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on Billboards in Suva, Fiji**



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Gender Stereotyping in Outdoor Media: A Pragmatic Perspective on Billboards in Suva, Fiji

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines gender stereotyping in outdoor billboard advertising in Suva, Fiji, through a pragmatic and multimodal analytical lens, focusing on how public advertising normalizes particular gender roles, identities, and power relations.

Methodology: Using a qualitative research design, eight billboard advertisements were purposively selected from high-traffic urban locations and analysed through pragmatic concepts such as implicature, presupposition, and speech acts, alongside Williams' (1978) Representation Theory and Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory.

Findings: The findings indicate that billboard advertising in Suva continues to reproduce traditional gender norms through selective visibility, role allocation, and symbolic positioning, with men predominantly associated with strength, leadership, athleticism, and public authority, while women are frequently positioned as caregivers, service providers, or sexualized visual objects. Even representations that appear progressive often remain anchored in nurturing and domestic expectations, thereby reinforcing culturally embedded gender schemas and patriarchal ideologies.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: By situating pragmatic and multimodal analysis within a Pacific Island context, this study contributes to gender and media scholarship by highlighting the persistence of stereotypical gender representations and underscores the need for gender-sensitive advertising practices and policy frameworks that promote more inclusive and equitable portrayals within Fiji's socio-cultural landscape.

Keywords: *Billboards, Gender Stereotyping, Pragmatics, Multimodal Analysis, Fiji, Advertising*

Introduction

Gender stereotypes are generalized preconceptions of attributes and roles of men and women in the society. Such perceptions limit individuals from performing to the best of their skills in personal and professional settings, thus being harmful (UNHR, 2014). The males are often symbolized as ambitious, brave, and strong whereas the female counterparts are associated with tenderness, beauty and virtuousness resulting in deteriorating sexual relations (Wang, 2023). Such roles have been established and passed down generations affecting not just genders in general but producers and advertisers.

These stereotypes have extended into media advertisements and further enforce such notions into society. Advertising media is a powerful agent in changing the opinions of people which significantly affects the lives of men and women in a society, this was further highlighted by Ojiakor Umenze et al. (2019) arguing that the subconscious power of perception through imagery suggest to consumers how they could and should model themselves. According to Wood (1994), all media forms create unrealistic and limiting perceptions of the sexes. Outdoor advertisements such as billboards ensure exposure is inescapable, unlike others forms of advertising (Ojiakor Umenze et al., 2019), thus, reinforcing gender stereotypes at a larger scale. The goal of advertising is to attract attention. Advertisements as such attempts to replicate everyday experiences and reach a greater audience, employ vocabulary and images which create further gender norms being enforced into the community. However, billboard advertisements often have no clearly defined relation between the sign, signifier and signified due to the use of arbitrary illustrations (Ojiakor Umenze et al., 2019). For instance, in Fiji a sports advertisement or fitness billboard normally includes male players despite the female athletes taking a prominent leap in the world of sports Bola (2016). Several researchers in their various case studies conclude that billboards that illustrate both the genders, the men are often in control while the women are used in more of a sexual context displaying certain parts of their bodies (Ojiakor Umenze et al., 2019).

While journalism remains central to media scholarship in the Pacific, advertising and outdoor media are equally influential forms of public communication that shape everyday social meanings. Billboard advertising, in particular, occupies shared public spaces and functions as a continuous visual discourse through which ideas about gender, identity, and social hierarchy are normalized. Despite this influence, billboard advertising in Pacific contexts remains underexplored in media and journalism scholarship. This study addresses this gap by examining how gender stereotypes are constructed and communicated through billboard advertisements in Suva, Fiji.

It could be argued that such stereotypes are rooted deep into the cultural histories of the communities in Fiji and as such promoters hope to appeal to these norms in a way to respect the cultural hierarchy. A deeper analysis of billboards also highlights how the text, font style and theme are also altered to associate with the different gender roles and emotions being depicted (Hussain et al., 2021). Therefore, billboards play a crucial role in navigating gender stereotypes in the greater community. The paper will therefore establish how billboards have

contributed to the gender stereotypes present in the larger Suva area. Multimodal analysis of the linguistic and visual elements of various billboards will be conducted to achieve this. The paper will also present recommendations on how advertisers can use gender sensitive and unbiased means of using billboards.

