A Content Analysis of Female Portrayals in Indian Magazine Advertisements

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Abstract

Since 1970's several research studies have been conducted by the developed countries on portrayal of women in advertising however very few researches can be traced in developing nations particularly in case of India. The present study examined the portrayal of women in Indian magazine advertising. Using content analysis, a total of 120 print advertisements were examined from the editions of India Today, Femina and Autocar published during April 2011 to July 2011. The study indicates prevalence of female stereotyping in Indian print advertising and young females stood as the best choice for brand promotion by advertisers. Conversely, these stereotypical images ignored the significant increase in the Work Participation Rate and literacy rate of women over the last few decades in India.

Keywords: gender portrayal, content analysis, stereotyping, advertising

Introduction

As per the report of FICCI-KPMG 2012, the advertising spend by marketers have increased significantly. The total advertising spends across all media in India for the year 2011 was accounted for INR 300 billion which contributes to 41 percent of the overall Media & Entertainment industry's revenues.

In addition, the advertising revenue recorded a growth of 13 percent in 2011. This indicates the high acceptance of advertising as one of the most influential and effective social communication tool by the marketers. The main aim of advertising is to convince the consumers to buy the advertised product by influencing their thoughts and feelings and in order to achieve that, advertising practitioners employ several strategy and tactics. Stereotyping of gender is the most common strategy and practice employed by several advertisers to establish a strong connect with the brand since 'a lack of identification with the roles portrayed may reduce the attention, credibility, retention and subsequent recall of any advertisement' (Pollay & Lysonski, 1993, p. 39). It has been noted that with the advent of women's liberation movement in 1960's, research studies on the representation of gender became a focal point in advertising research.

Researchers from the US, UK and European Union have contributed significantly in examining the gender representation in various mediums of advertising as against the studies conducted in Asia-Pacific region even more so in case of India. India being one of the largest economies of the world and second in world population yielded very few research studies on gender portrayal in advertising which were again very limited in scope. The current study is important considering the fact that in Indian context the number of published empirical research on the gender portrayal is very few; so far only four research studies are reported.

Mathew (1990) examined Indian male market segmentation and preference of male role portrayals in each segment. In another study, Munshi (1999) examined the depiction of Indian housewives in Indian television commercials while Das (2000) reviewed and analyzed the representation of men and women in Indian magazine advertisements. Dwivedy et. al (2009) examined male and female portrayal trends in the advertisements of India's highest read men, women and general interest magazine across various product categories.

An extensive review of literature of last five decades indicate general consensus on gender stereotyping in majority of advertisements where women are mainly depicted as (1) reliant on men (2) as sex-object or an ornamental item, (3) do not make important decisions, (4) as housewife (or a caring mother), and (5) mostly portrayed as house bound whereas men are mainly shown (1) as decision maker, (2) in a commanding role, (3) as an expert, (4) primarily in work setting or (3) as a voice of narrator.

Selected research study on gender portrayal in print advertisements

This section reviews the selected research studies on gender role portrayals in print advertising of different nations over the decades.

Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) content analyzed 729 advertisements for the roles portrayed by men and women in eight general audience and news magazines of 1970 in the United States. The results suggested that ads reflected stereotypical roles for women such as housebound and dependent, not making important decisions, sex objects. It was found that only 9 percent of the women were portrayed in working roles as compared to men (45 percent).

Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) conducted a comparative study of role portrayal of women in magazine advertisements of United States from the year 1958, 1970, and 1972. A sample of 268 advertisements was collected from eight magazines published in the year 1958. The result of

this study were compared with the findings of the research conducted in 1970 and 1972 in order to verify the 'extent to which these stereotypes have been maintained and reinforced' in advertising. It was concluded that 'advertisements have not kept up with the times in portraying women in the wide variety of roles they play in today's world'.

Lysonski (1985) examined the depiction of men and women in British magazine advertisements. It was found that women continued to be portrayed as housewives, dependent upon on men, and as sex objects.

Mitchell and Taylor (1990) investigated the female role portrayals in British women's magazines in late 1980s to provide trends from the mid-1970s. The results indicated less stereotyping of women as 'physical objects' and a trend towards using either 'family' or 'independent' cues.

