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# Commercials, Moms, Dads, and the Pandemic: an Explorative Analysis of Gender Messaging and Gender Roles in Pandemic-Related Commercials

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**ABSTRACT:** *The pandemic caused brands to be sensitive to the environment, including the fact that many Americans were facing isolation, job loss, and living in a struggling economy. Brands made a conscious effort to connect with consumers during COVID-19. Brand messaging has always been cognizant of the fact that they need to reach female consumers with meaning and purpose but how did this messaging position mothers or female care-givers in relation to males who may have been home providing an equal amount of care during the pandemic. This analysis of commercials investigates the relevance of gender in commercial messaging during a time when gender roles were shared as a direct result of pandemic restrictions.*

**KEYWORDS** - advertising, communication, gender, marketing, pandemic

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Prior to the pandemic, women were noted as paying more attention to brands and in a recent marketing study, 80% of the mothers surveyed reported that they were even more critical of brand messaging during the pandemic and that commercial messaging did affect their decision to utilize those brands in the future [1]. Major product lines and retailers were intentional about not portraying families as perfect and not engaging in brand messaging that would mom-shame, and worked to find a balance between utilize influencers and celebrities to sell products.

The notion that messaging needed to be directed towards mothers was supported by data which revealed early on that mother's suffered more during the pandemic and that a gender gap in work hours positioned women to take up more of the slack in the work-from-home, learn-from-home environment. However, this is not how pandemic commercials started. To provide context, Berkowitz (2020) notes that brands started out with the same format during the first few weeks of the pandemic; somber background music, stock footage of empty public spaces and a message of unity. By March 25, 2020 that quickly changed with agencies going their own way to focus on a variety of themes, from their storied history in business, trust, to their focus on people, to the organizational ability to be sustainable during uncertain times [2].

Journalist Justin Peters (2020) assessed pandemic ads further by creating a taxonomy of 13 COVID-related commercial themes. While there are more themes, these were the most prevalent at the start of the pandemic:

1. **We're here for you ads (care commercials)** - product endorsement is removed from the ad to assure the consumer that the advertiser and brand is concerned about the consumer in the midst of a crisis
2. **We're here for you with special deals** - brands manifest their empathy by offering consumers a variety of discounts
3. **You can count on us ads** - self-valorizing commercials declare that the brand in question has been, is, and always will be ready to serve you
4. **God bless our heroes ads** - spots ostentatiously applaud the essential workers and medical personnel who have worked steadily through this crisis
5. **You know, we're pretty heroic ourselves ads** - praising the advertiser/brands for staying in business so that housebound American would not have to spend the lockdown deprived of basic necessities
6. **We've got this ads** - these commercials posit that we will get through this crisis, one way or another, because we're Americans
7. **The CEO in the commercial ad** - feature a CEO looking directly into the camera and delivering a reassuring message, one often involving a charitable donation or a giving initiative
8. **Hands across American and in your pockets ads** - these ads hope to convince viewers that they can help save the world by spending money, and that the best way to do that is to route those funds through a profit-seeking organizations
9. **We're clean now ads** - these ads were designed to reassure consumers that the places they once patronized are clean; cleaner than ever and that consumers do not have to be afraid that patronizing businesses in person will put them at risk of contracting the coronavirus
10. **We've always been clean ads** - these ads brag about companies that purportedly have prized sanitation for years
11. **Really misjudged the moment ads** - ads acknowledge the pandemic however make it seem as if the stay-at-home lockdown was a joyful time for families
12. **We're back baby commercials** - ad features footage of exclusively non-masked people returning to life as usual, showing people embracing, doing things they have missed during lockdown, etc.
13. **This ad is helpful ads** - commercial spots that encourage people to apply for jobs during these tough times

While these typologies clearly identify strategic messaging what it also evident is that during the pandemic, it was difficult to understanding the media consumption patterns of consumers and that those creating commercials during this period were ill-equipped to address consumer needs [3]. Collins, Landivar, Ruppner and Scarborough found that in a subset of households in which both mothers and fathers were employed in telecommuting-capable occupations, fathers' predicted work hours did not fall below 40 hours per week, indicating that while the pandemic had a major toll on all aspects of society, most fathers in different-sex, dual-earner households continued to put in a full work week and that mothers in these dual-earning households did more adjusting of their time during the pandemic [4].

