

Removing stereotypes in advertising - Unilever launches #unstereotype

To remove the stereotypes in advertising, Unilever announced at Cannes #unstereotype, its global ambition for all of its brands and the industry at large to advance advertising away from stereotypical portrayals of gender; delivering fresh campaigns that are more relevant to today's consumer.



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It is urging marketers globally to be aware of the outdated stereotypes of gender that advertising still propagates and the fact that progressive portrayals are proven to not only be better for society, but better for brands.

Aline Santos, executive VP of Global Marketing for Unilever, says, "Stereotyping in advertising is a prevalent issue for all genders. However, our research shows that the negative effects are most keenly felt when it comes to representations of females. In fact, 40% of women say they do not identify at all with the women they see in adverts. Advertising can be a powerful force in leading positive cultural change. We believe it is our responsibility, alongside the industry, to be at the forefront of this change by positively portraying people as they truly are today – progressive ads will lead us to a progressive future for all."

As one of the biggest global advertisers, Unilever carried out multiple in-depth studies around the world over the last two years to understand how female identity has evolved and how brands can be more relevant and better connected.

"We have validated through testing with Millward Brown that more progressive advertising generates stronger engagement, talkability and delivers better branded impact. This shows that not only is there an important societal imperative for this change but a business imperative as well; it is an important journey that we must go on if we want to ensure we are truly maximising the potential of our creative outputs for today's audiences."

Three key areas

It plans to advance portrayals of gender in its ads with a special focus on women by addressing three key areas – role, personality and appearance. Roles should more broadly represent aspirations and wider achievements beyond product-related responsibilities. Personalities depicted should shift to become more authentic and three-dimensional. Appearance should be presented as enjoyable and non-critical, creating a positive and creative interest in being whoever you want to be.

Keith Weed, Global CMO, Unilever, says, "The time is right for us as an industry to challenge and change how we portray gender in our advertising. Our industry spends billions of dollars annually shaping perceptions and we have a responsibility to use this power in a positive manner. We are at the start of a journey and we are passionate about challenging the stereotypes that are pervasive."

Brands begin communication shift

Unilever's brands are already making waves with pioneering and breakthrough campaigns historically from Dove and more recently from Axe. Axe's Find Your Magic has been widely applauded by both consumers and the communications industry for its new positioning which is liberating for people, where genuine connection beats conquest. Axe will continue to be about attraction, but it is portraying the modern, relevant, genuine world of attraction - the true magic that happens between two equals.

Communications from other core brands such as Knorr and Lifebuoy have also been breaking their category moulds by shaking-up and rethinking the creative process from development right through to execution.

Aline continues, "With our Knorr brand, we recognised that traditional gender roles around food had started to blur and cooking had become much more inclusive and indeed on trend, like the MasterChef series. For Knorr to remain relevant, be inspirational and progressive, we knew we needed to change - niching our foodie conversation to specific gender roles seemed outdated, that's why when we portray our consumers today you see divorced dads, groups of students and millennials, not just the traditional stereotyped perfect family with mum doing the cooking."

Knorr's latest #loveatfirsttaste global campaign is a great example of how flavour, cooking and food can help drive more meaningful connections across gender, race and age and how understanding your flavour profile can even bring you love.

"Lifebuoy has taken the conscious step to portray women as the voice of authority, the one who influences the family and leads change. We used progressive personalities like a real doctor or a real life Bollywood mother who are known to stand for women's rights and the cause of Help a Child Reach 5. We took casting seriously to counter advertising stereotypes."

A recent Lifebuoy campaign features not only a female doctor, a role rarely depicted in Indian pop culture, but also a pregnant, female doctor as the voice of authority. This change reflects shifts happening in markets such as India, with working mothers in high-level roles; helping to continue to drive an evolution by providing an aspirational opportunity for women.

R. Balki, chairman at Lowe India says, "As we broaden depictions of people in our advertising, we will broaden creative opportunities; leading to progressive ads that are more enjoyable and generate stronger emotional response. This an exciting proposition that I'd love to see the global marketing community embrace."

Partners follow suit

Madeline Di Nonno, president of Glass Lions Jury and CEO of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media says, "Geena and I are heartened by this significant and progressive move from Unilever. Media is the only business industry when we can literally paint a picture of the world the way we want it to be. One 30-second spot can make a lifetime impression. Advertising as a storytelling medium is as important as the programming it is attached to. We believe advertising can take a

lead position and ignite the advertising and content industries to jump on board and embrace this movement.”

Several of Unilever’s partner agencies have already confirmed that they will be adopting the new approach – including BBH, 72andSunny, JWT, DDB, MullenLowe and Ogilvy, with many more likely to follow suit.

Santos concludes, “We hope that #unstereotype inspires others in the industry to join us and commit to building brands in a way that puts advertising on the forefront of leading culture with progressive portrayals of everyone.”

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