Kellerman and Kellerman (1998) conducted a follow–up study of the role portrayal of men and women in advertisements from eight general audience magazines of United States published during 1996. The result indicated that men as compared to women were portrayed more in working role in ads of 1970 and 1982 while in 1996, ads showed balanced approach. Moreover, the study also indicated a shift towards the decorative role of both the sexes.

Das (2000) examined the portrayal of women and men in Indian magazine ads from a wide range of magazines in 1987, 1990, and 1994. Results indicated that although the gender portrayals in Indian magazine ads have changed over the period, they are still portrayed in stereotypical ways.

Vela et al., (2007) examined male and female stereotypes in Spanish magazine advertising during the last three decades of the twentieth century. The results found that male and female portrayals have undergone significant changes in the last 30 years though gender

stereotypes persist. Results also indicated that low and decreasing levels of sexism in Spanish magazines.

Dwivedy et al., (2009) examined the role portrayals of men and women appeared in India's most popular men's, women's and general interest magazines during October 2006 to April 2007. Ads were content analyzed to identify the role portrayal patterns of male and female across magazine types. It was revealed that male and female are portrayed in traditional roles. Men's magazines depict men and women in very traditional role while women's and general interest magazines depict women in more modern roles.

A decade wise assessment of gender portrayal research indicates a similar pattern of gender stereotyping (see Table 1). During early 1970's it was found that men and women are depicted in highly stereotypical roles. It was hoped that advertisements of 1980's would depict men and women in more contemporary and non-traditional roles. But the studies conducted during 80's contradicted the forecast made by researches in the last decade. Both male and female continued to be represented in stereotypical role. The studies conducted in 1990's and 2000's were again consistent with the findings of previous year's researches only few researches observed slight changes in gender stereotyping particularly in case of women.

Literacy, education and employment status of women in India

As per Census 2011, the female literacy rate in India is showing a continuous increase over the years. The female literacy rate has increased to 63.7 per cent in 2011 as against the literacy rate of 8.9 per cent in 1951. There is a considerable enhancement in literacy rates of women during 1951 to 2001 (see Table 2). Moreover, the work participation rate (WPR) of women is growing gradually. As per the Registrar General of India in the year 2001, the WPR was 25.63 per cent as against the 22.63 per cent in 1991 and 19.67 per cent in 1981 (see Table 3).

In addition to this, the work participation of women in the organized sector (public and private sector both) increased from 49.53 lakh in March 2001 to 59.54 lakh in March 201 (see Table 4). Around 37 percent of married women participate in household decision making and they are most likely to make the decision about purchases for daily household needs as reported in NFHS-3 (2005-06). Overall, the data indicates an upward trend (progressive change) in the level of literacy, education and employment status of women in India.

Research Objective

The study intends to examine the female portrayal in Indian print (magazine) advertisement across various product and service categories. The study primarily focuses on current female portrayal in highly read magazines of three different genre i.e. general interest magazine, female and male targeted magazine in India. In addition to this, an assessment of female portrayals against their increasing current status of literacy, education and employment in India has also undertaken. Based on the objective, following hypotheses have been framed:

- H1: Females are more likely to be depicted in stereotyped role than non-traditional role.
- H2: Women are more likely to endorse products related to home and personal care.
- H3: Women are more likely to be portrayed as young.
- H4: Women are more likely to be presented in home settings than in office setting.
- H5: Women will be shown more often as product representative than expert.
- H6: Females will be shown more often without any indication of employment status.

Research Methodology

In the field of communication research, 'content analysis is the fastest-growing quantitative technique and includes the careful examination of human interactions; the analysis of character portrayals in TV commercials, films, novels or so' (Neuendorf, 2002, p.1). In order

to examine the female portrayals in advertising, the present study used content analysis. According to Berelson (1952) content analysis is 'a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content communication' (p. 18).

An extensive review of literature indicated that content analysis is the most preferred research method to examine the gender portrayals in media and social research (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1979; Lysonski, 1985; Gilly, 1988; Furnham & Voli, 1989; Mitchell & Taylor, 1990; Ford & LaTour,1993; Ford et. al., 1998; Milner & Collins, 2000; Das, 2000; Khairullah & Khairullah, 2009; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009; Ali & Shahwar, 2011).