Literature Review

Gender stereotypes in the Pacific

According to the United Nations Human Rights (2024), gender stereotypes is the practice of assigning roles to men and women based on their characteristics and attributes in the social setting. In the Pacific, gender stereotypes are shaped by traditional norms, colonial legacies and religious influences which significantly influences the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Historically, Pacific women have been relegated roles of a caregiver or a housewife and their contributions to the society remain undervalued. Douglas (2003) claims that gender roles in the Pacific are deeply intertwined with culture and traditions with women categorized as nurturers and responsible for the household, limiting their participation in leadership roles and formal employment. Men on the other hand, are categorized as breadwinners and leaders upholding social status due to their masculinity and physique (Jolly, 1997). Such gender stereotypes often reinforces patriarchal systems which marginalizes woman in decision making.

Nonetheless, colonialism and activities of the missionaries created different forms of patriarchy which reinforced and institutionalized gender stereotypes in the Pacific (Huffer & Qalo, 2004). As Huffer and Qalo (2004) argued that traditional stereotypes which created gender biases were entrenched by colonial government structures and Christian teachings. This resulted in marginalizing women from roles of authority in the political and social spheres. The influence of missionary schools on the education system also played a crucial role in perpetuating such gender stereotypes. This influence was exacerbated by channeling girls in domestic science subjects and boys in leadership training (Trease, 1987). Such an approach resulted in curtailing women's ability in shaping public policies and economic development. Post colonialism, Pacific societies remained entrenched in gender biases and continued to manifest the difference between men and women (George, 2012).

The Pacific media has been shaping public perceptions on gender which often reinforces traditional stereotypes, limiting gender equality. The representations made by the media frequently associates women with caregiving roles and men as leaders and decision makers. Ue (2019) claims that such representations are deeply rooted in historical narratives perpetuated by colonial influences, emphasizing rigid roles associated with gender. Such stereotypes contribute to a cycle of societal expectations and media portrayals which mutually sustain the traditional gender norms of society. The advertisement in the Pacific often emphasizes the role of women in beauty, fashion and family care which reflects global trends and reinforces the expectations of the local culture. Lingham (2020) emphasizes that women's representation in advertisement is disproportionate for household products and personal care because it symbolizes their association with domestic spheres. In contrast to men, who are

frequently featured in advertisements that represents leadership, finance, and adventure related products. This is a clear symbol of their perceived dominance in professional and public domains. McMillan and Worth (2019) also affirm that women are underrepresented in political and leadership spheres of media and when they are featured, much of the focus is on their appearance and emotional qualities that associate with family roles rather than professional competencies or stance of authority. Such bias further extends to the use of language in reporting where terms relating to men emphasize on strength and assertiveness in contrast to women who are often framed as compassionate or nurturing. Koya-Vaka'uta (2021) argues that modern media often fails to challenge patriarchal norms created by the Pacific culture, thereby continuing to represent women in roles that prioritize relationship with men over their independence.

Although challenging, these patriarchal norms have gained momentum. Achieving gender equality in the Pacific requires addressing contemporary barriers as well as colonial and missionary legacies which shape gender relations (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Similarly, Ratuva (2023) highlights that transforming the narratives of the media into the Pacific is a crucial step towards achieving societal changes that foster gender equality.

Women in advertisement

According to Eisend (2019), women have been depicted in traditional roles in advertisements emphasizing their responsibility as homemakers and caregivers. This trend has persisted for several decades which reinforces gender stereotypes, confining women to their private sphere (Goffman, 1979). However, a notable shift overtime shows more diverse and empowering representations of women in advertisements. Studies conducted over the years show evidence of women's portrayal in professional settings and dominant positions which challenges traditional stereotypes (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009).

Advertisements are reflective and constitutive of cultural norms whereby shift in meaning can alter societal perceptions of gender (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). Lindner also believed that women have been sexualized in many advertisements however there has been a shift in representation of women as independent, ambitious and authoritative figures. This is similar to Furnham and Paltzer's (2010) findings who conducted a meta-analysis of gender representations in advertising and reported that stereotypes persists but there is a discernible trend of advertisements that portray women as equal participants in many domains including business, sports and technology. They claim that such a change has been attributed to the feminist movements and due to a high demand for gender sensitive marketing strategies. Additionally, rising digital media platforms today provide a wider space for more nuanced and diverse portrayal of men and women in advertisements. According to Johnson, Grier and Fang (2020) social media campaigns are increasingly inclusive because it highlights women of various ethnicities, body types, and social backgrounds. This trend challenges traditional beauty standards and promotes intersectional representations of femininity.

