

Research Article

Gender Bias, Sexual Objectification and Balanced Coverage- Advertising and Gender Roles

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Abstract

In the contemporary times and recent years advertising and marketing have led to the boom in market playing a powerful role in the economy of a nation and world. At the same time they have also showcased ads featuring gender biases and stereotypical roles which have been resisted through counter ads on gender socialization, women and girl empowerment. Various research projects conducted by UNICEF through an analysis of most viewed advertisements on Television and You Tube have accessed the role of advertising media in reinforcing and challenging harmful gender roles shaping the life of young girls and women in order to drive more gender sensitive advertising. With an aim to support and achieve the Sustainable Development Goal for gender equality and women empowerment the paper analyzes promotion of gender roles in marketing and advertising as presented in social media.

Keywords – Gender bias, stereotypes, counter ads, rhetoric

Advertising biases are resting more upon assumptions rather than objective truth while campaigning. Even though marketers are trying their best to avoid possible preliminary judgments in decision making still it can be a difficult task to avoid gender biases in advertising campaigns. Basically the language of advertising depends upon advertising technology tools that have been created and trained by people who have their own unconscious biases.

Advertising tools greatly influence the campaign targets and can render a reflection that certain groups are advantaged and certain are disadvantaged over others. With the evolution of advertising technology the positive and negative biases are getting more and more embedded in the tools and systems. Human biases when often coded unknowingly in the technology give rise to technological biases

In the field of advertising there is an increased modernization as now the industry is dependent upon tools that automatically segment audiences and run campaigns. Though the marketers are using AI to remain unbiased still the Federal Trade Commission has noted that machine learning can result in bias and discrimination against the marginalized groups.

Therefore lot of attention has to be paid on how these algorithms are working and what kind of biases may build into the models.

The unconscious biases also known as implicit biases are unconsciously attributed stereotypes to certain groups of people which may include racial, gender and biases of racism. In most of the ads women are shown as homemakers and housewife doing all odd jobs of the house despite being a working woman they are shown to perform other household jobs also. Though education in recent years has given much opportunity to women to progress and carve their own future and lot of women now in the corporate and science sector are typical examples of this however still the ads reflect that after coming home from their duties they are typical housewives though using smart kitchen technology, still males do not work for the household. It is woman only who is using a technologically advanced air fryer, oven, microwave, washing machine or juicer but not men who are equally responsible for the household.

According to a report done by UN there is no country that has achieved gender equality and almost 50 percent of people surveyed firmly believe that men are better suited for leadership positions in all the arenas

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and also alone in advertising specifically 71% of creative directors are males. Gender biases affect the commercials and ad consumers with and they also impact the decisions made under the surface by the advertising technology. During 1980-2010 women at work were reflected only 4% of the time. Brands like Philips, Samsung, Surf, Ariel, etc. still show working women perform household chores using smart gadgets and not the man of the house doing any of these. Thus they are christened as Superwoman as they are shown efficient both in the professional as well as personal life challenges. These biases can lead to harmful representations and make audiences feel disconnected from the brand.

Racial biases are the biases that rest upon assumptions people have regarding individuals belonging to different ethnicity and race. This can however be regarded as an unconscious bias (Jennifer Eberhardt, Stanford University Psychologist). In her studies on racial biases she involved 10 black and 10 white participants who were instructed to look at different faces. The MRI Machines lit up more when they saw members of their own race and at the end of the experiment these participants had difficulty remembering the faces of people who belonged to opposite races.

Another important unconscious bias is that of ageism when elderly ladies are age shamed for the kind of trendy dress they wear or sections they perform to keep themselves happy. Most of the times they are trolled in the internet and social sights for their age and are instructed to behave as per their age through comments, most of the time obscene comments. Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas have been often age shamed due to huge age difference between Nick and Priyanka due to which they are mostly trolled on social media.