This increased visibility of mothers balancing home schooling, work, and the normal labor associated with operating a household became a key marketing point for agency creatives who wanted to design ads (both commercial and print) that would encourage and support moms during this challenging time. Brands also focused on delivering human content and empathy during the pandemic and instead of selling products, messaging was focused on building long-term trust, helping and supporting one another, and educating consumers during the pandemic [5].

Brands have always been good at marketing to moms as they have been positioned as the caregiver and fathers are traditionally the main source of income. However, in an era where gender and family roles are dynamic, one would think that messaging would have come full circle and that pandemic campaigns would reflect today's quarantined, married-heterosexual, same-sex, interracial, dual-earning families. Additionally, agencies have long struggled with how to message to fathers in a non-stereotypical manner that does not insult or emasculate men prior to the pandemic. For example, a 2012 Huggies ad intended to demonstrate the high performing diaper featured a father who neglected to put on a diaper properly because he was so fixated on the sporting event he was watching on TV. The ad was pulled from rotation, but this speaks to the glaring challenge advertisers face when messaging to male consumers.

A long-held belief is that women are the primary consumers and the default caregivers and the pandemic offered marketers and brands a way to deepen their relationships with women. While fathers made up between 13% and 23% of men who pulled back from their careers that was not enough to impact marketing strategies [6]. The unrequited questions still remains; why do marketers continue to get gender wrong? According to Dobscha creators of marketing strategies and their collaborators in advertising continue to create sexist reflections with no apparent consideration about the potential negative impacts and the people "at the table" (both men and women) seemingly do not offer realistic insight along the way in the creative process. Marketing that is geared towards male audiences centers on a corrective approach to masculinity. One that says to male consumers that we (as brand managers, chief marketing officers, etc.) are concerned about the perceived lack of empathy, the dominant male image, and the need to uphold the all-American persona, and can help to focus the male gaze inward. This too is tone deaf in a way. This sort of marketing excludes or diminishes the male presence and during the pandemic, even these elements of 'woke-marketing' were absent as a low percentage of the messaging portrayed the male in a dominant role in the home [7].

From an academic perspective, the consideration of the patriarchal nature of commerce and capitalism continues to give males a separate construct in the marketing space, which widens the gender gap and continues to ignore the fact that we are now living in a consumer-driven society in which there are new sets of gender roles. The current textual analysis of commercials during the 2020 pandemic examines the continued gendering of commercial messaging, intended for a target audience of married-heterosexual, dual-earning families and the implications of such messaging in a society where gender roles continue to change.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Tone Deaf Marketing**

During the pandemic there was a deviation to the principle that companies cut advertising budgets. In many countries, governments emerged as advertising buyers to promote public health messages or support journalism. This showed a clear shift in advertisers adjusting in response to the climate. Additionally, there was a concentrated shift in messaging because in-home media use went up. This presented many opportunities for content providers to meet consumer needs or to miss the mark on identity-based marketing efforts [8].

Relevant content shows consumers that organizations recognize cultural changes and relationships with the target audience as meaningful. To this end, content marketing that does not connect with a consumer base is tone deaf. At various stages in the marketing process, value is entrenched in the relevant content that illustrates how a product, service or good can be an answer to a problem. During the pandemic criticism of companies doing business as usual flourished. According to Angeloni marketing efforts during the pandemic created business opportunities but it also created isolation. Marketing done poorly can have lasting negative ramifications and make the acquisition of future clients or loyal consumers difficult. It is a delicate balance offering support by way of commercial advertising and being opportunistic [9].

Velázquez asserts that avoidance or the appearance of avoidance for fear of alienating a consumer base also creates a sense of tone deafness. This can be perceived as being disingenuous and the default response of inaction can paralyze marketing efforts. The narrative of brands is to assert themselves as problem-solvers. To this end, if a brand is not creating a narrative of doing so, customers are left to fill in the blank(s); often with a negative assessment. Brands that avoided the tone-deaf trap during the pandemic focused messaging on external factors including how businesses were being affected, social distancing, racial unrest, unemployment, and first responders to name a few [10]. Tone deaf messaging also takes the form of messaging that loses impact. Whether it is related to over saturation in the marketplace, time, or because the messaging seems cliché, these messages can be perceived as tone deaf. For example, advertisers found that salutes to first responders and essential employees lost impact over time and that repetitive wording took away from the sincerity of messages. Additionally, messages that worked for urban audiences fell flat in rural viewing. According to McCallan evolution from highly emotional messaging to connecting with consumer's feelings serves the purpose of advertising that helps consumers in some way [11].