Regardless of these advances in the advertising media, stereotypical portrayals remain persistent in certain sectors and areas. As highlighted by Taylor and Costello (2017) that

regional and cultural differences influence how women are depicted in advertisements. For instance, where western advertisements are continuously embracing progressive representations of men and women, traditional depictions are dominating conservative societies.

Men in advertisement

The traditional portrayal of men has undergone transformation from depiction in roles that highlight dominance, power and authority to those of vulnerability, domestic responsibility and emotional expression (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Mager & Helgeson, 2011). This can be particularly so with increasing modernization and exposure to the trends of global media. Thus, advertisements are gradually adopting to a diverse and inclusive portrayal of men.

Advertisements are now challenging traditional notions of roles of men for instance, highlighting men in featuring in household chores and parenting which reflects a shift in societal expectations where men can be seen in sharing domestic responsibilities (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Such changes mirrors broader regional movements in advocating gender equality and redefines traditional gender roles in the Pacific.

Nonetheless, cultural shift is vital in diversifying portrayal of men in advertisements. Advertisements now highlight men of different ethnicities, body type and sexual orientations moving away from the stereotypical image of masculinity. This approach further broadens the narrative of masculinity and emphasizes the coexistence of strength and vulnerability, and that masculinity is not monolithic. According to Gill (2007) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), this transformation reflects rethinking of hegemonic masculinity where representations made by the media are increasingly challenging the traditional norms and embracing diversity and intersectional identities. Kaufman (2014) also emphasizes that dismantling such rigidity masculinity fosters greater acceptance of emotional expression and non-traditional roles for men in the society. Additionally, advertisements in the Pacific highlight men's connection to their family and community where emphasis is placed on traits such as humility, respect and relational leadership. Such traits are deeply ingrained in the Pacific cultures.

However, traditional stereotypes in gender remain persistent in certain sectors. Advertising for industries like sports, construction, Kava production often portray men as stoic, physically dominant and reinforces hyper-masculine ideals of the society. On a similar note, tourism campaigns which often targets international audiences can sometimes present Pacific men as exoticized symbols of tradition and strength. Thus, perpetuating one-dimensional representations.

While existing studies have examined gender representation in Pacific media broadly, few have focused on outdoor advertising as a site of everyday media consumption. This study extends Pacific media scholarship by foregrounding billboards as influential yet under-analyzed media texts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design grounded in multimodal discourse analysis and pragmatic analysis. The approach allows for an in-depth examination of how linguistic and visual elements in billboard advertisements jointly construct gendered meanings.

Data Selection

A total of eight billboard advertisements were purposively sampled from high-traffic locations in Suva, Viti Levu, Fiji, including major roads, commercial districts, and community hubs. The billboards were documented between August 2025 and January 2026.

Selection criteria included:

- Public visibility and accessibility
- Explicit or implicit gender representation
- Presence of linguistic slogans or textual elements
- Relevance to everyday consumer culture (food, sports, religion, community, lifestyle)

Analytical Framework

The analysis integrates three complementary frameworks:

1. Pragmatic Analysis
 - Implicature: meanings suggested but not explicitly stated
 - Presupposition: assumptions taken for granted by the message
 - Speech Acts: how advertisements perform social actions (e.g., persuading, positioning, normalizing roles)
2. Representation Theory (Williams, 1978)
Used to examine how cultural symbols and media representations construct and maintain dominant social ideologies.
3. Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981)
Applied to understand how repeated media representations shape cognitive frameworks about masculinity and femininity.

Analytical Procedure

Each billboard was analyzed in two stages:

1. Linguistic analysis of slogans, taglines, lexical choices, and implied meanings.
2. Visual analysis focusing on body posture, positioning, gaze, clothing, spatial arrangement, and symbolic associations.

Ethical Considerations

All data consisted of publicly displayed advertisements. No human participants were involved, and no identifying personal data were collected.

Results and Discussion



Figure 1: Punjas Milk Powder

Figure 1 shows an advertisement for Punjas Instant Full Cream Milk Powder which features Fijian Drua rugby team. The interpretation of this advertisement through the lens of Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory and Williams' (1978) Representation Theory shows the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes. According to Bem's theory, individuals internalize societies expectations on gender which shapes their behavior and perceptions; in this case, the advertisement constructs the idea of masculinity around physical strength, dominance and aggression through the depiction of male rugby players in assertive and powerful poses.

