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# REPRODUCTION OF GENDER IDEOLOGY THROUGH RUSSIAN CONSUMER CULTURE: THE CASE OF ICONOGRAPHY OF THE 'MOTHER' IN RUSSIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary studies in consumer research significantly shifted the attention towards gender identities and its importance in consumer culture (Epp and Price 2006, Humphreys and Thompson 2014; Dion et al 2014, Cova et al 2013), however less devotion was given to ideological aspects in gender representations persisting in today's marketing practice (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). The constant changing patterns of social settings and marketplace ideologies that are socially and culturally produced and reproduced has been one of the most referred themes in consumer research (O'Guinn et al 2015, Dion et al 2014, Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012, McQuarrie et al 2013). Evidently more in-depth consideration was acknowledged by Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) scholars who believe in the social reproduction (Bourdieu 1979) and construction of identity as a result of socio-historic and sociocultural change that are evoked through meanings, symbols and signs (Moisio, Arnould, Price 2004, Arsel and Zeynep 2013). This paper focuses on the reproduction of gender ideology through exploration of archetypal images of motherhood in contemporary Russian consumer culture.

The interest towards gender related studies in marketing emerged since late 1960s along with critical developments regarding gender inequalities (Bettany et al 2010, Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, Cova, et al., 2013). The shifting methods and approaches of analysing gender stimulated the formation of a discipline called 'gender studies' in the field of marketing and sociology (Meyers-Levy 1988, Stevens and Maclaran 2000, Bettany 2006, Durante et al 2011, Fan and Miao 2012, Tiferet et al 2012). Due to the complexity of understanding and interpreting gender roles in Marketing Communication (MC) scholars implement interdisciplinary methods for more in-depth interpretation (Zotos and Tsihla 2014, Luyt 2011, Knoll et al 2011). Nonetheless, focus of investigation and analysis are more represented through gender stereotyping and comparative studies of male and female role portrayals in TV/print ads (Berger 2015, Schroeder and Zwick 2004, Kroska 2006) and minimal reflection was given to the reproduction of gender ideology through iconographic representations and its role in consumer culture (Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) argue that class and gender norms undergo through intergenerational transmission that often represent the collective past and Humphreys and Thomson (2014) suggest culturally iconic images as significant element in consumer decision making process and they represent the 'bigger systematic picture of integrated political and market structures' (Holt 2012, McDonagh et al 2012). Thus the theoretical and conceptual conversation around CCT and Consumer Research allows this study to fulfil the gap by looking at the reproduction of gender ideology that presumably generates iconographic images of motherhood (mothers) in print advertisement. Thus this study explores archetypal images of mothers in Russian consumer culture and proposes five archetypes of motherhood frequently used in print media. By implementing body of theory in consumer research we suggest a novel theoretical framework that attempts to unpack iconography of Russian mothers and the effect of reproduced gender ideology in Russian consumer culture.

Following Schroeder's (2006) interpretation we agree that images are core components of advertising practice and continuously circulate in everyday life by producing and reproducing sociocultural meanings (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002), stimulate gender roles (Goffman 1979), circulate signs and symbols that contribute towards identity formation as well as lifestyle choices (Arnold and Thompson 2005, Featherstone 2006). We also further argue that advertising is built on cultural codes (Schroeder 2013), icons (Cian et al 2015) universal archetypes (Thompson 2004, Belk and Costa 1998), symbols (Scott 1994, Moisio et al 2013), ideological images (Bourdieu 1979, Shepherd et al 2015, Humphreys and Thompson 2014) persisting in Russian cultural capital.

The theoretical background of this research is drawn on Bourdieu's sociology of '*symbolic power*' (Bourdieu 1984) that largely interprets the role of ideology, its sociohistorical development and effect on cultural capital; Consumer Culture Theory that interprets consumption as a dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson 2005); and Critical Visual Consumption (Schroeder 2005) that highlights the importance/influence of images, icons in contemporary marketing practice that continually circulate in culture.