Adapting messaging as a direct result of change is a necessity. In an Edelman Trust study, 71% of the people surveyed stated that they would lose trust in a brand if they did not reconfigure messaging during a crisis. Unfortunately, there is an entire spate of brands that came across as tasteless during the crisis of 2020. At the worst possible moment during the pandemic, brands chose to roll out ad campaigns slated for launch despite turbulent times. In other situations, brands were perceived as taking advantage of the pandemic [12]. While brands can add meaning to conversations during difficult times, those efforts have to be executed strategically. Appearances of being opportunistic rather than empathetic can present a serious challenge, making strategic consumer communication especially important. This holistic view of tone-deaf marketing has implications for how males were depicted or left out of pandemic messages. Being tone deaf is as much about what is said as well as what is not said. Both can have the same impact. This next section is an overview of how males have been historically depicted in advertising.

## **2.2 The Doofus Dad Stereotype**

Fathers in traditional nuclear families are repeatedly depicted in the media and literature as the breadwinner but also the 'doofus dad' that is out of touch because he is not the go-to parent when it comes to nurturing and providing caregiving for children. Both the breadwinner and the doofus stereotypes (think Homer Simpson or Dagwood Bumstead) are harmful and suggest that fathers are only useful in providing financial stability. Even when fathers are portrayed as carrying out caregiver responsibilities, the narrative presents two overarching themes: silent parenting and completing the puzzle [13].

According to Fletcher's study, silent parenting highlights a father's isolation as he carries out duties as there is judgement or suspicion associated with his actions; for example, the uncomfortable feeling of being the only dad at a playground and being unable to create a sense of connectivity with mothers. The other theme focuses on single fathers and their challenges to balance the breadwinner identity with that of a nurturing parent. Parenting prejudice that has seeped into mainstream media often portrays fathers as lazy, incompetent, and stupid and these troupes are often personified in commercials or sitcoms and has created a new norm opposed to showing the depth and range of males in the household. When it comes to commercial messaging fathers are often outwitted by their children or the subject of eye rolls from wives. The negative portrayal of fathers, husbands and men in general contributes to the decrease in males wanting to assume these roles and hinders the creation of positive assumptions about men and their roles [14].

Other studies show that the stay-at-home dad images in commercials come with the caveat that we should accept those dads because they are trying even though they will never be as good as mothers in those same roles. Scholars believe that the current models of fathers do not reflect reality and that there should be a

push for an updated representation that shows positive male engagement. The role of mothers has been reframed but men have been left behind and there is space to shift the norms of fatherhood as masculine as reported in an MDG Advertising study in which only seven percent of males surveyed said they relate to the depictions of masculinity in the media [15].

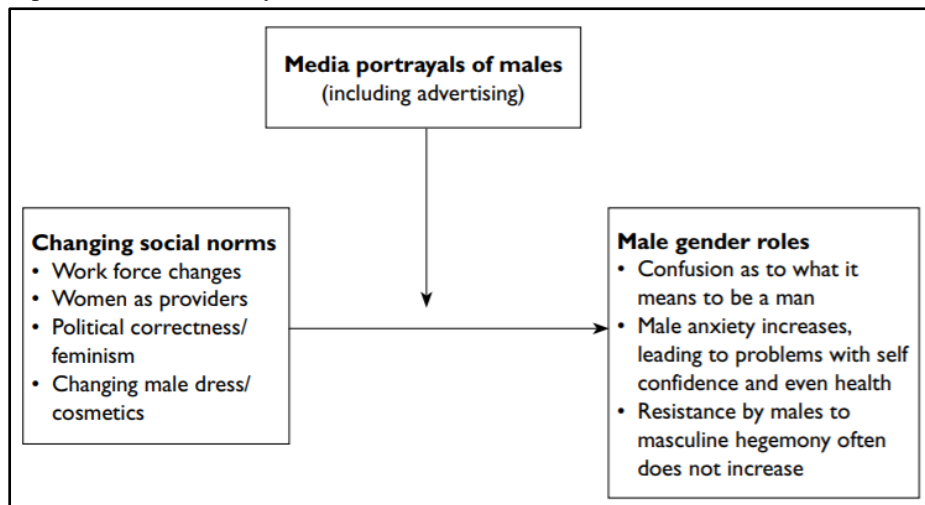


Figure 1. media portrayal of males (Gentry and Harrison, 2010)

