

Gender inclusivity in advertising in the Caribbean

Call to action for Policymakers

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.



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.

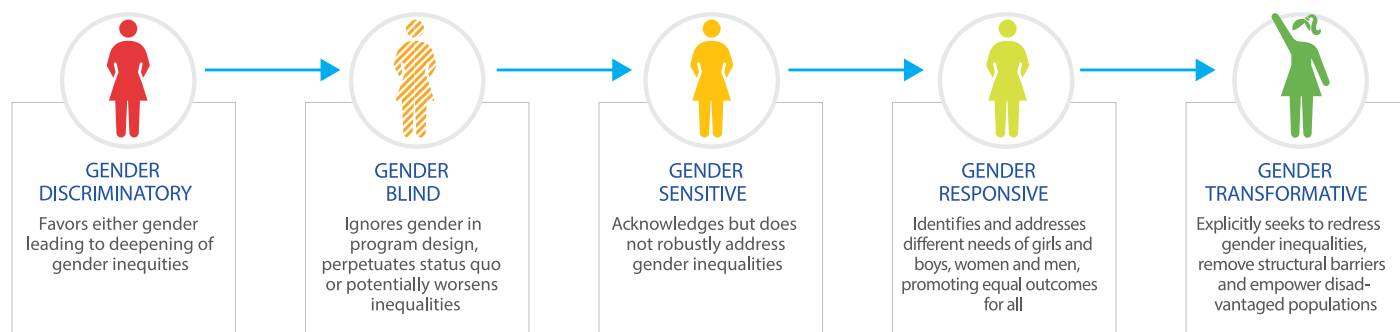


Gender stereotypes

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 advocate for gender inclusive and equitable marketing campaigns.



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

What can policymakers do?

Regulation

- ❑ Develop statutory regulations governing how gender is portrayed through advertising in the country including guidance specifically on depictions of children.
- ❑ Include policies on responsible marketing to children, with gender-specific mentions, in statutory legislation.

Industry standards

- ❑ Partner with CSOs and private-sector allies to develop regional and/or country-specific standard of practice on gender- and age- sensitive advertising.
- ❑ Engage in advocacy with local advertising-standards associations to create or strengthen statutory guidelines.
- ❑ Collaborate with women's organizations and CSOs to develop locally appropriate strategies and campaigns to incentivize uptake and implementation of relevant standards.

Children and youth participation

- ❑ Expand opportunities for adolescents to participate in their communities and in the regulatory and advertising creative processes that affect them.
- ❑ Work with youth organizations to change social norms that stand in their way and develop platforms for them to share their experiences and propose solutions.

Education

- ❑ Promote the inclusion of gender equality or sustainable development component in the curriculum in marketing and business classes in schools, universities and business colleges.

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](#)