

Breaking the Stereotypes: Gender Equality through Advertisements

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Abstract

Many a times advertisements are considered as a channel to convince people to buy certain products, as thus making them a consumer. Advertisements have the power to persuade the consumers to buy branded products, without giving them a chance to think about its necessity. The same advertisements also help to have a wider perspective on different matters, especially on gender equality. It not only persuades people to become a consumer but also helps to think outside the box. Many advertisements break the gender stereotype.

Keywords: Advertisement, Gender equality, Gender stereotype

INTRODUCTION

An advertisement can be defined as “a picture, short film, song, etc. that tries to persuade people to buy a product or service”(“Advertisement”).

Through advertisements a common man is able to understand different varieties of brands for a same product, which helps to look into choices. Another important impact of advertisement is that, it breaks the existing stereotypes. Many advertisements stand as a breakthrough in gender equality. It insists its viewers to think outside the box. Some advertisements even become a topic for wide discussion.

Breaking the Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are a generalized concept of what one should do or should not do when belongs to a particular gender. It is believed or practiced

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that women should do particular jobs and men should do another type of jobs which are not meant for women.

The war placed many women into jobs customarily regarded as men's work, and might have helped to loosen previously rigid stereotypes of masculine and feminine sphere of activity. After the war, however, there followed a period of considerable ideological pressure on women to stay at home and raise children, while men were expected to pursue careers and enter public life (Poplawski 637).

Decades after the Second World War, the situation is not much different.

Unlike other popular culture platforms, advertisements have the uniqueness in moving ahead of gender stereotypes that is still prevailing in society. Among the seventeen goals of the United Nations, the fifth goal is gender equality. "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world" ("Sustainable Development Goals"). It also says, though women and girls make half of the world population, still there exist gender inequality. This gender discrimination stagnates the progress in society. In many fields, women are still underpaid. Thus, the fifth goal which deals with gender equality concern about the equal status a woman must enjoy along with the man. Concerning about the matter, advertisements are not concerned about the equality of male and female only but about the others too. It tries to address the need to embrace the change and break the stereotypes on gender concepts.

In 2019, when Gillette Company produced an advertisement on the first shave by a transgender, it created waves on social media ("New Gillette ad"). It showed the need to accept a child irrespective of its gender and how wonderful the child feels then. Another advertisement from the Vim dish wash bar and gel produced different perspectives of cleaning dishes. One advertisement in which Mr. Virender Sehwaq, then Cricket player, cleaning a pressure cooker ("Vim Gel"). Cleaning dishes are considered as a responsibility of women. So, a male cricket player washing dishes was something new. In another version, a guest appreciates the baking skill of the house wife and prompts her to start a bakery. The husband who stands there without giving a helping hand to his wife tells her that he knows that is her dream too. What hinders her from the start up is that it takes a long time to clean the dishes and she does not get ample time for her passion. The advertisement promotes its product by showing that it takes less time to clean dishes than other products. Thus, she is able to chase her dream ("Mohak Nimgaonkar"). That is a stereotypical concept that women are bound to do house chores and those are her responsibilities. The same product has a varied version that shows house chores are not any one person's

responsibility but it's a joined responsibility. Here, a proposal scene is shown in which the boy says that he will help the girl in cooking. While the girl retorts that she will help him in cleaning dishes ("Vim Liquid"). The advertisements of the same product with different perspectives have the potential to make its viewers not only to become consumers but also to think about the exigency to break the stereotypes.

Two energy drink products show a similar concept. Certain tasks are meant for boys, but with the help of these products even girls are able to do it. One of the products is Horlicks. Here, a mother is worried because her car's tyre is flat and nobody is there at her service. While she tries to call someone for assistance, her daughter got down from the car and changed the flat tyre. That was a surprising scene for her mother as well as for the viewers because such mechanical works are meant to be done by boys ("Horlicks"). The second product is Boost. Here, a girl does net practice and a group of boys with their captain, the cricketer, Mr. Dhoni arrives. Boys make fun of the girl by telling her that Cricket is the game of boys which needs stamina to perform. The breakthrough is that the girl replies that game does not have any gender discrimination ("Boost: Secret of my energy"). Though cricket is played by women too, it still has not achieved a status as enjoyed by the male players. It shows whether its male or female who plays, what matter is their performance.