The constant bombardment of these images or lack of positive imagery has an adverse effect on society and culture. The influence of the media and commercial messaging is massive and while conventional thinking and scholarship suggests that masculinity cannot be marginalized the cultural idealization of masculine characters can be harmful in that it forces men into confined roles. This confusion about masculinity also creates challenges for marketers. Advertising perpetuates a very traditional male gender norm, despite much evidence that those norms are very dynamic. This continues to remain problematic in that research on the roles of fathers in a family context in commercials is limited[16].

### 2.3 Focus on the COVID -19 Mom

A search using the key words “COVID-19 adverting for moms” yields 3,580,000,000 results on Google, 165,000,000 on Microsoft Bing, and 165,000,000 on Yahoo. A significant portion of digital content focused on the fact that mothers were now on the front lines of a pandemic risking their lives while others were at home working from couches or kitchen tables while simultaneously monitoring kids in online classes. While pivoting to a focus on mothers was not new to brand marketers, there was a different type of engagement around moms scrambling to find a balance between online meetings for work, prepping meals, monitoring children on Zoom classes, and women leaving the workforce to run their homes full-time.

Digital and social media influencers also saw an increase in women seeking content with an increase of 20% from the previous year. Additionally, 21% of women looked for new influencers to follow, with the hope of finding meaningful ways of navigating a new household environment. Social media also raised more questions about the division of household labor and responsibility among couples, citing that 59% of women who already experience an unequal division of labor in the home took on more responsibility as a direct result of daycare providers and child care centers being closed[17].

Mothers have always experienced an unfair tradeoff and some have perceived this as a crisis long in the making; one that subsequently stretched mothers even further during the lockdown, forcing them into positions in which they were providing extended support to family members without being able to find time to support their own emotional and physical needs, necessary to meet the demands of their careers, homeschooling,

housework, and child care. Government efforts to help families with child care costs, increased unemployment benefits and flexible corporate work policies seemingly have not been enough to help mothers meet the demands. The silver lining has been the fact that more legislative attention was given to this matter in the first six to eight months of the pandemic than in the last twenty years and while mothers remain the primary focus of this legislative discourse, corporate policy adoption, and advocacy much of what may be sustainable post pandemic may prove beneficial for all family members[18].

The research of Carlson, Petts and Pepinnotes the assumption that the pandemic would lead to increased domestic time and work for fathers is further stagnated by the gender ideology hypothesis that positions males as earners and women as domestic engineers. A hypothesis that has been at play for decades. Although support for reducing gender inequality when viewing roles of individuals in two parent/partner households is important, different-sex couples continue to be challenged by domestic roles and responsibilities [19]. This is further highlighted in a 2018 General Social Survey in which 77 percent of the participants agreed that it is better for women to assume roles in the home and for men to be the primary earner [20]. The depiction of roles via commercial messaging also supported the notion that women assumed much of the domestic work responsibility during the pandemic, focusing on women multitasking in the home during the pandemic, spending a significant amount of time engaged in domestic labor, and assuming governance of home schooling. Gender marketing theory speaks to why there was such an immense focus on women during the pandemic.

## **2.4 Gender Marketing**

While gender is reduced to male/female or masculine/feminine, the conceptualization in marketing is often problematized. Marketing strategies that are more progressive focus on moving away from dominant cultural views of male and female or feminine and masculine, while others work to capitalize on those stereotypes; leading to content that is not only stereotypically sexual but reflective of ethnic and other tones of inequality. Theoretical practitioners engage in work that contributes to a better understanding of gender and how it impacts consumer behavior and identity [21]. Gender marketing emerged as a result of a fundamental need to understand the point of view of male and female consumers. Marketing segmentation has been a useful tool for companies whose product success is contingent on gender differences and acceptance of those products. Moreover, messaging helps to convey to a consumer that a product, good or service has specific value based on gender attributes. To make a brand or product male or female, you need to achieve its strong association with a certain gender in the point of view of the consumer. In creating a male or female image of a product, companies try to make it attractive to stereotypical men or women and then promote and advertise the product strictly within the created image. The assumption is that women and men differ fundamentally in terms of lifestyles, thus impacting their purchasing decisions [22].

