

Gender Stereotypes in Political Advertisements: The Case of Male MP Candidates of Thessaloniki, Greece

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Abstract: *This paper investigates gender stereotypes in printed political advertisements of male MP candidates in the first electoral district of Thessaloniki between 1993 and 2007. The study answers the following questions: (a) what is the frequency of appearance of gender stereotypes in advertisements of MP candidates? and (b) what are the changes in the frequency of appearance of these stereotypes during the investigated time span? The research was carried out in ten daily national and local newspapers. The categories of gender stereotypes were drawn from three literature streams including commercial advertising, gender stereotypes in politics, and political communication. The research questions of the study were addressed following the content analysis methodology. The results of the study showed that, as in commercial advertising, the predominant stereotype in political advertising in the investigated period was that of the successful politician. There was a definite change in the predominant stereotypes over the course of the period, with a gradual shift towards stereotypes that were closer to the new portrayals of 'today's man'.*

Keywords: *Gender stereotypes, Political advertisements, Greek MP candidates*

1. INTRODUCTION

Political advertising is considered one of the most significant promotional tools that candidates in modern election campaigning possess in order to communicate with their electorate (Kaid 1999). Through advertising, politicians seek to inform voters about their candidacy (or remind them of its existence) and try to influence them positively in order to win their votes (Lees-Marshment 2009).

Since advertising is an unmediated form of communication, its content is strictly controlled by the sender (Samaras and Papathanassopoulos 2006). This allows politicians to formulate their messages in such a manner as to promote their candidacy in the best possible way (Newman 1999). In this context, candidates choose to communicate verbal or non-verbal messages that correspond to the existing beliefs or expectations of the target-voters (Kaid 1999, Robinson 2010). In order to achieve this, they use widely accepted stereotypes concerning the positions, characteristics, behaviour or even the appearance of the ideal politician, including gender stereotypes (Kahn 1996).

Despite the importance of gender stereotypes in political advertising, they have not yet drawn the equivalent academic attention. To date, only a few studies have been published in the field, and most of them refer to the US experience (e.g. Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Sambonmatsu 2002, Fridklin and Kenney 2009), in contrast to the relevant works in commercial advertisements, where plenty of research has been accumulated on both sexes in different countries and media (Gauntlett 2002, Wolin 2003). Therefore, scholars stress the need for further investigation on gender stereotypes in politics (Johnston and Kaid 2002, Fridklin and Kenney 2009), as well as longitudinal research to identify possible changes in the frequency of projected stereotypes (Carlson 2001).

The present paper aspires to contribute in this direction. Its purpose is to study the dominant gender stereotypes in printed political advertisements of male MP candidates in the electoral district of Thessaloniki between 1993-2007. This study is the first of its kind that refers to the Greek experience. Besides, its research findings may also be useful to political candidates or other professionals in politics, such as communication specialists, who may draw insights on how gender stereotypes can be used practically to increase advertising effectiveness.

2. GENDER STEREOTYPES IN COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL ADVERTISING

A stereotype is defined as the representation of a social group based on one or more characteristics, which may project a correct or incorrect representation of that social group (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells 2009). Stereotypical representations use easily understandable, symbolic meanings acceptable to the majority of a society. Stereotypes correspond to a particular social framework and period of time. That is to say they are social constructs that influence the way members of a society perceive other individuals or social groups (Gauntlett 2002).

Gender stereotypes function as intellectual structures that classify individual characteristics, behaviour and beliefs into the social groups of "male" and "female". The classification is multi-level. For instance, it concerns characteristics of appearance (e.g. hair, figure, grooming, etc.), behaviours relating to gender roles (e.g. child rearing, staying at home, etc.), characteristics at the professional level (e.g. choice of profession, level of professional commitment, etc), and other

characteristics, such as interest in or behaviour towards others, self-perception or ways of social advancement and recognition.

The study of gender stereotypes in commercial advertising focuses on whether and to what degree the projected stereotypes influence the identity and self-awareness of the two genders, as well as what society perceives to be the place and the role of men and women within it (Dow and Condit 2005). In the nearly forty years that this scientific field has existed, a relatively rich depository of research data and studies has been accumulated from different countries, different types of media (television, cinema, magazines, even the radio and the Internet), public groups and categories of products (Gauntlett 2002, Wolin 2003, Dow and Condit 2005). However, in Greece very few studies have been carried out on the gender stereotypes projected in commercial advertising (Zotos and Lysonski 1994, Doukeri 2003).

