women do not clearly express their attitude, either be it friendly or dominant and aggressive. What is really interesting here is that gender conflicts arise either from family tension (the classic dispute between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, for example), or men’s incapacity to make their wives or girlfriends happy. Obviously, these findings on conflicting or amiable relationships are strongly connected with the Romanian perspective on sharing responsibilities inside the home.

2.4.4. What is the balance between authority and subordination in women’ relationship to men and/or children during the commercials?

The previous issue can definitely be explained by finding out the balance between authority and subordination in relationships in which women are involved in. According to the quantitative data provided by our sample, authority belongs to women 33 situations, while men have total control of decisions and women in less ads, 15. The rest of commercials share authority and do not emphasize anyone’s dominance. Returning to Hofstede’s theory on “gender nations”, there is no doubt that we deal with a women-oriented society and advertising highlights this dimension of

consumption, which is practically dominated by concern for the family and children and less for professional performance. Even if the sample is not bigger, selection criteria make these findings relevant, given the image of local brands, on the one hand, and the involvement of women in family and society, on the other hand. Female authority in Romanian commercials may be associated with a global trend, which consists in considering women very good consumers, decision –makers in the family and organizers of the family budget. Martha Barletta began her book evaluating the female power on the market by writing, “Women are the world’s powerful consumers. They are the big spenders, whether we are talking about households, corporate purchasing or small business”¹³. Romanian women are greatly concerned about their family, being more conservative and traditional, and, for this reason, commercials broadcast on the local market for local brands emphasize their identity regardless of the product. They do not spend money on themselves so much (except for 2 commercials), but subordinate men by using sensibility and verbal authority.

2.4.5. What is the balance between individualism and collectivism regarding the values encouraged by the women presented in these commercials?

Discussion relying on Hofstede’s theory applied in this research leads present research to another model of communication that regards the relationship between individualism and collectivism in the behavior of women. According to our findings, individualism dominates with 29 registrations, while the collectivist attitude draws the attention in 21 ads. Certainly, women are preoccupied by the local context and do not strive for external values or ignore their social background. Given that their authority is often emphasized, women rely on themselves and do not ask for help. The small difference between these categories could be explained by the glocalization phenomenon and the influence of global brands, which similarly advertized all over the world. In one of the TV ads for national phone provider Romtelecom, a father is a secret agent and travels a lot, being shown in action in many cities (Bucharest, Paris, New York) while risking his life. In the most dangerous situations, his wife calls him and asks him personal questions or to buy small goods. The woman reminds him to buy a Christmas present for their child and milk, as if man were an ordinary employee. At the end of the ad, the entire family is happy, celebrating Christmas in a very traditional way. The female perspective is very individualistic while the man’s job depicts him as a universal James Bond. Whenever the creative idea of the commercial does not focus on domestic responsibilities, the image of woman is universal by acting as any other woman concerned about herself and she is completely out of the local context. Going shopping, emphasizing her beauty, ignoring her family means to reject the local personality and femininity for the sake of global stereotypes. Sometimes the individualistic perspective is woven with the collectivistic one, pointing out the glocalization or hybridization phenomenon.

2.4.6. What do women strive for -innovation or tradition?

The last issue this research aims to find an answer for regards the way women adopt or reject innovation in terms of Hofstede’s theory entitled “uncertainty avoidance”. Here we investigated not only the relationship between tradition and innovation, but we also tried to link this research result with the age of women, considering that a local identity promoted by femininity depends on this criterion as well. The following chart briefly points out these data, highlighting, in our opinion, an unexpected correspondence between age and overview on life:

¹³ Martha Barletta, *Marketing to women: how to increase their share of the world’s largest market* (Chicago, USA: Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2006), xxi.

	Young women	Old women	Middle-aged	Number of ads
Innovation	14	6	9	29
Tradition	11	7	2	20
Innovation and tradition	1	0		1

First, age definitely makes the difference when we speak about tradition or innovation. Young women top both aspects, which is quite unexpected, considering people got used to seeing old people anchored in their past and customs. In this case, young mothers, wives, friends or girl friends prefer tradition, almost as much as they respect it. Regarding the attitude of the old women about innovation, all 6 commercials depict them in a very humorous way, either using modern language (as like in the cooking oil commercial Untdelemn de la Bunica – Granny’s Oil or for Altex- Apgreidin), or acting almost childishly (Altex-Madam Multimedia, Antena 1-The wheel). A retired woman is waiting for her pension surrounded by a computer, and a video- camera to monitor the postman, just to have fun. She is the woman ironically called Madam Multimedia, who invalidates the theory according to which old age always means being conservative and rejecting technology. To sum up, innovation and tradition do not represent real competition between old and young women, because both age-groups choose them sometimes. Expanding the target or making him or her trust the product more involves adopting a conservative or inventive attitude. This proves once again that advertising sometimes goes beyond stereotypes and reconstruct female or male profiles.

