Gender Bias and Inclusion in Advertising in India Report: UNICEF


Why in News

Recently, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDI) released a report titled “Gender Bias and Inclusion In Advertising In India”.

- The research has shown that while ads in India are superior to global benchmarks insofar as girls and women have parity of representation in terms of screen and speaking time, their portrayal is problematic as they further gender stereotypes.
- GDI is a non-profit research organization that researches gender representation in media and advocates for equal representation of women.

Key Points

- Gender and Prominence:
  - About:
    While girls and women have a strong presence in Indian advertising, they are mostly reinforcing traditional gender roles by selling domestic and beauty products to female consumers.
  - Impact:
    This is problematic because of the intergenerational transfer of norms to children, including a lack of empowering role models for men undertaking domestic work in the home and women working in the paid workforce.
• Stereotyping Physical and Mental Capability:
  ○ About:
    ▪ Decision Making:
      Male characters are more likely to be shown making
decisions about their future than female characters (7.3%
compared with 4.8%), the latter are twice as likely to be shown making
household decisions than male characters (4.9% compared with
2.0%).
    ▪ Colourism:
      ▪ Two-thirds of female characters (66.9%) in Indian ads have
light or medium-light skin tones—a higher percentage than male
characters (52.1%).
      ▪ This is problematic because this advances the discriminatory
notion that light skin tones are more attractive.
    ▪ Objectification:
      ▪ Female characters are nine times more likely to be shown as
“stunning/very attractive” than male characters (5.9% compared
with 0.6%).
      ▪ Female characters are also invariably thin, but male characters
appear with a variety of body sizes in Indian advertising.
  ○ Impact:
    Sexual objectification has serious consequences in the real world. The more
girls and women internalize the idea that their primary value comes from
being a sex object, the higher their rates of depression, body hatred
and shame, eating disorders, and a host of other personal
impacts.
• Recommendations:
  ○ To Governing Bodies:
    ▪ Establish guidelines for advertising with benchmarks for equitable
representation for girls and women and promoting positive
gender norms, including around leadership and body attitudes.
    ▪ Establish skin color guidelines and caste/class guidelines.
    ▪ Promote diverse templates of beauty rather than regressive beauty
norms of women and girls being only fair, thin, etc.
    ▪ Advocate with advertisers to see value add in diversifying
representation in gender, skin tone, and caste/class benchmarks
to help promote brand equity and expand the consumer base.
  ○ To Content Creators:
    Need to be more sensitive and aware towards gender
representation.

Gender Equality in India
Gender equality in India has made gains as a result of legislative and policy measures, social-protection schemes for girls and adolescents and gender sensitive budgets over past years.

Some Indian Initiatives Related to Girls: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG), Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, etc.

- India has attained gender parity in primary enrolment and boosted female literacy from 54% (2001) to 66% (2011).
- India ranks 108th out of 153 countries in the global gender inequality index in 2020, an increase since 2015 when it was ranked 130th out of 155 countries.
- India is among one of the few countries where under-5 mortality rates among girls is higher than boys.
- Gender-based discrimination and normalization of violence continues to be a challenge. Many women face overlapping social, emotional, physical, economic, cultural and caste related deprivations.
- Adolescent girls face vulnerabilities, including poor nutritional status, increased burden of care, early marriage and early pregnancy, and issues related to reproductive health and empowerment while 56% are anemic.

Way Forward

- Misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes of women in advertising have a significant impact on women and young girls—and how they view themselves and their value to society. While female representation dominates in Indian ads, they are still marginalised by colorism, hypersexualisation, and without careers or aspirations outside of the home.
- The stark inequality evident in portrayals of females in these advertisements must be addressed to ensure an equitable society.

Source: TH