Though fewer in number than studies that have been carried out in commercial advertising, relative studies have shown that gender stereotypes also exist in politics. Voters often form opinions about political candidates based on their stereotypical views of gender, overlooking perhaps the personality, the body of work or the political positions of candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Kahn 1996, Fox and Smith 1998, Sambonmatsu 2002). Indeed, voters seem to depend on stereotypes, not only at times when their knowledge about a candidate is incomplete, in which case they use stereotypes to “fill” their “knowledge gap” (Fridkin and Kenney 2009), but even when they possess abundant information about a candidate. In the second case, gender stereotypes function as “*information shortcuts*” (Sambonmatsu 2002: 21).

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The research objective of this study is to examine the dominant gender stereotypes in printed political advertisements of male MP candidates in the first electoral district of Thessaloniki between 1993 and 2007. The study aspires to document the frequency of appearance as well as possible changes in the frequency of appearance of these stereotypes during the period under investigation.

The present study is therefore called upon to answer the following questions: (a) what is the frequency of appearance of gender stereotypes in advertisements of MP candidates during the period 1993-2007? and (b) what are the changes in the frequency of appearance of these stereotypes during the investigated time span? The specific period of time (1993-2007) was selected because it was a time of significant social, communicational and political change and evolution for Greece, which influenced the way political communication was conducted.

The method used in the study is content analysis. This particular method was selected because it is appropriate for the systematic analysis, quantification and comparison of communicationally significant data that emerge from the content of different texts or messages (Bertrand and Hughes 2005), as is the case in this study.

The sample selection process was multi-levelled (see Krippendorf 2004). The study considered advertisements that were placed in newspapers during the last 30 days before each election. The sample selected was of male MPs representing the first electoral district of Thessaloniki in three electoral contests, those of 1993, 2000 and 2007, thus spanning a period of fourteen years, which makes it possible to draw in-depth conclusions and to document possible changes in the frequency of appearance of gender stereotypes.

The categories of the content analysis are presented in Table 1. The formulation of these categories took into account (a) references in the international literature regarding gender stereotypes in politics (see Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Sambonmatsu 2002, Fridkin and Kenney 2009), (b) references to characteristics that impact on the image of politicians in a positive or a negative way, mainly from the work of Holtz-Bacha and Kaid (1995: 76) and Schweiger and Adami (1999: 361), and (c) the classifications referring to gender stereotypes in commercial advertising. Based on these studies, it could be considered that the first two stereotype categories, those of the successful and the dynamic politician, for the most part express traditionally male stereotypes, while the other three, those of the visionary, the decent fellow citizen and the ethical politician, are more female stereotypes.

Table 1: Content analysis classifications

<u>1. Successful</u>
• Emphasises his professional capacity
• Emphasises his political achievements and/or experience
<u>2. Dynamic</u>
• Presented as a fighter, assertive
• Shows himself in action
<u>3. Visionary</u>
• Holds out hope for the future
• Stresses his youth
<u>4. Decent</u>
• Gives weight to the average citizen
• Appears ordinary, dresses simply
<u>5. Ethical</u>
• Emphasises ethics and transparency
• Characterised by consistency of word and action
<u>6. Indeterminate</u>

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Frequency of appearance of gender stereotypes

As is shown in Table 2, a total of 73 different advertisements of MP candidates were documented. The stereotype that appeared most frequently was that of the dynamic candidate (28.8%), closely followed by that of the successful man/politician (27.4%). The visionary stereotype represented 20.5% of the total, and that of the decent fellow citizen 17.9%. Relatively few advertisements were documented where the dominant stereotype was that of the ethical politician (2.7%), while in some cases it was not possible to determine the stereotype projected (2.7%).

Table 2: Frequency of appearance of gender stereotypes in the advertisements of male political candidates during the period 1993-2007.

	1993	2000	2007	Total
Successful	11 (42.3%)	5 (21.7%)	4 (16.7%)	20 (27.4%)
Dynamic	10 (38.4%)	6 (26.1%)	5 (20.8%)	21 (28.8%)
Visionary	3 (11.5%)	6 (26.1%)	6 (25%)	15 (20.5%)
Decent	1 (3.9%)	3 (13.1%)	9 (37.5%)	13 (17.9%)
Ethical	0 (0%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.7%)
Indeterminate	1 (3.9%)	1 (4.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.7%)
Total	26 (100%)	23 (100%)	24 (100%)	73 (100%)

4.1.1. The successful stereotype

As mentioned earlier, the stereotype of the successful man/politician was the second most frequently appearing stereotype in the period under investigation, at a rate of 27.4%. In the advertisements where this particular stereotype is dominant, the element that is most prominent in the candidate's projected image is his professional capacity, political body of work, experience, education and social activity. The emphasis in the message is on "who he is", projecting his abilities with the purpose of convincing prospective voters that he is worth electing. Non-verbal elements concerning the candidate's whole look, such as attire, body posture, gaze, complete the message. Candidates belonging to this category almost always appear wearing a dark suit, conservative tie and, usually, a white or pale blue shirt, a choice that signifies success, authority, reliability and credibility.