Gender marketing also shapes the perception of reality; the way consumers perceive themselves and their acceptance of stereotypical behavior. Marketing messages also contribute to the development of competition, strength, and managerial qualities in men and for women they reinforce the notion that women should be cooperative and caring. This aside, the manifestation of masculine or feminine qualities connected to a product or brand does not deter female consumers. In fact, it is more socially acceptable for women to purchase products marketed to both genders and macho culture makes it less acceptable for men to cross those lines of masculinity and femininity. According to Zbooker, the problem that current marketers face is that people can exhibit both male and female qualities. Masculinity and femininity are mobile, not permanent categories, traditional gender roles have changed, and gender boundaries have expanded. What previously could only be male or female can now be both, but the concept of gender neutrality in marketing does not address the problem. Marketing is a complex field and campaigns that work will always require a tactical gender-based approach.

### **III. HYPOTHESES**

Past research in the area of gender marketing suggests that both pre and during the pandemic, marketing efforts were highly geared toward women as primary consumers of goods and services. Additionally, the research supports the notion that commercial messaging has been slow to keep up with changes in father's and mother's roles in heterosexual, two-parent households. The pandemic also presented a fertile landscape for research in that it heightened the disparities in pay, job loss, strained gender roles and the increase of domestic work with the potential for more shared responsibilities. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were investigated:

- H<sub>1</sub>: Women will be portrayed more domestically in COVID-19 commercial messaging and the visualization of gender roles will be consistent with past practices*
- H<sub>2</sub>: Increase in domestic responsibilities and elevated responsibilities within the home will more likely be associated with women*

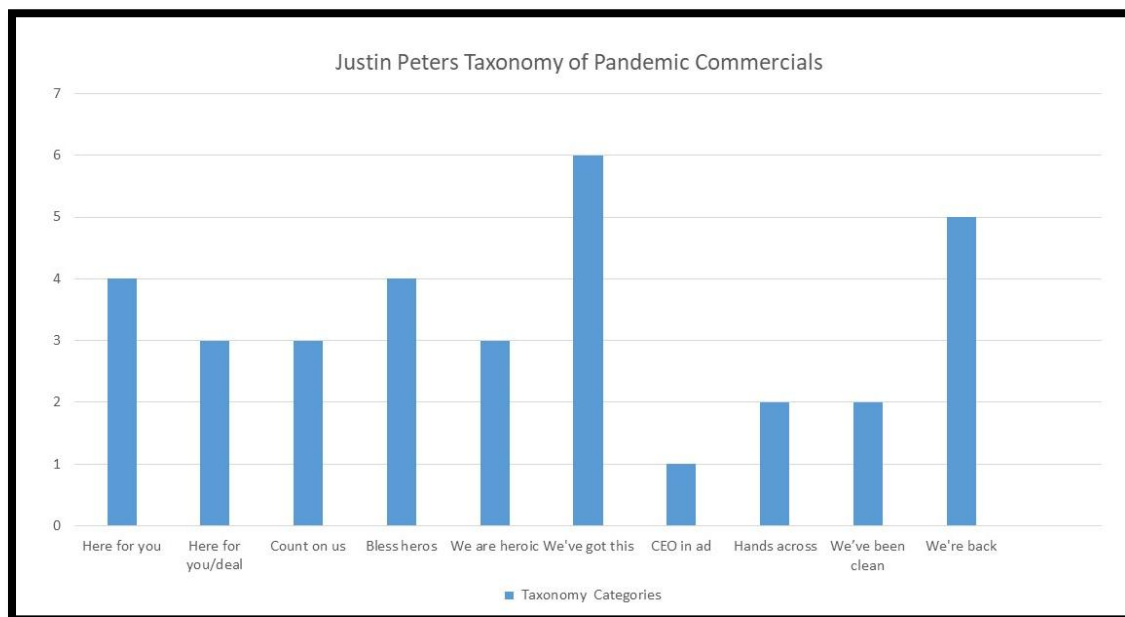
### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

This study followed a qualitative methodology, specifically a content analysis. While qualitative methods can be restrictive, for the purpose of this study, utilizing non-numerical data allowed the researchers to examine commercial content for relevant themes associated with the presentation of gender related messages in commercials during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyzing commercial contents can help provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of people about the crisis. Data were collected from the commercial content aired from March 2020 to December 2020 on network television. The search feature on Google<sup>®</sup> and YouTube<sup>®</sup> was used to find commercial content related to Coronavirus or COVID-19. Overall, 30 commercials were downloaded and analyzed using thematic analysis. The transcripts for each commercial were analyzed along with the visual content of each commercial.