Sample of Magazines

According to Newbold et al. (2002), sampling of media content analysis comprise of three steps: (a) Selection of media forms (i.e. magazines, TV, film), and media content or genre (news, current affairs, advertising, content pages of magazines, drama, and so on); (b) Selection of issues or period; (c) Sampling of appropriate content from the selected media. Thus, the study first identified the media form (i.e. magazine) and then the most read magazine in three different genre viz. general interest magazine, male oriented and female oriented magazine in urban area (Delhi city).

Based on the IRS data of 1st Quarter 2011, following magazines have been selected for the study (see Table 5): General Interest Magazine – India Today (English); Women's Magazine – Femina (English) and Men's Magazine – Autocar (English). Issues published during April 2011 to July 2011 were selected to collect the advertisements. Advertisements which were quarter page or more in size with at least a female in it were selected for the study as the study only examined female role portrayals in ads. Based on the criteria, a total of 263 advertisements were selected but only 120 (as repeat advertisements were omitted) were content analyzed.

Coding Procedure

The researcher adopted the coding procedure used in the previous researches on gender role portrayal (Lysonski 1985, Gilly 1988, Das 2000, Das 2011) with slight modifications to make it suitable for the current study.

Central Figure

In this study, female adult playing a central role in print advertisement was classified as central figure. If the advertisement had two or more females, the one who is featured most notably was selected for further coding.

Variables coded for central figure

Role Portrayal Category

The study used the same role portrayal categories which were used in previous researches. Following categories were identified: (i) Dependency^a; (ii) Housewife/Parent/ Spouse/Girl Friend; (iii) Sex-object/Decorative; (iv) Career Oriented; (v) Authority Figure^b; (vi) Non-Traditional; (vii) Celebrity; (viii) Neutral and (ix) Others.

Age

Central figure was categorized as being (1) Young (35 years or less); (2) Middle Age (35-55 years); (3) Old (55 years and above); or (5) unclear.

Employment

Central figure was categorized as being (1) Employed; (2) Celebrity; (3) Unemployed; or (4) Unclear (with no indication of employment).

Credibility

Central figure was categorized as being either (1) product user; (2) authority, when they

This category was merged with Housewife category due to non depiction of central figure as dependent (n=0)

b This category was merged with Celebrity as celebrities were used as authority in the selected sample of ads.

were depicted as source of information or expert; (3) Non-user; or (4) unclear.

Variables coded for advertisement

Location

Central figure was categorized according to the location or setting of the advertisement Following categories were identified: (1) Home; (2) Office; (3) Store/ Restaurants; (4) Outdoor; or (5) Other.

Product Category

The product categories were based upon the literature review and the scope of this study.

The product categories were classified into following: (1) Body (Personal care/cosmetics/
toiletries); (2) Home (Household Products); (3) Food & Beverages; (4) Auto & Auto accessories;
(5) Clothing (men & women); (6) Fashion/Jewelry/Accessories; (7) Financial Services/Banking;
(8) Electronics/consumer durables; (9) Telecom/mobile services; and (10) Others.

Coding Reliability

Inter-rater reliability on the coding of a subsample of advertisements was determined prior to the main study. To test inter-coder reliability, two management students, one male and one female coded 20 print advertisements. Both the coders were trained for a week to code the advertisements effectively. They were given detailed description of the variables of content analysis. The disagreements between both coders were resolved through discussion. The inter-coder reliability (percent agreement) among the coders is 91.43 percent which indicates overall coding reliability is above the standard norm.

Results

H1: Females are more likely to be depicted in stereotyped role than non-traditional role.

Women portrayal as housewife, spouse, girlfriend, dependent, sex-object, decorative have been defined as stereotyped. Table 9 indicates that in 64.2 per cent magazine advertisements, women were depicted in stereotypical role. Majorly they were shown either performing daily household activities or merely an object to ensure eye balls of the customers. The chi-square analysis $\chi 2$ (5, N=120) = 91.30, p < .05 supported the hypothesis that women are more likely to be portrayed in stereotyped roles.

H2: Females are more likely to endorse products related to home and personal care.

