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Gender Bias and Inclusion in Advertising in India Report: UNICEF

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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