

Gender inclusivity in advertising in the Caribbean

Call to action for Advertisers/Marketers

Advertising is one of the key sectors which has the opportunity to positively influence gender norms. Such actions will benefit society by shifting rigid expectations which limit individual potential, while also addressing root causes of violence against women and girls.

Gender stereotypes are pervasive among society and must be addressed across sectors in order to promote and socialize gender norms more aligned with human rights principles. Greater knowledge around advertising and its influence on stereotypes, norms, and gender socialization is

needed to inform future interventions which can lead the industry in a positive direction.

To fill some of these knowledge gaps, UNICEF and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, with the support of the Spotlight Initiative Caribbean Programme, conducted a systematic content analysis of 600 advertisements from television and digital media in four Caribbean countries (Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago) that aired between 2019 and 2021.

A close look at advertisements in the Caribbean

The study found that harmful gender norms continue to be represented, reproduced, and reinforced in television and digital media advertisements in the Caribbean. The ways in which women and men were portrayed were often illustrative of discriminatory gender norms and a patriarchal system that privileges masculinity over femininity. The analysis of the ads revealed that:

1. Women were shown as caregivers but also as objects of sexual desire.

- ▶ Women were more likely than men to be depicted with family or as having dependent children, to be portrayed in domestic spaces, and to be performing domestic tasks.
- ▶ Women were portrayed in revealing clothing seven times as often as men.

2. Men were portrayed as powerful providers and leaders.

- ▶ Men were more likely than women to be shown having a professional, paid occupation.

- ▶ Men were more likely than women to be represented across almost all of the reviewed occupations.

3. Advertisements in the Caribbean failed to capture the region's diversity, widely excluding nondominant groups.

- ▶ Characters portrayed in the reviewed advertisements were largely heterosexual, young, thin, non-disabled, and middle-class.
- ▶ There was a near-total absence of LGBTQIA+ individuals, people living with disabilities, and adults over 50 years old.
- ▶ Very few characters were portrayed as working-class or having large bodies.

The characters in the advertisements reviewed reinforced traditional gender roles and portrayed a very narrow view of Caribbean society, suggesting that such portrayals are “normal” and what is expected or considered acceptable amongst Caribbean audiences.



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Why does it matter?

The power of marketing and advertising in shaping — or challenging — gender norms is especially important during adolescence. The portrayal of gender stereotypes in advertising may create conflicting or unrealistic expectations for youth, which may result in low self-confidence, higher rates of depression, and different forms of gender-based violence. Yet, adolescence can also be a time for transformation, as young people begin to explore and define their own identities and values.

It is critical that policymakers work together with ad agencies, civil society, and the private sector to capitalize on this opportunity window and thoughtfully leverage advertising and marketing as forces for positive change.

Key terms



Gender socialization

The processes by which individuals learn and internalize gender norms.



Gender norms

Informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behavior on the basis of gender.

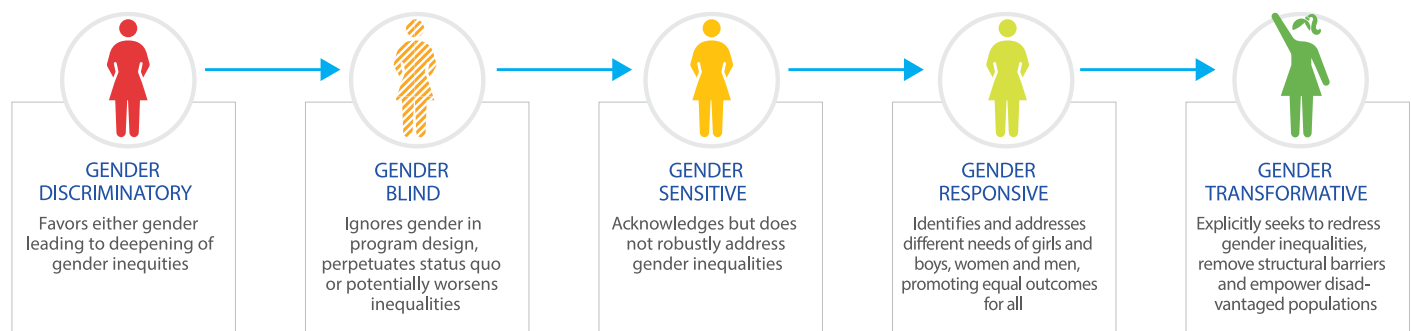


Gender stereotypes

Generalizations about groups of people as gendered subjects. For example, a common gender stereotype is that “all women” enjoy performing domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning.

