

Breaking the Stereotype:

Empowering women in advertising in developing markets

Pinaki Banerjee



Given the role that they play in deciding on the everyday brands used in households, women are central characters in many advertisements. Traditionally in many developing markets, stereotypes were often used to portray the role women played. Most advertisements were centered around activities performed by women at home to make the family happy, portraying their dependency and not making any important decisions. While growing up, when TV was the most dominant media, every commercial break out would show advertisements with women either doing laundry or other household chores to ensure family confidence.

For example, Nirma, a laundry powder brand in India, showcased the importance of clean clothes for family to stand out in a crowd¹.

Fortunately, a couple of decades have passed, and some of the old stereotypes are giving way to new approaches to advertising in developing markets. Ariel launched their “Is laundry only a woman’s job” campaign which challenges the typical stereotype that was predominant for years. This was followed by their Cannes Lions winning “Share the Load” campaign which not only achieved results for the brand, but also led to a broader cultural change in behavior².



Reel Life follows Real Life

Stereotypes are a reality in society. But we have seen over time that “Reel life follows real life”. A recent study by Havas reports that nearly half of women surveyed agree that TV commercials show too many outdated gender stereotypes. Furthermore, a similar amount resent how women are depicted in advertising³. As the role of women has changed in the developing world, with more and more women joining the work force, this change is inevitable in the role played by women in advertisement. Advertisers need to seize this opportunity and portray the roles they are playing in today’s world.



One example of what isn’t working anymore: Audi recently produced an advertisement in China that likened women to used cars. After receiving significant criticism, Audi apologized and withdrew the ad. There is less acceptance of portraying women as objects⁴.

Recognizing the importance of using consistent brand cues, both visual and verbal, that resonate with the brand it is important to present a more realistic and reflective picture of woman.

For example, in Saudi Arabia, perhaps considered a more traditional society, Brooke Bond Red Label challenged social prejudices by portraying a free conversation between a father and daughter about a failed marriage⁵.



SKII launched a global campaign “Marriage Market Takeover” to inspire and empower women to shape their own destiny, challenging “sheng nu” or “leftover woman” a term used for women who aren’t married and are treated shamefully after age 25⁶.



Or take the example of Nike, which created powerful ads to challenge female stereotypes in Russia, Turkey and Middle East⁷.

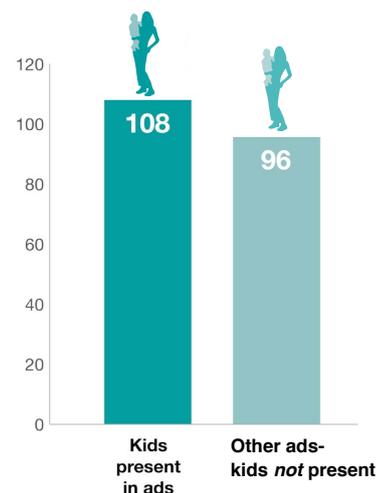


The Expanding Role of Women in Advertising in the Developing World

So, how are advertisers expanding the roles of women in advertising in the developing world?

One role that remains powerfully important, although is shifting, is the role as mother. Women in developing markets still play a more active role in parenting and spend, on average, more time with their children when growing up. This theme is still used extensively by advertisers. Our database also shows that advertisements that show bonding between mother and children have a better chance of attracting attention.

Brand Attention Index: Presence of kids
The scores are expressed as indices based on the average for the score within dataset (Avg=100)



Source: Ipsos Ad Database in APAC & MENA, n=1500+ cases
Brand Attention Index is a measure to understand the ability of a communication to win consumer selective attention and leave retained brand-associated impression

Furthermore, when advertising household products, while the stereotype is shifting from portraying women in subordinate, not authoritative roles, there has been some progress by brands to challenge these stereotypes. Storylines focused on women empowerment, are showing encouraging success. For example, Cif's "Christ the Redeemer" from Brazil tells their story very differently. There is movement, but there is still a long way to go⁸.