As noted by Karla Mantilla, the online “gender trolling” of women, particularly political opponents and journalists, is becoming an increasingly common feature of rightwing movements, and must therefore be understood as a deliberate strategy to silence them and “keep them in their place” (The Guardian)

With the democratization and access to social media internet assumes a specific place in the globe where individuals utilize their freedom of speech to voice their opinions and ideologies. However there are many ideologies that sustain and preserve gender hierarchy, roles and believe that those women who are outspoken and are struggling for their rights and equality must be silenced through trolling or be chastised. Some of the popular incidents in real life include that of Rana Ayyub a left leaning journalist who

was trolled, subjected to pornographic videos with her face morphed into it along with rape and death threats which were quite common to her. She was sent torn and burnt copies of her book *Gujarat Files* (Khybri 2018).

Gauri Lankesh, a staunch critic of BJP and Hinduism was shot dead outside her house with the killer saying he was trying to save his religion. (Kalkod 2018). According to a study by Amnesty International marginal women and particularly Muslim women have been trolled more than any other religion and ethnicity which reveals about 94.1% Muslim women being targeted in 2020. Bulli Bai an app in India auctioned Muslim and targeted outspoken journalists who spoke against Islamophobia and sexism (*Deccan Herald*)

There is a dominance of misogynistic content in the internet which is shadow banning women abuse online. The fact is undeniable that there are certain online spaces that act as fertile grounds to cultivate harmful political ideologies and activity and have also provided grounds for genocidal and femicidal violence in the real world. Though hidden in the plain sight, the infrastructure of social media is shaping gender norms which unpicks that how the technological designs, profit models and organizational hierarchy are giving way to patriarchal norms and often end up promoting sexist, heteronormative and racist stereotypes.

There are hashtags, memes and selfies in the social media that are also capable of shifting the gender norms online. Social media is an important virtual space but often it has been harnessed by activists to call out the patriarchal norms and share right based gender content so that online movements can be built to bring a wave of change in the society and their outlook towards the gender norms with changing times. However still there is much uncertainty about whether selectivism can really bring about a change in the social outlook. There are aligned researches that seek to answer such queries by spotlighting the great potential for feminist digital activism in order to catalyze transformative shifts, both in case of the sexist behaviour and the thinking line. However it is much important and vital need of the time to recognize and understand that social media can behave as an empowering space for feminist activism.

There are patriarchal biases that act according to the design. It basically refers to the experiences of the netizens on the social media space which in turn reflects a combination of technological and human decisions. There are decisions by the data labelers who categorize content to company leadership steering its strategy an priorities and to design a team which is

capable of programming the very algorithm curating the news feeds.

Biases in advertising world through the social media have great potentials either to attract or distract the possible consumers for a particular product. At times they can impact the customers negatively increase liability for brands and reduce the effectiveness of the campaigns. A marketer is running a broadly targeted campaign using modern marketing tools to strike responses across several market segments but biases in advertising can lead to inaccurate representation of the target audience that can purely damage the seller customer relationship to a serious extent. Advertisements reinforcing the gender norms through the amplified parameters to engage different people online. However one can find a constant presence of hateful content present directed towards women and other non confirming genders on this platforms. A lot of human and technological biases have been built on the social platform and it is equally important to understand them that how they are promoting towards the hateful content against women. In this context it is important to remove the sexist and misogynist content and to develop a just world in the online platform. Balanced coverage in media is something that presents and honest view of all the aspects of a story or an issue in a fair and unbiased way. It allows the readers to form their independent opinion and stops them being swayed away by any one side of the story. But it has been observed that the mainstream media coverage of the economic issues is not doing a good job to provide the perspective of workers and also over represents the perspective of business. This means that the media has failed to reflect its fair tendency and balance and so the public is unable to receive the accurate information on any issue. An unbalanced and biased coverage is capable of affecting the public opinion and views in a significant way and also changes their behaviour and responses in turn.