To test this hypothesis, products were grouped into three categories: a. Female Oriented; b. Male Oriented; & c. others. Products which are related to personal care, home, food & beverages, clothing & fashion have been defined as female oriented products. Male oriented products include auto, financial services, consumer durables, & telecom. The frequency distribution table (see Table 8) indicates that women are primarily preferred as brand endorser for female oriented while their appearance in commercials are very low in case financial services and telecom. The chi-square analysis $\chi 2$ (2, N=155) = 98.83, p < .05 supported the hypothesis that women are more likely to be portrayed in stereotyped roles.

H3: Females are more likely to be portrayed as young in most of the advertisements.

Table 10 indicates that out of 120 ads examined, women were mostly shown as young i.e. less than 35 years (90.8 per cent). Young female models are mainly used to gain visual attention to the advertisement. The chi- square analysis $\chi 2$ (2, N=120) = 179.55, p < .05 supported the hypothesis that women are more likely to be portrayed as young. Only in one advertisement woman was portrayed in older age.

H4: Females are more likely to be presented in home settings than in office settings.

Consistent with the findings of previous studies, of 120 ads examined, only in six ads (5 per cent) women were shown in office settings (see Table 10). The chi-square analysis indicated that women are likely to be presented in home settings than office settings and verified significantly, $\chi 2$ (4, N=120) = 36.33, p<.05, hence the hypothesis is supported H5: Females will be shown more often as product representative than expert.

The result supported the findings of previous studies that women are mainly shown as product representative or as user (see Table 10). In 70.8 per cent ads, women were shown as product representative and only in 15 per cent ads they have been shown as expert. The chi-square analysis $\chi 2$ (3, N= 120) = 138.47, p<.05 is significant, hence the hypothesis is supported. H6: Females will be shown more often without any indication of employment status.

The result supported that women are mainly shown either unemployed or without any indication of their work status in majority of the print advertisements (see Table 10). In 54.2 per cent ads status of women with respect to their employment were unclear which indicate that they are overrepresented in the 'unclear' category. The chi-square analysis $\chi 2$ (3, N= 120) = 56.07, p<.05 is significant, hence the hypothesis is supported.

Discussion

The main objective of this study is to examine how women are depicted in the contemporary Indian print (magazine) advertisements. All the hypotheses are proven strongly by the results reported in the study. There is strong evidence that women are continued to be type casted in Indian print advertisements. Our study indicates that the frequency of appearance of women is high for women oriented products such as personal care, home, food and beverages, clothing and fashion. In case of role portrayal of women, the dominant female role portrayal in magazine advertisements were identified as housewife (19.2 per cent), sex-object (45 per cent)

and as celebrity (21.7 per cent). It may be noted that though advertisers are giving preference to the female celebrities but they too were depicted in either promoting household related products or only served as a decorative item. Moreover in our study, findings indicate that in most of the advertisements, women were not depicted in the office setting or in working role, in fact they were most often shown as without any clear indication of working status. This indicates that advertisers prefer to under play the employment status of females in most of the advertisements. Additionally, result of location of the advertisement and employment status clearly complement each other. We also found that even today majority of female models are depicted as young and hardly employ women in older age. This reveals the fact that advertisers are not taking seriously the demographic pattern and are only keen to portray women in younger role. In terms of credibility, more than 70 per cent ads portrayed women as a user of the product while only 15 per cent ads showed them as expert.

All the above findings are in line with findings of the study conducted by Das (2000) and Dwivedy et al. (2009) except that portrayal of women in neutral and non-traditional role. Our study indicated low incidence of female portrayals in neutral and non-traditional category unlike the increase reported in both the past studies. Another interesting and contrasting finding in our study is the unclear category of employment status and credibility. Women as unclear employment status showed high percentage (as reported earlier) while it was very low (only 2.5 per cent) in credibility. This reveals that advertisers have acknowledged the rising participation of women in employment but they are not assured of consumer acceptance of representing them in non-traditional way, thus, they preferred to portray them in a neutral role instead of in an independent role.