For categories targeted at both gender, we have witnessed significant change where both men and women play equals. This is promising, and we expect to see faster change in the future.

Recently in Saudi Arabia, Nescafe's commercials emphasized the equality of both genders in conversation. This was unthinkable a couple of years back⁹.



There are many such examples, but the question is, is this effective?

Ads which portray women in a positive light have higher chance of success as this makes the brand stand out in the crowd. Our database analysis demonstrates that ads which make the brand stand out in a new way have significantly higher chance of success. In this regard, it may become more important to show a more realistic and balanced picture, a modern-day woman, who plays multifaceted roles and emerges as one who is, not only in full control of herself, but also has the power to influence others around her.

Copy Effectiveness Index (CEI): Makes me think about the brand in a new way
 The scores are expressed as indices based on the average for the score within dataset (Avg=100)

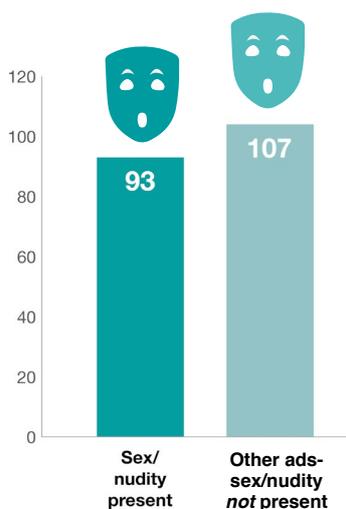


Source: Ipsos Ad Database in APAC & MENA n=1500+ cases
 CEI is a measure of success of ad defined by the ability of the ad to build Brand Attention & Brand Desire

As demonstrated by the Audi ad discussed earlier, advertisers need to be careful to not show women as objects in advertisements. It may be a common belief that sex sells and therefore the tactic becomes taking advantage of the female sexual image by equating it to the advertised product. Such advertisements degrade women to some extent. There are innumerable examples across various categories, including food and beverages, which depict women as sex objects, but the question remains if this has a positive impact on the brand.

Although the impact may vary from one category to another, depicting women as a sex object does not have a strong impact on the brand. Showing women as a sex object may be able to attract more attention, but from our database we see that ads which have sex or nudity in the storyline have lower impact on the brand than those which do not.

PPS Index : Ad which have Sex/Nudity
The scores are expressed as indices based on the average for the score within dataset (Avg=100)



Source: Ipsos Ad Database in APAC & MENA
 n=1500+ cases PPS Index is an impact measure on Brand Desire based on Purchase Intent & Frequency of purchase/use

Hence showing such ads may not be effective for your brand strategy. Furthermore, objectifying women beyond what is natural, could also be harmful to individuals and our society as a whole.

Looking Forward

It will be interesting to see how the portrayal of women’s roles will change in future, but the initial efforts are quite encouraging. Several global bodies, such as the Cannes Lions, are recognizing the work done around gender equality in advertising. So, why not play a pivotal role in shaping the way people traditionally think of advertising by being bold and challenging the status quo? Show what is the reality today in the world. As Tanya Joseph recently commented in Marketing Week, recognize that women have significant purchasing power: stop casting them in secondary roles or treating them like accessories¹⁰. If you are not ready enough to be bold on mainstream media, perhaps you can experiment with new ideas through digital channel with new ideas, learn and improve and then extend. But the cultural shift is happening, so it is time to be prepared.

References:

- <http://indianexpress.com/article/business/business-others/out-with-the-old-more-of-the-new-2932688/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOpLBgEZOkk>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpfop-jFxec>
- <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2103084/audi-advert-likening-women-used-cars-backfires-china>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpfop-jFxec>
- <http://www.sk-ii.com.sg/en/whats-new/in-the-spotlight/Marriage-Market-Takeover.aspx>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_iCII5ngdl
- <https://vimeo.com/102934402>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7F2v1UD4fk>
- <https://www.marketingweek.com/2017/09/13/tanya-joseph-women-advertising/>