

Gender Bias in Advertising

The growth of the media industry has many plus sides: it broadens accessibility for consumers who have more options to choose from and provides more platforms for producers to create content. But with this increase in consumption and production comes an amplification of gender biases, a problem that has long afflicted the industry that most companies argue can ultimately only be solved in time.

The sexism present in society proves to be a powerful agent in the creation of stereotypes that spread in the form of advertising and communication. Gender is one of the biggest obstacles for women to take on the task of leading, and it creates a constant assessment of women's work, their pay, and career prospects.

Advertising is one of the main propagators of this inequality, going through unethical intricacies where the female figure appears represented in a stereotyped way. Differences perpetuated by stereotypes put women at a disadvantage before men in the workplace. When a company promotes its product on different forms of media (electronic, print, and digital) to do marketing, it's called advertising. Consumers watch ads on television, listen to them on the radio, and come across them in the newspaper. There is a message in every ad and they're known to have a massive impact on society. Any stereotype message adds fuel to the already existing gender inequality.

Research by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University and J. Walter Thompson New York analysed more than 2,000 English-language films from the Cannes Lions Archive to put numbers to the challenge of female representation in advertising and get a sense of whether the situation is changing. The report stated that:

- *Men get about four times as much screen time as women and speak about seven times more than women.*
- *There are twice as many male characters in ads as female characters.*
- *25% of ads feature only men, while only 5% of ads feature only women.*
- *18% of ads feature only male voices, while less than 3% of ads feature only female voices.*

Hence it can be concluded when it comes to women's screen time and speaking time in commercials, there has been no statistically significant change over the past 10 years.

It has been noted over the years by viewing various advertisements that women are shown as being more concerned about their beauty and figure rather than being shown as authority figures in the ads; they are usually shown as product users. This has led to a common belief that most of the advertisements and their contents are sexist in nature.

There is a tendency in many countries to portray women as being subordinate to men, as alluring sex objects, or as decorative objects. Many of the ads do not show gender biases in the pictures or the graphics, but some bias does turn up in the content of the advertisements. Within language, bias is more evident in songs and dialogue than in formal speech or when popular culture is involved. The ad industry needs to understand that advertisements are greatly responsible for eliciting such views.

The children also see the advertisements portraying women and this creates stereotypes in their minds about the different roles of men and women. All these facts combine to influence the public about gender roles.

There has been a lot of attention given to the portrayal of gender in advertising by both practitioners as well as academics and much of this has been done regarding the portrayal of women in advertising which shows a gender bias.

As women over the years learn to assert themselves and increase their spending power, brands and agencies are realising that they can no longer pander to the lowest common denominator in their communication. Thankfully, in recent times some brands and a few best ad agencies have dared to break stereotypes beautifully and showcase the contemporary woman in her all-new avatar.

Havell's 'HawaBadlegi': A couple sitting at a registrar's office, with the husband taking the wife's last name and making the official do a double-take. A brilliant yet simple take to break the gender stereotype.

Ariel's 'Share the Load': In Ariel's 'Share the Load' ad, a father watches his daughter juggle work and household chores. After introspecting his role at the house, he tries to bring about a positive change in the family. He agrees to share laundry duties with his wife - this ad is a perfect challenge to gender stereotypes in our society.

Airtel-Boss: This ad features a modern-day couple. The woman is a multi-tasker who handles her office and subordinates at work, one of whom happens to be her husband. She then comes back home to prepare food for her husband who is still at his workplace on his boss' orders. The ad beautifully portrays a relationship where a woman is cast as her husband's boss.

Titan Raga: '#HerLifeHerChoices': Titan Raga celebrated the 'Woman of today' in this empowering advertisement. They showed us a strong and independent woman who is capable of making her own life choices. She has aspirations and is not afraid to take control of her life. It is really interesting how they have depicted a high-spirited woman with an aura of sensuality wrapped around her.

Anouk's Bold Is Beautiful, The Calling: This very simple yet powerful ad hits the nail on the head. It is beautifully written and it manages to break all stereotypes, giving a reality check to the hypocrisy that exists in our society. Debunking the old rules to make her way, Radhika Apte shows us how bold is beautiful and it should be a philosophy we should live by.

Such changes in a gender-biased landscape are like a gust of fresh air that should be welcomed with open arms. However, the ad industry still has a long way to go to fix the age-old gender stereotypes that have been in the industry for a long time.