### **V. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The 30 commercial advertisements downloaded from Google<sup>®</sup> and YouTube<sup>®</sup> were considered as a sample size for this study. The collected content was analyzed and coded into the following categories; visual, vocal and textual content. Additionally, the content was coded based on Justin Peters' taxonomy of pandemic commercial themes. Of the 30 commercials, the majority fell into the category of "We've got this advertisements", N=6, with the next two relevant themes being "God bless our heroes" and "We're back", N=5. According to Peters, during the pandemic it has been important for brands not to appear desperate or out of touch and the most successful brands celebrated the strength that this country is ostensibly made of and visualized the fortitude to remain in business, support businesses, and each other[23].

TABLE 1. Commercial themes based on Justin Peters Taxonomy\*



### 5.1 Visual Data Analysis

Visual media can be informative but it can also be manipulative and support long-standing cultural stereotypes. Imagery is deeply connected to consumer consciousness however; the study of visual media can often be complex because components such as body language and other imagery may not convey a clear and concise message. Additionally, what is inferred through the visualization may not be associated the same by all consumers. Breaking down the commercial content beyond Peters' Taxonomy allowed for a richer assessment of brand messaging based on gender roles. A summary of the visual analysis is presented in Table 2. The visual analysis consisted of a detailed scene-by-scene, actor/character analysis that was coded in the following manner:

- Women in traditional roles (home)
- Men in non-traditional roles (home)
- Men in traditional roles (working)
- Women in traditional roles (working)
- Images of mothers alone/single mothers
- (scene's at home)
- Nuclear families working together
- Interracial/biracial couples
- Women expressing frustration
- Men expressing frustration



TABLE 2. Visual analysis of commercial content

Women in traditional roles (home)	Men in traditional roles (home)	Men in traditional roles (working)	Women in traditional roles (working)	Images of mothers alone/single mothers (scene's at home)	Nuclear families working together	Interracial/biracial couples	Women expressing frustration	Men expressing frustration
C2 C3/n=4 C4 C5/n=2 C7 C9/n=23 C10 C12/n=2 C16 C17/n=5 C19 C20/n=3 C22/n=3 C23/n=6 C25/n=3 C27/n=6	C2 C3 C10/n=2 C19/n=3 C20/n=3 C22/n=4 C23/n=2	C4 C5/n=3 C6/n=4 C11/n=3 C13/n=11 C24/n=7 C28/n=12 C30/n=4	C5/n=2 C6/n=3 C7 C11/n=3 C13/n=5 C18/n=6 C21 C22 C24/n=5 C28/n=12 C30	C1 C3/n=3 C4 C10/n=4 C11 C16 C20/n=3 C21 C22 C23/n=5 C24 C9/n=22	C7/n=3 C12 C15 C17 C20/n=5 C23	C16 C22 C30	C10/n=4 C23	C10/n=2 C23/n=2
N=63	N=16	N=45	N=40	N=44	N=12	N=3	N=5	N=4

In this representative sample women overwhelming were projected in traditional roles in the home than men (Women N=63; Men N=16) but the representation of both genders in the workplace was relatively equal, (Women N=44; Men N=40). There were 12 occurrences of a nuclear family with a heterosexual couple engaged in nuclear family interaction with a contrast of 44 occurrences of single women in these roles. A summary of the current visual analysis does support the notion that the industry is still heavily focused on connecting with female consumers.

## 5.2Vocal Data Analysis

The voice in commercial advertising and marketing builds a sense of trustworthiness and has the potential to alter messages and the effectiveness of those messages. According to a 2017 research study, comprised of 202 participants from the United States, the analysis of variance indicates that there were differences among the voice treatments [ $F(3, 194) = 6.71, p = 0.00025$ ] in how users viewed the trustworthiness of the video message. The post hoc tests revealed that female voices are significantly more trustworthy than male voices, while professionalism did not influence viewers' trust perception. When asked their preference of voice, participants preferred the female/professional voice to the other voice options [female/non-professional, male/professional, and male/nonprofessional] [24].