Indian advertisements, as compared to the global trend in portrayal of women, portray them in stereotypical role. Despite some differences, the results of this study are consistent with findings of the past studies conducted in western (US, UK) and other Asian countries (China, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea). Indian advertisements were found to be similar with the UK, US, China, Japan and other Asian countries in portraying women as sex-objects, as decorative item, in younger role, as product users. While the portrayal of women in non-working role is consistent with the findings of study conducted in China, Thailand, Hongkong, Turkey but the recent study in America revealed the predominance of work related role of women in ads (80 per cent of ads). Furthermore, on the one hand there is a significant decade wise increase in the literacy rate (from 8.9 percent in 1951 to 29.8 percent in 1981 and 65.5 percent in 2011) and in the work participation rate of women (almost 40 percent) and on the other hand these changes have not reflected in the advertisements and remain locked to traditional image of women. A study of print advertisement in Hongkong reported similar finding that the contribution of women in the Hongkong labor market had not brought any elementary changes in the advertising practices. This is due to the fact that countries with deeply rooted patriarchal ideologies usually dominate the people's mindsets and because of this their attitude towards gender role has not changed, they still carry stereotyped associations with themselves. Another possible explanation may be attributed to the fact that change in mindset take decades and may be noticed in the generations to come. Overall the findings of our study echoed the similar results which has been found and observed in the studies conducted in other Asian countries especially those with patriarchal ideology.

The findings of the present study offer many implications for marketing managers, practitioners and advertising strategists. The current ad assessment in India reveals that most of

the advertisers are still resorted to gender stereotyping and have ignored the significant progress women have made in the society which may lead to poor connect between the brand and consumers. In order to have better connect and effective communication impact, it is advisable to marketing practitioners to review their strategy of gender portrayal. By employing more contemporary gender role representation in their communication, companies can enhance their competitive advantage by making the advertising messages more convincing and realistic for the consumers. Additionally, with the reforms in FDI policy in India, those companies willing to tap the world's largest and growing economy can also benefit with the finding of this study and formulate better promotional strategies to make it suitable for the Indian environment.

The results of the study, raises the question of appropriateness of such message strategy in the current socio-economic status and changing role of women in India. The findings of the study suggest that advertisers or marketing practitioners should review and relook their advertising message strategy in order to make their communication more realistic and identifiable for their target audiences. The study also has some limitations. The present study examined a small sample of ads from three magazines and does not focus on impact of magazine type on female portrayals. Future study should extend gender portrayal research not only to other conventional media but also to internet and digital marketing space. Besides, this research can also be extended to a survey of consumers to find out their preferences, as unacceptable image may affect buyer behavior.

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APPENDIX A

Readership Data of Publications (1st Quarter, 2011)

Publication	All	State : Delhi	Male	Female
The Times Of India	960	960	632	329
Hindustan Times	842	842	548	295
Navbharat Times	813	813	523	290
Hindustan	505	505	329	176
Punjab Kesari	365	365	273	92
Dainik Jagran	336	336	250	86
Infomedia Yellow Pages	209	209	150	59
India Today (English)	137	137	97	40
Pratiyogita Darpan	117	117	79	38
Grih shobha (Hindi)	106	106	37	69
Mail Today	102	102	74	29
Grehlakshmi	97	97	28	69
The Hindu	69	69	57	11
Mint	67	67	46	20
The Economic Times	65	65	50	15
Meri Saheli	59	59	8	50
Vanitha (Hindi)	57	57	2	55
General Knowledge Today	54	54	35	19
Champak (Hindi)	52	52	33	19
Femina	51	51	9	42
Readers Digest	51	51	26	25
Sandhya Times	48	48	41	7
Competition Success Review	47	47	27	20
Arogya Sanjivani	47	47	15	32
Auto Car	45	45	38	8
Nandan	45	45	24	21
Outlook	41	41	28	13

Source: IRS (2011)

APPENDIX B

Variables for Content Analysis

Variables	Definition
Role Portrayal**	In what role the female character is portrayed?
Age	Approximately what is the female character's portrayed age?
Employment	What is the employment status of female character?
Credibility	Is the character credible because she is (1) a product user or (2) an authority?
Location	What is the location of the advertisement?
Product Category	What is the product type being advertised?

**Female Role Portrayal Categories

Dependency	Women as dependent on protection by/reassurance from a male; or as making unimportant decisions.
Housewife	Women as housewives/concerned with housekeeping tasks.
Sex objects	Women as sex objects whether or not gender is related to product; Emphasis on sex appeal.
Nontraditional	Women engaged in nontraditional activities (e.g., buying a car, fixing appliances, engaged in sports).
Career oriented	Women engaged in professional/nonprofessional occupations as committed to their jobs and concerned with their performance.
Authority figure	Women as experts in a field as voice of authority/product representatives or a celebrity.
Neutral	Ads showing men and women as being equal with neither shown as dominant.
Other	Ads that do not fall into any of the above categories.