Further, two advertisements with almost similar concepts but in a unique manner. Both depict a man who is transforming to a woman and how their families react to the situation. In the advertisement of Starbucks, parents are waiting for their son to reach. Meanwhile, his mother requests the father to be nice to him unlike the previous meeting. It also shows the son's photo while the father makes a call. Later instead of their son, a girl enters and it's seemed to be their son who had been transformed to a female. Though the father is speechless he offers a coffee in which he inscribes her name as Arpita instead of Arpit. Though it's with difficulty, finally the father too accepts the change ("It Starts With Your Name"). In the next advertisement, from Bhima jewellery, the boy who wanted to be changed to a girl is in distress. But her family is comforting him and supports him. They buy him anklets and other gold ornaments and finally she comes out as a complete woman ("Bhima Jewellery"). Even his elderly relatives support him in the change. In this advertisement the girl is shown with confidence because she got support. Whereas in the previous advertisement, the girl has a regret feel on her face in the beginning that turns to be a happy face when her father accepts her. Both these advertisements show the need to accept one's children in the way as they are. It gives them confidence to face the world.

An advertisement on sanitary pads makes its viewers to think about the message it conveys. It is created in such a way that, a group of fathers are asked to listen to the conversation of their daughters. A group of girls are talking about their perception about their fathers. All of them are very proud of their fathers. Some consider them as their super heroes and fathers faces are brighten with pride. After a silence one of the girls talked about monthly periods. The pride faces of fathers changed and they frowned at their kids' conversation. Meanwhile, all the girls agree that though their fathers are with them always, during period time they are indifferent to their kids, they keep a distance from them. Whereas these girls longed for the presence of their fathers too along with the female members ("It's just a period"). That was a thought-provoking advertisement. Many families still consider period as taboo. Male members found it difficult to talk about the matter or to console their partners or kids during the pain or stress they go through the time.

The same sanitary pad company released another advertisement that showcases the existing indifference towards women and their monthly periods. It asks its viewers to teach their boy children too about the phenomena so that a girl child will not feel ashamed in front of others ("This Daughter's Day"). This advertisement was created as an initiation on Daughter's Day from the company to teach the boy child about the matter.

An advertisement of Vicks is heart touching because it shows how the society is unconcerned about the lives and rights of transgender. Here a transgender woman takes care of an orphan girl and that girl calls her 'mom'. She says her mom thinks she would become a doctor, but what she wanted is to become a lawyer because she wants to support her mom who was denied from the basic rights (Vicks - Generations of Care").

Like the varied version of the above-mentioned dish wash bar, there is another advertisement about a detergent, Ariel, where they show the importance of sharing responsibilities. In one version a mother is busy cleaning and arranging the room of his son while he sits idly playing game in phone. This mother is talking to her daughter on phone and from her expression and her conversation with son indicates that her daughter quit her job because of the responsibilities in home, where her husband does not know to help. Then the mother realises that it's their mistake to raise their sons without allowing them to share responsibilities and she rectifies it by asking her son to do laundry ("Are we teaching our sons"). The second version shows a silent distance emerged in between an old couple, where the husband could not recognise where he made mistake? It's his daughter who realises him the need to share the household works with his wife. When he starts helping her, a new relationship

begins there (“Ariel | See the Signs”). The third version shows a wife pointing out the helping mentality of two men, who are their neighbours. When she says this, her husband responds that even he shares every house works with his roommate when he was in college. The wife was wondering and asked why he was not able to share house works with his wife? The advertisement gives the message that one should consider his/ her partner as an equal, so that they will share responsibilities equally (“When we”). In their “#Share the Load” series they emphasise laundry works are not only mother’s duty, as well as they also created advertisements that shows sharing loads will help both partners even to sleep for equal duration of time. All these show the need for sharing household works so that those works will not become a burden for any one member of the family.

Conclusion

Advertisements have the purpose to persuade its viewers to buy their products and to introduce new branded products to the consumers. Though the purpose of advertisement is promoting products, most of the advertisements are created in a way that it gives a message to the society through their products. There are many short films and campaigns that promote gender equality. But advertisement does this in a unique way. The above-mentioned advertisements are a few from numerous ones. The way they promote equality and address gender taboos are inspiring. After all, advertisements not only take the issues of discrimination towards women, but towards transgender also. It makes one think about the relevance to bring change in family and in society to an extent. In short, advertisements act as a media to break the gender stereotypes in a distinctive manner.

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