

Get gender right in advertising by sidestepping stereotypes

By Leigh Andrews

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The Kantar insight division's Duncan Southgate, global brand director of media and Jane Ostler, global head of media, recently presented a global webinar session in headline findings from their latest AdReaction study on the challenges of gender-progressive marketing and getting gender right in advertising. Here's what you missed.



As seen in the Kantar AdReaction Getting Gender Right webinar.

AdReaction goes back to 2001 when Southgate began with the words that most marketers think they're getting gender right in their messaging, but ad testing shows that many are still getting lots wrong, particularly when it comes to gender balancing and addressing stereotypes.

These findings are reflective of research by JWT and the Geena Davis Institute on unpacking gender bias in advertising, which shows the following results, for ads from 2006 to 2016:

Analysis of Cannes award-winning ads from the past decade revealed troubling statistics



Men speak 7x more than women



Men get about 4x as much screen time as women



Men are 62% more likely to be shown as smart

Screen grab from the Kantar AdReaction 'Getting gender right' webinar.

Southgate said:

“ Perhaps Cannes Lions-winning ads back then aren't representative of all ads around the world, but even so, that's pretty worrying. Particularly when you think about the fact that the industry felt fit to reward those ads publicly. ”

He called it clear and concerning evidence of unconscious gender bias being rife in the advertising industry.

Overall, what marketers are getting wrong ties in with Southgate's definition of not being progressive: reinforcing rather than helping to eradicate harmful gender-based stereotypes. Luckily the Unstereotype Alliance, launched at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity in 2017, is set to get this back on firm footing.



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Ostler said to get it right you need to address your targeting. It's not that marketers ignore women, though – on a whole, they tend to target more women than men. Unfortunately, lots of that targeting is based on gender stereotypes.

Ad touchpoint 1: Gender targeting

For example, females are over targeted for laundry, baby products and household products. This may be insulting to men, who have opinions on these topics, and women don't want to be solely responsible for it – vice versa on automobiles.

Making progress in targeting can be as simple as challenging out-of-date and simplistic assumptions.



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Kantar's Connected Life research shows increasing numbers of both genders now claim responsibility for grocery purchasing in most countries across the globe, with Kantar's BrandZ analysis from 2017 and 2018 showing that gender-balanced brands are more valued than gender-neutral brands and that too many brands show a traditional gender skew.



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For example, in 2014 Home Depot's brand power was stronger amongst men but fast-forward to 2019 and that's no longer the case, as the brand has since made a concerted effort to also target female buyers.

Ad touchpoint 2: Gender portrayals in ad content

Southgate added that how women and men are portrayed in ads plays a big role in how well those ads work, too – obviously, it's not that women don't appear in ads, it's that where both genders appear in an ad, the men tend to be more prominent while the women shown are usually shown as caring and likeable but in a background role.

On the consequences of feminism in advertising, Southgate says not to go overboard as you need to display concepts of strength, caring and respect in positive female portrayals without being too aggressive in this regard in your brand portrayal.

For example, in 2017, Nike in Russia's 'Believe in More' campaign successfully balanced concepts of brand strength and sensitivity by modifying expectations of 'what are girls made of', beyond gossip and marmalade...

That was a win, as there's no denying it's tricky to get a female portrayal right, but positive, progressive portrayals of males can be just as tricky, as we saw with the heated debate and controversy that followed Gillette's recent #WeBelieve campaign:



Gillette's 'We Believe' ad receives mixed feedback

15 Jan 2019



But working on accurate, positive gender portrayal isn't just a nice to have – it has a strong correlation with ad effectiveness and builds brand affinity.

On how ad response varies by gender, and implications for creative development, Ostler said recent neuroscience learnings suggest there's only 8% difference between the male and female brain.

According to the Link database, women are slightly more likely than men to prefer ads that feature children and well-known music – but that difference is only 3% to 4%. So there's no such thing as a formula to predict whether a specific ad will perform better amongst women and men.

Ad touchpoint 3: The cultural delicacy of getting the cultural nod

While humour works well in getting both genders to feel more positive towards a brand, remember that you'll need to navigate sociocultural awareness, too. What may be seen as a bold statement in your country may not be seen as being bold or culturally sensitive elsewhere, and vice versa. See the two gender-positive ads below as examples of this:

Be aware that going too far, too fast in a way that's inconsistent with your current messaging also puts you at risk of progressive backlash.



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Audi Spain's 'The Doll Who Decided to Drive' animated ad challenged stereotypes effectively, whereas the launch of their 'Daughter' campaign at the 2017 Super Bowl in the US faced a mixed response.

Ad touchpoint 4: Gender placement

Southgate said gender is a readily available targeting variable, and you can fine-tune it even after the ad is live, especially with digital ads, but even with optimising gender portrayals to maximise creative response, all isn't quite rosy in the digital garden. Note that in-market media placement factors like targeting receptivity may bring down the effectiveness of digital ads.

For example, women tend to be less impressed by targeted ads as well as unskippable preview ads. The AdReaction findings showed that word-of-mouth marketing and point-of-sale also does better than online advertising with women, while websites and reviews did better for men.



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With online ad spend on the rise around the world, there's a clear need for better targeting of ads for women.

Ad touchpoint 5: Embed gender programmes

Southgate shared that Kantar has partnered with Diageo's experience in getting their gender placement and programming right through the five steps of their embedded ongoing progressiveness programmes.

This works in first establishing a benchmark for Diageo Communications, then working to understand female gender portrayals in different cultures around the world before developing an advertising framework, driving impact and finally measuring success through copy testing.

The benchmarking stage found women tend to be underrepresented, but when applied to a brand like Bailey's Irish Cream, they saw significant change over a few years, with a 48% increase in ROI.

It clearly pays off to put more effort into getting gender right in advertising.

[Click here](#) for the full webinar recording and download Kantar's [Getting Gender Right Report](#) for further insights.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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