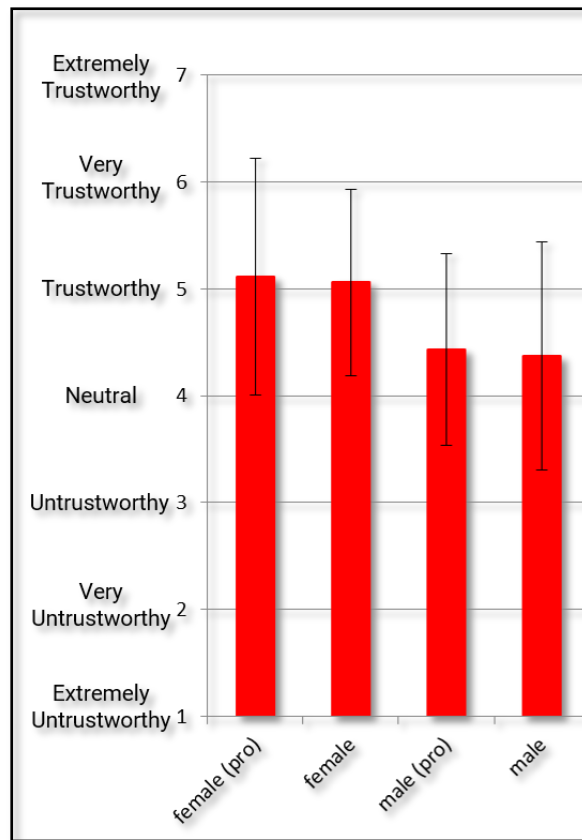


Figure 2. trustworthiness of voice

While the referenced study was highly contextual, it does have inferences at it relates to the current examination of gender messaging. In Table 3, while the rate at which female voices appeared in the representative sample greater than the male representation, with a statistical difference of roughly 13%, it can still be concluded that viewer perception of likability and perceived preference is connected to hearing a female.

Video watched	Voice preference			
	Female pro	Female	Male pro	Male
female pro	31	4	6	2
female	23	16	9	2
male pro	30	4	15	2
male	16	12	7	16

Figure 1. voice preference  
a

Table 3. Visual analysis of commercial content

Male	Female	Mixed
N=22	N =25	N=1

Yonata discuss the following factors as related to voice:

- gender to gender demographics and trust in selling products
- voice implications for neutrality, authority, or delivery of factual information general associated with maleness
- voice implication for instructional content, emotional or intimate content general associated with the female voice

According to Yonata, data supports the notion that female voices are generally preferred over male voices. He further asserts that understanding the scientific process by which we interpret sound in the auditory region of the brain may be more significant than understanding the marketing value of the most effective voice to use from a messaging perspective. This factor helps to illuminate the scientific processing of voice, rather than a gender-driven choice based on the considerations of demographics, consumer reach, or profitability[25].

### 5.3 Textual Data Analysis

Textual analysis is a vital research tool that can be deployed when examining and interpreting text that represent systems of belief and views that impacts the way in which others within a specific group or culture are impacted by those interpretations. With regard to the current study, textual analysis has utility in that the researchers explored the relationship between a dominant view of advertising and its impact on specific groups. Of the 30 commercials in this study, 25 complete transcripts were available via YouTube<sup>®</sup>, two were manually transcribed, and three commercials had no narration. The textual analysis of the recorded content revealed 14 direct or indirect, scripted references to moms/females, while this same data set made no references to dads/males. When applying Peter's Taxonomy, the commercials that fell under the *here for you, we've got this or we're back* category were scripted with more inclusive language or phrases:

- “...proud of all the people.”
- “This is our chance to play for the world.”
- “...we are united in one single cause...”
- “...we'd like to salute everyone who's trying hard...”

There are few examples of discourse analysis in advertising, suggesting that there are even fewer discourse analytic studies applied to marketing phenomena at all. However, what is known is that when considering discourse as forms of social action where language is constructive and constitutive of social life, that textual analysis does enable researchers to draw implications and assumptions from the text and make sense of why viewers relate to content in the manner in which they do. To this end, textual or discourse analysis forces us to examine meaning and the complex processes through which social meanings are produced [26].