Source: Das, M. (2000). Men and Women in Indian Magazine Advertisements: A Preliminary Report; Sex Roles, 43(9/10)

Table 1

Decade wise Portrayal Assessment in Advertising

Year	Assessment
1970's	Representation of male and female were stereotypical. It was predicted that 1980's would see more ads in contemporary & non-traditional role.
1980's	Male and Female were continued to be in stereotypical role and contradicted the assessments made in previous research on gender representation.
1990's	Researches in this period were almost consistent with the findings of previous research and noted very slight changes in the way male and female were depicted in the ads.
2000's	Most of the researches continued to analyze gender representations and found some slight changes in the representation of gender in ads.

Source: Kumari & Shivani (2012)

Table 2

Literacy Rates 1951-2011

Census Year	Person	Male	(in percentage) Female
1951*	18.3	27.2	8.9
1961*	28.3	40.4	15.4
1971*	34.5	46.0	22.0
1981**	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991**	52.2	64.1	39.3
2001**	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011**	74.0	82.1	65.5

Source: Census *aged 5+, ** aged 7+

Table 3

Work Participation Rates (WPR) by sex 1981 - 2001

			(in percentage)	
Census Year	Female	Male	Persons	-
1981	19.7	52.6	36.7	-
1991	22.3	51.6	37.5	
2001	25.7	51.9	39.3	

Source: Census

Table 4

Employment of Women in the Organized Sector

Year ended 31st March	Women employment (in Lakh)	Percentage change over previous year	Total employment (in Lakh)	Percentage of women employment to total employment
2001	49.53	0.6	277.18	17.9
2002	49.37	-0.3	271.92	18.2
2003	49.68	0.6	270.00	18.4
2004	49.34	-0.7	264.43	18.7
2005	50.16	1.7	264.58	19.0
2006	51.21	2.1	269.93	19.0
2007	53.12	3.7	272.76	19.5
2008	55.12	3.8	275.48	20.0
2009	55.80	1.23	280.98	19.9
2010	58.59	5.00	287.08	20.4
2011	59.54	1.63	289.99	20.5

Source: DGE&T Annual Employment Review, 2011

Table 7

Chi- Square Test Statistic

	Product Category	Location	Role	Age	Employment	Credibility
Chi-Square	14.50**	36.33*	91.30*	179.55*	56.07*	138.47*
Df	2	4	5	2	3	3

^{*}p≤.05; ** p≤.001

Table 8

Appearance of Women as per Product Category

Product Category	Frequency of Appearance	Percent
Personal Care	13	10.8
Home	7	5.8
F&B	7	5.8
Auto	8	6.7
Clothing	11	9.2
Fashion	19	15.8
Financial Services	6	5.0
Consumer Durables	6	5.0
Telecom	3	2.5
Travel & Tourism	13	10.8
Others	27	22.5
Total	120	100.0

Table 9

Role Portrayal of women in Advertisements

Role Portrayal	Frequency of Appearance	Percent	
Housewife	23	19.2	
Sex-object	54	45.0	
Career- oriented	8	6.7	
Non-traditional	4	3.3	
Authority/Celebrity	26	21.7	
Neutral	5	4.2	
Total	120	100.0	

Table 10

Portrayal of women in Advertisements in other categories

Variables	Categories	Frequency of Appearance	Percent
Location	Home	28	23.3
	Office	6	5.0
	Store/Restaurant	12	10.0
	Outdoor	32	26.7
	Others	42	35.0
	Total	120	100.0
Age	Less than 35	109	90.8
	35 -55	10	8.3
	55 & Above	1	.8
	Total	120	100.0
Credibility	Product User	85	70.8
	Expert	18	15.0
	Non-user	14	11.7
	Unclear	3	2.5
	Total	120	100.0
Employment Status	Employed	16	13.3
	Celebrity	24	20.0
	Unemployed	15	12.5
	Unclear	65	54.2
	Total	120	100.0