According to a study carried out by Doukeri and Panagiotou (2005), components of the stereotype of the successful male-politician are documented in almost all political advertisements. Apparently this is no accident. The elements that characterise the personality of a candidate, such as his professional career, experience, intelligence and ability to succeed, are an integral part of his image and constitute key selection criteria for voters (Schweiger and Adami 1999, Kapelou 2000). The frequency of this particular stereotype seems to have an additional, equally important cause. The successful stereotype is also related to a broader perception of masculinity that was dominant in Greek society, the "traditional archetype" (Mancini and Swanson 1996: 19), and the stereotype of the ideal man (Zotos and Lysonski 1994, Doukeri 2003): the successful, independent and dominant male, behind the mask of toughness and leadership, the "superman", possessed of strength and power, of rational and competitive thinking, of high achievement records and self-confidence, and total emotional control.

4.1.2. The dynamic stereotype

The most frequently appearing stereotype, representing 28.8% of the total, was that of the dynamic politician. In this category, candidates are presented as fighters, active and assertive, warriors for their country and their fellow citizens. The high frequency with which this particular stereotype appears in the advertisements of this period is considered to be due to two reasons. Firstly, it relates to the active interest of voters in acquiring a better life. In their effort to send an "enticing" message to voters, candidates promise in their advertising to fight vigorously for their country and for their fellow citizens. Secondly, the frequent appearance of this stereotype is related to the common perception of masculinity, elements of which are assertiveness, vigour, courage, even aggression (Badinter 1994, Doukeri 2003). As Huddy and Terkildsen (1993: 120) report, this particular stereotype is the most representative male stereotype in politics. Male politicians stress vigour, toughness and aggression as the most prominent characteristics of their image, linking them indirectly to their ability to handle difficult situations, like those occurring in politics, with determination and effectiveness.

4.1.3. The visionary stereotype

According to the research findings the stereotype of the visionary politician was the third most frequently appearing stereotype in the period under investigation, with a rate of 20.5%. In the relevant advertisements, candidates offer a vision of, or even some hope for, a better future, emphasising their youth, their attractive appearance, and/or using largely emotional language. Thus, they aim to influence voters by provoking positive feelings towards their person, an approach which, according to Huddy and Terkildsen (1993), diverges from the stereotypical means of projection used by male

politicians and is usually associated with the style of female candidates, with a greater focus on appearance, youth, personal interest and creating positive feelings.

4.1.4. The “decent fellow” stereotype

The stereotype of the decent politician appeared in this study at a rate of 17.9%. The message of the advertisements in which this was the dominant stereotype focuses on the ordinary, average citizen-voter. The candidate is promoted as a simple, ordinary person, usually smiling, likable and approachable, casually dressed without suit or tie. He is presented as being the same as his fellow citizens, implying that he is in a position to understand their needs and their daily lives.

With this particular type of projection the candidate endeavours to create the image of a politician who cares about the people, in order to endear himself with the voting public and build up a certain familiarity-at-a-distance. Like the previous stereotype, this style of projection diverges from the stereotypical projection used by male politicians. As has already mentioned, sensitivity and interest in the average citizen and their daily life are traditionally stereotypical of female candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Sambonmatsu 2002, Fridkin and Kenney 2009).

4.1.5. The ethical stereotype

Transparency, consistency, morality and the honouring of promises made are elements that voters seek in candidates, since politicians are often accused of obscurity, corruption, intrigue, exaggerated pre-election promises and inconsistency (Kapelou 2000). For this reason, some candidates advertise their morality and integrity of character, as well as their consistency of word and action (Schweiger and Adami 1999). Fridkin and Kenney (2009) report that morality and honesty are encountered more often in female candidates, and that is why they pertain more to female stereotypes.

In this study the stereotype of the ethical politician was dominant in only two advertisements (2.7%). Both are from the 2000 elections, possibly because the issue of the morality and consistency of politicians was high on the political agenda of that particular pre-election period. With this means of projection candidates seem to have chosen to differentiate themselves from other candidates, responding to the wish of voters for morality and consistency in politics.

4.2. Changes the frequency of appearance of the stereotypes

Table 3 illustrates the statistical significance assessment of the difference in the rates of appearance of the projected stereotypes in the three electoral contests studied. As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3, significant changes were documented in the projected stereotypes over time. Specifically, the frequency of appearance of the successful man/politician stereotype presented a gradual decrease over the period in question. Moreover, there is a statistically significant difference between the electoral contests of 1993 and 2000, and those of 2000 and 2007, rated at 5%.

Table 3: Statistical significance assessment of the difference in the percentages of appearance of the projected stereotypes in the elections of 1993, 2000 and 2007.