The use of slogan "STRENGTH IN EVERY SIP" associates the consumption of milk with ideals of masculinity. This reinforces the stereotype that men should embody athleticism, physical power and strength. Further correlating with Williams theory of Representation which claims that media constructs and maintains societal norms, this advertisement perpetuates the exclusion of women from narratives of athleticism and strength by featuring male figures only. The use of rugby – a sport that is culturally associated with male dominance. Despite the existence of Fiji women's rugby team, the deliberate choice of highlighting male athletes rather than female counterparts establishes the notion that strength and sports excellence are inherently for male domains which marginalizes the female athletes, limiting the broader conception of gender inclusivity in sports and nutrition discourse which is strongly enforced by media bodies.



Figure 2: Vold Milk Drink Powder

Figure 2 represents an advertisement for Volt Milk Drink Powder which contrasts sharply with Figure 1 of Punjas Milk powder advertisement. Both the advertisements represents gender and reinforces traditional gender roles in a different way. While the advertisement of Punjas Milk Powder is exclusively featuring male rugby players associating milk with strength, athleticism and masculinity, the Vold Milk Drink Powder features a smiling woman and a young boy in a domesticated and nurturing domain which reinforces traditional roles of femininity and caregiver.

The type of words used in Figure 2 advertisement such as “Explore all the tasty ways to use Volt Milk Drink Powder!” and its referral to smoothies and tea situates the product as versatile and suited for home consumption. This aligns with the stereotypical representation of women being responsible for preparation of food and the wellbeing of children in their households. The position of the woman of holding the product while standing beside the boy suggests a supportive motherly role in her child’s health and growth. Thus, portraying the ideology of women being caregivers who ensures that proper nutrition is provided to her family.

In contrast, in the advertisement Punjas Milk Powder, a particular emphasis is on strength as suggested by the slogan “STRENGTH IN EVERY SIP”. It also features male athletes which targets a demography of power and performance. On the other hand, Volt Milk Drink Milk Powder particularly targets milk as a domestic need and portrays women as homemakers and caregivers. Such gendered contrast is a clear indication of how advertisers are reinforcing traditional gender roles strategically with men being portrayed as strong, competitive and dominant and women as nurturers of households. This contrast aligns with Goffman’s (1979) findings on gender studies where he found that media representations reinforce gender roles. His analysis highlights that men are depicted in positions of strength, power and dominance and women are portrayed as nurturer, passive and responsible for caregiving duties.



Figure 3 Pepsodent Toothpaste

Figure 3 is a Pepsodent advertisement which reinforces gender roles through visual and textual elements. This aligns with Goffman's (1979) Gender Advertisement framework and Williams' (1978) Representation Theory. The advertisement features a woman as a dental professional in a white lab coat which symbolizes expertise and authority, alongside a young boy with a bright smile emphasizing on the benefits of the product. Although the picturization of a female dentist is suggesting an empowered role, it still relates to the traditional gender roles where women in advertisements are frequently portrayed as caregivers or service providers. The phrase "#TalkToADentist" is directing the attention of the consumers to the expertise of the woman, yet the overall focus is on the wellbeing of the child rather than the professional achievement of the woman. The slogan "10X STRONGER TEETH" targets dental health rather than challenging gender stereotypes because the advertisement subtly suggests the idea that women are responsible for children's health and hygiene. Williams Representation Theory claims that media portrayals reflects and maintains the social norms and this advertisements is evident of presenting woman in a professional role while emphasizing her connection to nurturing and care. Such strategic representations ensure relatability and trust which reinforces traditional and modern aspects of gender identity in advertisements. In comparison to the Punjas advertisement as presented in Figure 1 which excludes women from the conceptual framework of strength and Volt advertisement in Figure 2 which reinforces femininity, this advertisement provides a progressive yet traditional depiction of gender roles where women's presence is highlight in professional field but their association with nurturing and caregiving role remains.



Figure 4: Community empowerment

Figure 4 presents an advertisement for empowering voices to inspire communities. It features a male singer performing with a guitar. This again reinforces stereotypical gender norms of society confirming to Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory similar to figure 1. In this, the advertisement suggests the wider role of men being the voice of the society to reason and inspire. The use of words as "empowering" and "inspiring" depict the patriarchal dominance men possess in shaping the community in their image.