Over decades there have been numerous attempts to apply Bourdieu's (1992) cultural theory on various aspects of consumption practice (Allen 2002, Boghian 2013). The majority of studies were reflecting upon the cultural capital, symbolic capital, social capital and theorisation of habitus in the consumption practice (Thompson and Tambyah 1999, Allen 2002, Kates 2002, Muiz and OGuinn 2001, Murray 2002, Mathwick et al 2008, Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013). Nonetheless, one of the earliest scholars that demonstrated how cultural capital constructs consumption through the work of Bourdieu were Thompson (1996) and Holt (1998). Since then, research stream brought in acknowledgement of ideologies present in consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

Drawing on Bourdieu's '*symbolic power*' and Jung's '*archetypal figures*' we address the following research questions:

- What is the 'iconography of motherhood' in Contemporary Russia?
- How representations of mothers in Russian consumer culture reproduce ideologies of motherhood?
- How mothers resist/conform to the iconography and how it impacts on their consumer behaviour?

Russia is a country that passed through several sociohistoric transitions and political and cultural transformations that largely constructed contemporary Russian consumer culture (Roberts 2014, Kaufmann et al 2012). In this sense Russian consumer culture is considered as a strong representation of symbolic capital that sustained throughout centuries thanks to its ideological strategies (Wirthschafter 2006, Carmichael 1968, Kravets and Orge 2010) and strong believes in national traditions and heritage (Bartlett 2005, Simes 1994). Literature evidenced that one of the strongest and main sources of ideology propaganda was first promoted in Russia through icons and iconography (Agadjanian 2001, Bondarenko 2000, Brittlebank 2009). The power of dominant hierarches were constructed through religious and political interference in socialisation of the Empire (Carmichael 1968), Soviet era (Note: here the religious ideology was replaced with solely political icons) (Fitzpatrick 1999, Fleron 1996) and later the Federation (Oushakine 2000, Racioppi and See 1995). The style of ideological propaganda was represented in forms of visual messages, posters and iconic representations that were standing out with its style and symbolic meaning (Rusnock 2007, West 2011, Bonnel 1998).

Moreover, the changing iconic representations of women (such as 'woman-worker', 'superwoman' - *mother and worker*, 'traditional woman'- *mother-homemaker*) in Soviet Union

has been documented to show diverse ideological empowerments and its acceptance by the society (Racioppi and See 1995, Sorokin et al 2006, Fitzpatrick 1999).

Hence in order to unpack the ideological aspect and reproduction of gender ideology in Russian consumption practice this project looks at the marketing practice and the critical visual consumption (Schroeder 2005) that represents culturally produced icons, symbols and images circulating in contemporary advertising field. We further appraise the iconographic representations of the modern Russian mother produced in contemporary print advertisements and aim to unpack its effect on mothers. We embrace the possibilities and the levels of mother's resistance and conformity to these modern iconographies, hence investigate the effect on their buyer behaviour.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In his early studies Goffman (1979) deliberated advertisement as an exclusive segment of the real world and it stimulates the individual's perception of good life, gender roles and understanding of right and good in social reality (Belknap & Leonard II 1991). Nowadays, the subject matter in consumer research aims to clarify how media images (online, print ads), circulate meanings, signs and symbols amongst people and how such visual means contribute to people's sense of identity and lifestyle choices (Arnould and Thomson 2005, Featherstone 2006, Slater 1997). For our project we consider how images circulate in culture and how people understand and decode images used in contemporary advertising. The focus of the study is to uncover the hidden ideological values of marketing communication, its effect on the construction of female identity as a mother and their (mothers') responses to the iconographic depictions.

The recent research showed an increasing interest towards the gender roles, the degree of stereotyping in advertisements (Luyt 2011, Lee 2014, Eisend et al 2014, Huang and Lowry 2015). One of the earliest and still renowned studies on gender advertisement has been produced by Goffman (1979) where he examines male and female portrayals in media commercials. The major contribution of his research is the theoretical emergence of coding frame used in content analysis of gender roles in marketing practice as well as the shifting thoughts of male and female portrayals being socially constructed, which asserts the meaning of gender roles *as they are*, *as they want to be* and *as they should be* (Goffman 1979). Nowadays scholars employ Goffman's scheme in order to understand gender representations in advertising practice from different angles, such as contextual (Wester/non-Western), Generic (racial and ethnical categories); conceptual (stereotypes/portrayals), strategic (product's country of origin effect) etc. and below we provide a brief review of relevant studies.