Balance and fairness in publication and telling are the two important buzzwords in the field of journalism and media coverage. Its main objective is that the stories must be balanced in sense of attempting to present all the sides of a story. Fairness expresses the idea that a journalist should try to achieve accuracy and truth with full honesty in reporting and presenting the things in media. He should be free from all kinds of biases and should be influenced by any social or political thought. However the viewpoint of most of the critics states that journalists are never successful in being completely balanced and fair as they are intentionally reluctant to speak all the sides of a story or tell the truth which is absolute. A news coverage is

often said to be unbalanced in the way that it represents voices of those only on both extremes of the spectrum or of those who are very powerful. Biggest example in this context is of the election coverage and in many countries candidates from the non mainstream parties are getting little news and media coverage.

Media plays an important role in the society and according to Llanos and Nina 2011, media can play an important role of the promotion of gender equality both within the working environment in terms of employment and promotion of females and in representation of women and men in terms of fair gender portrayal and in using non gender specific language. Studies and researches have revealed the idea that although the number of working women in the globe is increasing day by day still the top positions in the corporate and global scenes are male dominated (White 2009).

Byerly, C. M. (2011). 'Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media', International Women's Media Foundation, Washington DC
What is the condition of gender equality in the global news media? This study presents findings from its analysis of news company behaviour in relation to gender equality in staffing, salaries and policies. It finds that men occupy the vast majority of governance and top management jobs and news-gathering.

The disparity of this nature is particularly evident in Africa where there are lot of cultural impediments to women and the way roles and responsibilities of a journalist matter which include travelling away from home, evening work and covering political and sports issues are confined only to masculine domains (Meyers 2009). According to the *Global Media Monitoring Project* it has been reported that throughout the world female journalists are more likely to be assigned 'soft' subjects like family, lifestyle, fashion and arts. However 'hard' subjects like news, politics and the economy is much likely to be written and covered by male journalists.

The level of participation and influence of women in media is also an implication for the media content and it is expected that female media professionals are more likely to reflect other women's needs and their perspectives as compared to their male colleagues. It must be acknowledged that not all women working in the media will be gender aware and prone to cover women's needs and perspectives; and it is not impossible for men to effectively cover gender issues. Recent research from 18 disparate countries shows that male and female journalists' attitudes do not differ

significantly (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012). Nonetheless, the presence of women on the radio, television and in print is more likely to provide positive role models for women and girls, to gain the confidence of women as sources and interviewees, and to attract a female audience. As reflected below:

White, A. (2009). 'Getting the Balance Right: Gender Equality in Journalism', International Federation of Journalists, Brussels
How can journalists and other actors working in the media contribute to gender equality? This handbook aims to assist people working in the media to assess progress on gender equality, identify challenges, and contribute to debates and policy formulation. It urges those working in the media to do more to confront gender distortions in newsrooms and in unions.

Fair gender portrayal in the media should be a professional and ethical aspiration, similar to respect for accuracy, fairness and honesty (White, 2009). Yet, unbalanced gender portrayal is widespread. The Global Media Monitoring Project finds that women are more likely than men to be featured as victims in news stories and to be identified according to family status. Women are also far less likely than men to be featured in the world's news headlines, and to be relied upon as 'spokespeople' or as 'experts'. Certain categories of women, such as the poor, older women, or those belonging to ethnic minorities, are even less visible.

Stereotypes are also prevalent in every day media. Women are often portrayed solely as homemakers and cares of the family, dependent on men, or as objects of male attention. Stories by female reporters are more likely to challenge stereotypes than those filed by male reporters (Gallagher et al., 2010). As such, there is a link between the participation of women in the media and improvements in the representation of women.

Men are also subjected to stereotyping in the media. They are typically characterized as powerful and dominant. There is little room for alternative visions of masculinity. The media tends to demean men in caring or domestic roles, or those who oppose violence. Such portrayals can influence perceptions in terms of what society may expect from men and women, but also what they may expect from themselves. They promote an unbalanced vision of the roles of women and men in society.

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