UNICEF’s ‘Gender Continuum’ diagnostic tool

UNICEF uses the Gender Continuum diagnostic tool to evaluate the effectiveness of a development or humanitarian intervention in addressing gender inequalities in programme design, implementation, monitoring and/or evaluation. You can use this tool as a clear guide and/or inspiration to develop gender inclusive and equitable marketing campaigns.



Source - [Promoting diversity and inclusion in advertising: a UNICEF playbook](#)

What can agencies do?

1. Develop content that promotes positive messages, advances human rights, and challenges harmful stereotypes and normalized beliefs around violence against women and girls.

- ▶ Build alternative depictions of masculinities by portraying men and boys in more diverse ways so as not to reduce their worth to harmful and simplistic stereotypes. Depict men as caregivers, contributing to household duties, experiencing a range of emotions, and showing vulnerability.
- ▶ Build alternative depictions of femininities by portraying women and girls in ways that do not reduce their worth to harmful stereotypes which subjugate or sexualize their being. Depict women in the workplace, in positions of authority, as popular leaders, and powerful individuals.
- ▶ Include greater diversity of characters, considering characteristics such as race, class, disability, body size, gender, and sexual orientation.
- ▶ When portraying household settings, reflect the reality of diverse family units, including multigenerational households, single-mother- or single-father-led families, and other situations outside of the nuclear family.
- ▶ Use distribution channels that ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory marketing mechanisms, including preventing use of gendered algorithms in digital platforms.

2. Mainstream gender and age-sensitive advertising practices, including through awareness-raising and capacity building.

- ▶ Regularly train staff (especially senior management, advertising production, and creative teams) on unconscious bias, including how our identities impact content development and marketing choices in a way that promotes or challenges harmful gender norms.

- ▶ Develop long-term strategic plan and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in marketing and advertising.
- ▶ Hire diverse teams of writers, producers, and artists and ensure that they can bring new perspectives and experiences to the creative and production process.
- ▶ Use evidence to address stereotyping regarding race, disability, sexuality etc.
- ▶ Practice positive gendered marketing. Femvertising promotes positive gender socialization to women and girls by focusing on traits such as intelligence, strength and perseverance rather than just attractiveness, thinness and domestic skills.

3. Strengthen content-quality testing and evaluation mechanisms.

- ▶ Leverage tools to create and track advertising content that is free of gender stereotypes, and to push for progressive portrayals of all people.
- ▶ Test advertising scripts and copy for bias among a diverse audience, including children and adolescents.
- ▶ Conduct impact assessments with diverse child stakeholders, including consultations with children and adolescents, to understand how marketing can impact their perceptions of themselves and others.

4. Develop partnerships and collaborations with gender-equality organizations.

- ▶ Partner with gender-equality organizations and women-led media groups to identify appropriate ways to use marketing and advertising channels to promote messages that combat violence against women and children.
- ▶ Collaborate with marginalized groups and the organizations that represent them to ensure that their perspectives are reflected while creating advocacy and training materials.

Demonstrate your commitment

By setting key performance indicators, you can demonstrate your commitment as an ad agency to avoiding negative stereotypes and achieving diversity, equity and inclusion in the development, marketing and advertising of products. [Use this check-list of key indicators to guide your progress.](#)

Business strategy and structure

- ❑ Responsibility for the implementation of diversity and inclusion targets is clearly assigned.
- ❑ Company exit/attrition rate is tracked as a measure of bias.
- ❑ External talent is identified to support diverse voices on the team.

The creative process

- ❑ Steps are put in place to continually assess and ensure that creative processes take into account cultural shifts, trends and expectations.
- ❑ Regular analysis of the impact of hiring practices and the workplace culture on creative teams is carried out.
- ❑ Long-term strategic plans and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion are developed for creative teams.

Product marketing and brand communication

- ❑ Impact assessments are conducted with diverse stakeholders to understand how

marketing can influence their perceptions of themselves and others.

- ❑ Regular contact with industry bodies/ governments is maintained to ensure minimum standard around gender stereotyping and inclusion.

Policies on gender

- ❑ Clear gender and advertising policies for adults and/or children are in place. If the company does not direct marketing at children, it takes into account the overall impact of their advertising on gender stereotypes.
- ❑ Global responsible marketing and advertising policy that prohibits harmful and unethical advertising related to children is followed.
- ❑ Guidelines for the use of children in advertising and marketing are established.

Channels for marketing and advertising

- ❑ Distribution channels (offline and online) are monitored for gender bias.
- ❑ Influencers that promote positive gender roles for boys and girls are clearly identified.

For more recommendations and info:

- [A Review of Advertising in the Caribbean and Its Links to Gender Equality, Gender Norms, and Violence Against Women and Girls” study in the Caribbean](#)
- [Promoting diversity and inclusion in advertising: a UNICEF playbook](#)