Among all the studies related to the comparative investigation of male and female roles in ads, feminist movement brought a new insight within the gender portrayals in advertisements by looking at the evolution of female roles in a society (Thompson 1996, Kerrane and Bettany 2013, Thompson and Ustuner 2013). Early studies exhibited predominance of the archetypal categories of women as housewives, women reliant on a man or objects of sexual representations (Zotos and Tsihla 2014, Lin and Yeh 2013). Likewise Lin & Yeh (2013) implement DRI model (Divine Feminine Role: Ideology, Ritualistic, Experiential, Consequential, and Intellectual) to describe a development of exposed visual conception. Here they attempt to highlight the predominant position of religious symbolism in particular female portrayals in contemporary advertising field. The feminist movement also raised the issue of women not being portrayed in variety of roles that they are actually involved in real life (Belkaoui and Belkaoui 1976). *Mother/ motherhood* as a topic of discussion in consumer research has long been linked to the behavioural aspects of consumption (e.g. reflections on child influence on consumption experience, family life, market and cultural capital) (Kerrane and Bettany 2015, Epp and Velagaleti 2014), self-image formation (Belk 1988, McNeil and Graham 2014, Bettany et al 2014) or so called collective/social identity expression (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013, Coleman and Williams 2013). Only a few studies vaguely reflected

on females' representations as *mothers* in contemporary advertising practice (Atkinson 2014, Minowa et al 2014, De Laat and Baumann 2014, Granot et al 2014, Lin and Yeh 2013, Zotos and Tschla 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

We applied a novel methodological framework of critical visual methods (Schroeder and Borgerson 2015) and qualitative content analysis (Schreier 2014) and conducted thorough image analysis of *mothers* produced in Russian 'mother and baby' magazines. The dimensions and categories of qualitative analysis are mainly based on Goffman's schema (1979) and critical visual analysis (Schroeder 2002, Schroeder and Zwick 2004).

Baby and mother (parenting) magazine advertisements were used as the main source of the data. The sample consisted of the following issues: three magazines ('*Schastlivye Roditeli*', '*Moi Rebenok*' and '*Dobrye sovety*') of Russian origin and widely publicised in Moscow, and three magazines (Prima baby and Pregnancy, Mother and Baby and Baby London) of Western origin that are widely distributed in London. The selected samples were continually (monthly) published between January 2013 and December 2015. All the above-mentioned magazines were also selected in accordance with the demographics, circulation and readership rates obtained both from NRS (2014-15) as well as the local rating data for the Russian magazines. We systemised the choices of magazines between two countries in order to have a balanced approach in examining magazines within the same category in terms of geographic and psychographic segmentations. The chosen timeframe is due to the research objective, which seeks to reveal the modern look of the Russian 'mother' and see whether it differs from the modern look of the western 'mother'. The issues from each year were randomly selected and a total of 45 issues for Russian and 45 issues of western magazines were further analysed. Each advertisement that contained 'mother' figure was systematically collected, which resulted in a total of 288 valid advertisements for both Russian (160 ads) and Western origin magazines (128 ads).

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The results revealed plural archetypal images of mothers in contemporary Russian print advertisements symbolising diverse iconographic representations and cultural meanings. The mothers produced in ads are representatives of younger middle social class generation, they usually do not portray dominant agency in the advertisement and are usually passive. We also unpacked the fact of passive and active gaze of mother and child, where child was more actively engaged with the camera rather than mother. The centre of mother's attention remained to be the child, with the mother's agency (as rendered by gaze) expressed only through the child. Moreover, it appeared that majority of pictures are taken indoors and the mother figure was seen mostly in home settings.

**References Available Upon Request**