The slogan "Fijian Crafted" with a Fijian man being the only person illustrated in this advertisement further amplifies the narrative of how the community needs to be crafted in the image of a man to be considered a proper community of Fiji. The image represents a man singing, sigidrigi – a cultural singing activity typically performed by men in the Fijian community to reconstruct the communities (Cattermole, 2009). While post-independence there have been emergence of female sigidrigi artists, the choice to only utilize a male performer to share the message of empowerment reinforces stereotypes symbolizing men as the spearhead of a community embodying reason, power, vision, moral and spiritual values to shape the society. This extends to the depiction of females in figure 3 where a female dentist was used to symbolize service and care provider instead of being promoted as an inspiration to empower women of communities to progress and further such dominant careers.



Figure 5: Car Wash and Rental

Figure 5 illustrates a car wash and rental advertisement which contrasts with all other billboards analyzed thus far. This billboard while advertising about motor vehicles utilized the image of

a woman enjoying Coca-Cola which realistically has no connection to the service advertised. As such gender and traditional gender roles have been reinforced in a unique manner. The advertisement is for car washing and rental provision services, thus, the use of a woman reinforces the stereotype of women having the role of service providers in the community. Moreover, the use of woman in such an advertisement reinforces the image of woman as objects to attract attention due to their feminine features, sex appeal.

Adding to Huq et al. (2016) and Munjal's (2016) theory on unethical advertisements, Yusop (2021) confirms that advertisements giving wrong impressions and stereotypes are controversial and unethical. While there is not much use of words via any slogans, the image itself stands out where a sense of sensuality is presented. In contrast, the previous figures presented women as caregivers only. The image used provides an erotic expression of the woman trying to drink from the bottle while the bottle is away from the face, as such the open mouth and bottle can be interpreted as use of sex appeal to attract attention to the billboard. Use of such unrelated and erotic imagery is a representation of how gender stereotypes are still being reinforced using indirect and unethical strategies, particularly when objectifying the female group as sex objects in a traditional community.



Figure 6: Its Bula Friday – Jack's of Fiji

Figure 6 illustrates a bula clothing advertisement by Jack's of Fiji which contrasts with the billboard from figure 5. While the purpose of the company may have been to advertise clothing, it has reinforced gender norms of the traditional hierarchy. The clothing was advertised with all participants wearing an identical outfit in color and design. In doing so, the advertisement highlights a more modern outlook of the sigidrigi practice of the Fijian natives where men and women are sat in a group along with kids having a fun session. However, upon closer inspection the men are in the background with the guitar, while the woman and kids are sat in front clapping and holding fans.

According to Ojiakor-Umenze et al. (2019) advertisements promote and maintain patriarchy through the imagery more than words based on the placement of male and female imagery, thus promoting female subjugation. The men are leading the signing session as per traditions while woman are just sat there to clap and fan the men. It can be interpreted as the woman just being sat there to fan the men as to not feel the heat while performing. Moreover, the sitting

arrangement also portraying the stereotypes. The men are sat at the back overlooking the overall house, while the women are sat to cheer on for the men and care for the kids sat in between the two ladies. This reinforces gender stereotypes of women having the role of providing caregiving and support service to the men who have the role of leading and performing important traditional tasks. As such this confirms with Belknap (2009, as cited in Ojiakor-Umenze et al., 2019) that media while using various social processes, contribute and perpetuate male superiority.



Figure 7: Faith and Fellowship

Figure 7 represents an image that promotes a youth religious event through three connected panels with messages such as “A Celebration of Faith and Fellowship,” “Games, Worship and God’s Grace,” and “Rise in Faith, Lead with Purpose”. It is notable that there is absence of female representation in this billboard. Each section exclusively features young males being part of religious activities which is inclusive of singing, praying and expressive worship. Although the intention could be of highlighting energy and participation of youth in religious gatherings, the exclusive male imagery portrays a powerful yet problematic message about who belongs in such spiritual roles in the community. Such gender imbalance often reinforces stereotypes that visualize religious leadership and spiritual expressions are domains of men not women. As the young man are shown as authoritative and energetic who have the ability to occupy center stage in the narrative of faith. Their body language for instance arms being raised, confident facial expressions and engagement in public speaking or music symbolizes leadership skills. In contrast, the absence of female representation suggests that they are not involved in such activities or rather not considered significant to be visually represented in this context. This omission of female representation aligns with Goffman’s (1979) perspective of gender stereotyping where he claims that invisibility or lack of representation is itself a powerful reinforcement of societal norms.