	1993-2000		2000-2007		1993-2007	
	% change	t-statistic	% change	t-statistic	% change	t-statistic
Successful	-20.6	1.59*	-5	0.44	-25.6	2.08**
Dynamic	-12.3	0.93	-5.3	0.43	-17.4	0.97
Visionary	14.6	-1.32*	-1.1	0.09	13.5	-1.25
Decent	9.2	-1.15	24.4	-2.01**	33.6	-3.17***
Ethical	8.7	-1.48*	-8.7	1.48*	0	0
Indeterminate	0.4	-0.07	-4.3	1.02	-3.9	1.03

*, **, *** Indicate a statistically significant change of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

The stereotype of the dynamic politician also presented a gradual decrease in frequency of appearance over the same period. However, this difference is not statistically important, as its level of significance is 10%. The rate of appearance of the stereotype of the visionary politician increased from 11.5% in the 1993 elections to 26.1% in the 2000 elections, a statistical significance level of 10%, and decreased slightly to 25% in the 2007 elections. The percentage of appearance of the stereotype of the decent-citizen politician increased from 3.9% in the 1993 elections to 13.1% and 37.5% in the 2000 and 2007 elections respectively, becoming the most frequently appearing stereotype in the last electoral contest. Regarding this particular stereotype there is a statistically significant difference both between the electoral contests of 1993 and 2007, where an increase of the particular stereotype by 33.6 percentage points was documented (significance level 1%), and between 2000 and 2007, where the increase was 24.4 percentage points (significance level 5%). The stereotype of the ethical politician appeared, as mentioned before, only in the elections of 2000, with a frequency of 8.7%. There was a statistically significant difference between the electoral contests in 1993 and 2000, and 2000 and 2007, with a significance level of 10%.

The changes that occurred in the frequency of appearance of different stereotypes are considered to have two main causes. Firstly, it seems that the focus of the message gradually shifted from the characteristics of the candidate to how voters

would benefit from his election, and from quasi-rational arguments to emotionally charged communications. In other words, advertisements became voter-oriented (Lees-Marshment 2009, Robinson 2010), gradually changing from candidate-centred, where the dominant feature was the characteristics of the candidate, e.g. his knowledge, experience, capability, dynamism and fighting spirit, to voter-centred, where the dominant message focused on the needs and requirements of the voter, such as the vision of a better life or an interest in the daily life of the average citizen, and was mainly emotional in thrust. Secondly, these changes seem to be the result of the gradual evolution of society and its transition to the “*modern archetype*” (Mancini and Swanson 1996: 19), as well as of the broader change that overtook gender stereotypes, particularly after the change in the position and role of women in society. This change to a certain extent discarded older representations of masculinity and the characteristics of the ideal man, and defined a “*new masculinity*” (phrase coined by Badinter 1994: 228), in which the “ideal” man is shown to have characteristics, such as compassion, tenderness or sensitivity, that had previously pertained exclusively to women and were seen as signs of weakness and even femininity in men (Clare 2000, Gauntlett 2002).

A corresponding convergence of gender stereotypes is also reported in politics (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). The increased frequency of appearance of the traditionally female stereotype in the political advertisements of male candidates, however, is likely part of an effort to enrich their unchallengeable male identity with characteristics, positions and attributes that have a resonance with voters. Candidates thus expand the electoral base they are addressing, adding more groups of voters, such as young people or women.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTHER RESEARCH

The research findings showed that overall the two most frequently appearing stereotypes were those of the dynamic and of the successful man/politician. These stereotypes are considered to be the most characteristic male stereotypes in politics (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Doukeri and Panagiotou 2005, Fridkin and Kenney 2009) and correspond to the corresponding male stereotypes that are documented in commercial advertisements in Greece (Zotos and Lysonski 1994, Doukeri 2003). However, the study documented significant changes in the promoted stereotypes over time. The dynamic and the successful stereotypes gradually decreased, while those of the visionary and the decent politician increased, with the result that in the 2007 elections the last two were those appearing most frequently. This change seems to be due mainly to the related convergence observed between male and female stereotypes in politics (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993), which is the result of a wider change in the position and role of the two sexes in society that also changed the perception of masculinity (Badinter 1994, Gauntlett 2002). The new masculinity wants the male politician less tough, rational, dynamic and assertive, and more emotional, human, sensitive and visionary.

The results of this study could serve as an occasion for further investigations that would allow for relative comparisons. A similar study looking at the gender stereotypes projected in the advertisements of female candidates so as to determine whether and how far these follow the stereotypes of male candidates would certainly be interesting. Also, similar studies could be carried out for different periods of time, or for other candidates from Greece or abroad, or for different media, such as candidates’ promotional leaflets or personal websites, so as to further enrich the related research in this particular field.

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