2.5. Discussion

The political and social changes permanently determine a reconstruction of the image of women who is disseminated through any kind of media and by any means. Discrimination and feminism are two words which have been dominating research studies and media market for a few decades. These terms fed other concepts like globalization, internationalization and the image of women which began to be universally framed and understood, regardless of local identity. Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross considered that the relationship between the media and women has an important role in understanding femininity in a global or particular way: “The ways in which the media represent the female subject and the experiences of women working in media organizations themselves are the product of a world system of patriarchal capitalism whose globalizing tentacles currently threaten to strangle the fragile flower of change”¹⁴. Advertising is a real medusa, considering it exploits any type of media to promote many products both for women and men by using the female image in a global or local manner. Women could be the target, the creative support and they can positively motivate the men, because of their beauty, as well as responsibility in the household and at professional level. In terms of local identity, these general features are differently perceived or replaced by the specific ones easily recognized by the target.

In our case, this study provides some information about the female profile in local advertising in terms of promoting local products. Women living in the urban area seem to be the main characters in the analyzed commercials, and they are basically presented as housewives (mother and child), despite their age. Women do not unfriendly react towards men or children, in spite of their authority, which is obviously expressed in more than half of the selected commercials. Most women involved in commercials to get the consumers’ attention prefer innovation, regardless of their age, which proves their independence. Similar in number are the female characters who individualistically behave, according to Hofstede’s theory, and preserve one’s native heritage, such as tradition, religious celebrations, family rituals, and relationships. There are small contradictions here, which is not so unexpected in advertising, because women living in the city are innovative and authoritarian

¹⁴ Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross, *Women & Media, a Critical Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 75.

on the one hand, but do not appreciate collective culture, on the other. Collective culture rejects the local context and tries to integrate consumers in a global life-style. Usually, living in an urban area implies being very connected to global features having a job and many other influences.

Therefore, this research helps us identify several female patterns important in preserving the Romanian identity in local advertising:

The young and innovative woman, who also belongs to a family and promotes new changes of society (for example the Romanian integration into the European Union in the ad for Bucegi beer entitled *Bunicul - The Grandfather*).

The young and traditional woman preoccupied by her family and preserving rituals (Murfatlar wine-the dowry).

The old and innovative woman, adapting to contemporary times (Altex campaigns) by using computers, driving a car (even if wheel is ironic in the ad for Antena 1- *The Wheel*)

Middle-aged women, dominative and always in conflict with their husbands because of their lack of skill for domestic activities (Măgura chocolate - *The perfect man*, Adria).

Middle-age women, which are traditional and skilled in preserving the taste of childhood sweets (Napolact).

3. Conclusion

The image of women in Romanian advertising reveals a range of profiles by also using the former criteria (age, tradition vs. innovation, responsibilities). The gap between young and old generation is not substantial, given their ability to adapt to what they need. The traditional perspective represents the main strategy to create campaigns for promoting dairy, bakery products, cold meat products. Revolutionary femininity arises from commercials dedicated to products that are, usually, very quickly upgraded: cars, domestic appliances, media. This apparent contradiction (young vs. old, tradition vs. innovation) points out two important aspects: first, target segmentation implies a proper association between product features and consumer image, and second, the female profile still reflects the transition from communism to capitalism by its conservative attitude combined with accepting new life-style solutions. There is, for sure, a hybridized depiction of women responsible for the family, on the one hand, and professionally involved, on the other hand. Tradition means preserving family responsibilities and considering the woman the origin of all solutions while innovation refers to the new woman who accepts challenges as much as men do.

To sum up, according to Hofstede's theory, individualism defines better femininity than collectivism, the Romanian nation relates more successfully to femininity in advertising than to masculinity, and women adopt innovation regardless of their age and this is sign of the short-orientation culture (based on popular culture, folk wisdom, and tradition). In our opinion, the role of women in preserving Romanian identity in local advertising consists of establishing a balance between past and present and emphasizing the social involvement of local brands in consumer's life. Advertising creates a challenging and nonconventional profile for women, going beyond the stereotypes, such as women in the kitchen, unemployed women, women depicted only as housewives and encouraging the power of femininity in making decisions and buying the best products for their family or themselves. Romanian Advertising does not isolate women from their family or profession by not emphasizing their beauty or sensitivity and passively presenting them. On the contrary, the main features of female portrayals are dynamism and authority, which make them a user or possible user for almost any product.

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