In Fiji, religion and community worship plays a central role in peoples social life. This visual narrative is a reflection of deeply embedded patriarchal values. Historically, male leadership has always dominated religious spaces and this billboard is an echo of those hierarchies which fails to represent the diversity of participants in faith communities in today’s time. According to Bem’s (1981) Gender Schema Theory, people develop cognitive frameworks about gender based on their exposure to cultural messages. Therefore, such advertisements present spiritual leaderships as exclusively made available to man which reinforces a narrow and exclusionary

gender schemas, particularly among impressionable youth. Based on William's (1978) Representation Theory, this advertisement not only reflects the reality of the society but constructs a version of reality where men are dominant religious figure while women are omitted from spiritual life. Thus, contributing to the normalization of gender hierarchies in religious context and public spaces.



Figure 8: Sports World

Figure 8 represents the under 20 Fijian Rugby team presented on the billboard sponsored by a sports brand. It features six young male athletes who appear strong and serious. This is an emphasis on power, discipline and their national pride. It is interesting to note that there is absence of female representation in the billboard despite the active involvement of women in rugby in Fiji. The use of male athletes aligns with the physical requirements of a rugby player which is strength, competitiveness and an appearance of a leader. This is often captured in sports activities whereby such domains remain reserved for men more than women. For instance, despite the women's rugby team, the sponsors preferred the use of male athletes to highlight their brand. While the intention of the sponsor can be the emphasis of youth rugby team, the male imagery portrays a powerful but a stereotypical message which is showing a narrative of who excels in sports and gaining sponsorship.

Focusing on the body language of the male athletes - the upright posture, folded arms and a confident facial expression - is symbolic to determination, authority and physical prowess. This suggests men are natural leaders in the area of sports and they occupy the center stage in maintaining Fiji's pride. The absence of women in such billboards indicates that they are to engaged in competitive sport neither are considered worthy to be publicly represented. Such omission of women resonates with Goffman's (1979) ideology that invisibility becomes a powerful reinforcement of societal norms.

Fiji's rugby plays a crucial role to shape identity, community and unity of the nation. This visual narrative is a reflection of patriarchal values where men are dominant and celebrated in public while female athletes remain underrepresented. According to the Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), gender roles are often developed on the basis of cultural messages. Hence, it reinforces the schema that athletics strength and sponsorship are the domain of men and women remain excluded from recognition in such areas. In relation to Williams (1978) Representation Theory, Figure 8 is a reflection of reality and a version of male dominant figures in sports while women's achievements remain invisible. Although the Fiji rugby sevens team – the Fijiana –

has achieved success on the international stage and won their first ever Olympic medal (bronze) at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, their visibility in such local sponsorship advertisements remains minimum in comparison to the male counterparts.

Taken together, these billboard representations reveal consistent patterns of gendered visibility across diverse sectors of public life, including sport, religion, nutrition, and community identity. Despite surface-level variation, the advertisements collectively reproduce a hierarchy in which masculinity is associated with authority, strength, and leadership, while femininity is aligned with care, service, or visual appeal. These patterns highlight how billboard advertising operates as a form of everyday media discourse that sustains patriarchal norms in Fiji's urban public spaces.

Conclusion

This study shows that billboard advertising in Suva, Fiji, continues to play a powerful role in reinforcing gender stereotypes in everyday public spaces. Through subtle visual and linguistic cues, such as, implied meanings, underlying assumptions, and symbolic positioning, men are commonly portrayed as strong, authoritative, and natural leaders, while women are more often shown as caregivers, supporters, or objects of visual appeal. Even advertisements that appear progressive tend to fall back on familiar cultural expectations that associate women with nurturing and femininity. Drawing on Representation Theory and Gender Schema Theory, the study highlights how repeated exposure to these messages shapes how people understand and internalize gender roles. In Fiji's social context, where religion, sport, and community life strongly influence everyday values, such advertising representations quietly help maintain patriarchal norms and unequal gender relations.

The study also recognizes certain limitations, notably its focus on one urban area and a relatively small number of billboards. Future research could examine rural settings, explore digital advertising platforms, or investigate audience reception to better understand how gendered messages are interpreted and negotiated.

This paper calls for more gender-sensitive approaches to advertising practices that challenge stereotypes, encourage more balanced representations, and better reflect the diverse experiences of men and women in contemporary Fijian society.

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