To gain a better understanding of gender messaging the data was analyzed according to the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Women will be portrayed more domestically in COVID-19 commercial messaging and the visualization of gender roles will be consistent with past practices*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Increase in domestic responsibilities and elevated responsibilities within the home will more likely be associated with women*

In short, this research supports H<sub>1</sub> as it was observed that women were represented more often in advertisements. Further, the textual analysis revealed that deliberate scripting was done to connect with a female consumer-base. The notion that socio-cultural views of women as primary consumers and as the more domestic partner was also validated by this study. With regard to H<sub>2</sub>, while not confirmed by data, ad copy referenced the fact that more women were impacted as a result of elevated responsibilities during the pandemic and through discourse in their advertising, constructed meaning that positioned their products or services as ones

that could help to remediate this elevated responsibly. While advertisers were more sensitive in their portrayal of fathers in the advertisements, the advertising objectives were more in line with traditional advertising and marketing canons, using language and visualization that resonates with a specific group; in this case female consumers.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The pandemic raised concerns about gender equity and that was ever-present in pandemic-related commercials. The pandemic will reshape the advertising industry and the focus on survival, sticking together and conscious consumerism will cause the industry to find new ways to promote their brands. Changes in the socio-cultural constructs of gender roles in different-sex homes will also force people to rethink how best to represent gender roles through messaging as those roles change and become less traditional. Social change which often drives advertising is slow to progress as it related to the imaging and messaging of domestic labor. Pandemic advertising, which became a vessel through which gender inequalities were exacerbated, provides greater context for research in gendered divisions of labor in commercial messaging, increased participation of males in domestic responsibilities, and the egalitarian sharing of those responsibilities.

While this study contributes to a growing body of pandemic-related research in the social sciences, it is not without its limitations. The current study focused on a subset of commercial advertising related to pandemic messages and sales of products, however, the data may not be generalizable to a larger data set of commercials in which gender is one of the proposed variables. Additionally, there is the concept of different-sex couples/families in advertising. As demographics shift, what constitutes a family and is deserving of academic study comes into question. While character casting in commercials has grown to include same sex and interracial couples, and persons with disabilities, none of those were represented in the data set for this study. Despite these limitations, there is evidence that this research has the potential to be extended as gender inequalities will remain firmly entrenched in how advertisers do business and connect with stakeholders.

## **VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## Appendix A

### Full Report Justin Peters Taxonomy of Pandemic Commercial Themes

Justin Peters Taxonomy of Pandemic Commercial Themes	
1. We're here for you ads N=4	C1 Ford "Vehicle built for mom" C16 Dawn "Come clean to close the chore gap" C19 Budwiser "Checking in that's whassup" C20 Coca-cola "The great meal"
2. We're here for you with special deals N=3	C6 State Farm "COVID-19" C11 Ford "Differed payments" C12 Hyundi Assurance "COVID differed payments"
3. You can count on us ads	C3 Uber "Thank you for not riding Uber"
4. God bless our heroes ads N=5	C10 Google "Thank you teachers" C13 Amazon "Thank you Amazon" C24 St. Peter's Healthcare System "Thank you" C30 First Energy "Thank you"
5. You know, we're pretty heroic ourselves ads N=3	C4 Clorox "Caregiver" C17 Proctor and Gamble "Secret #raiseitup" C22 Care.com "Care keeps going"
6. We've got this ads N=6	C2 Hyundi "This is us" C7 Amazon "The show must go on" C9 Facebook Groups "Born in quarantine" C18 Unilever "We will fight the pandemic together" C28 Nike "Play for the world" C29 Mint Mobile "Ryan Reynolds voice mail"
7. The CEO in the commercial ad N=1	C6 State Farm "COVID-19"
8. Hands across American and in your pockets ads N=2	C25 Oscar Mayer "Front yard cookout" C26 Burger King "Stay home for the Whopper"
9. We're clean now ads N=0	
10. We've always been clean N=2	C5 Clorox "leave the outside, outside" C27 Dove "Wash to care"
11. Really misjudged the moment ads N=0	
12. We're back baby commercials N=5	C8 Amazon "Ready for school" C14 "Trolls World Tour Movie" C15 Kinder Joy Candy "Easter" C21 Care.com "Back to school" C23 Care.com "Back to school & back to work"
13. This ad is helpful ads N=0	

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