Advertising industry complacency is letting brands and women down

29 Jan 2019

The vast majority (91%) of marketers think they are doing a good job of portraying women as positive role models in adverts. However, a significant percentage (45%) of audiences think women are still being portrayed inappropriately according to Kantar's newest analysis of advertising creativity and media effectiveness. The advertising industry's failure to portray and target women well impacts the effectiveness of individual adverts and campaigns, and at a high level means male-skewed brands are missing out on an average of $9 billion in brand valuation.
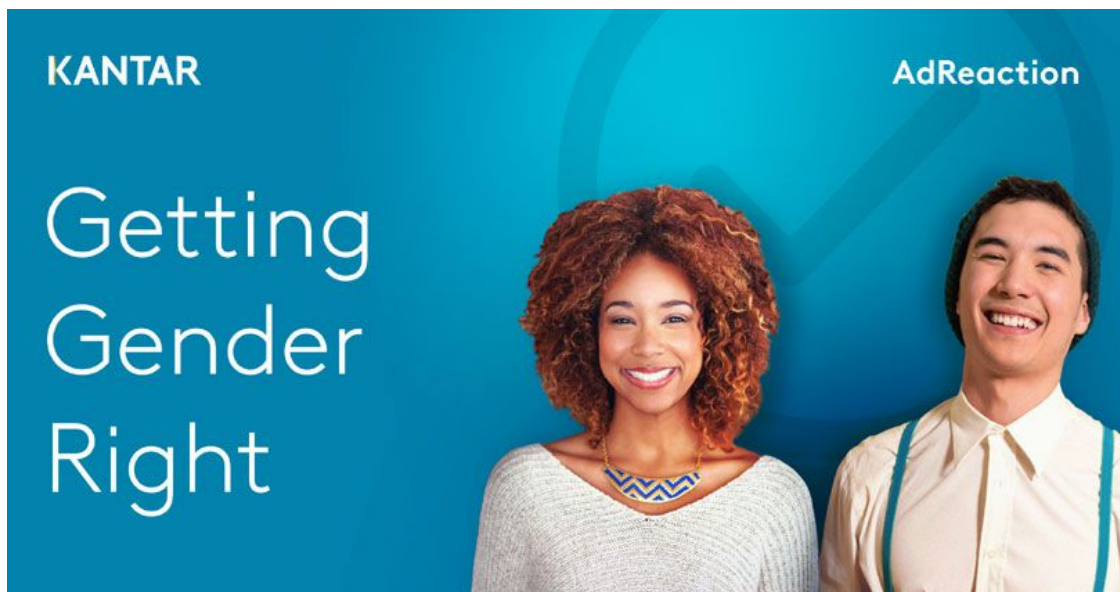
The latest AdReaction study from Kantar, includes analysis of 30,000 ad tests in the 2018 Link™ global ad database, survey responses of 450 global marketers, consumer advertising attitudes among almost 40,000 consumers around the world, and brand equity analysis of over 9,000 global brands to create an in-depth understanding of the role of gender in advertising.

Key creative findings from *'AdReaction: Getting Gender Right'* include:

- When both genders appear in ads, men are 38% more likely to be featured prominently than women.
- Gender portrayals in advertising remain stereotyped, with most ads showing women to be "likeable" or "caring", and only 6% including an "authoritative" female character.
- Adverts led by authoritative female characters outperform other ads. They generate more expressiveness (measured via facial coding), in part because these roles are a positive surprise. Authoritative female characters also make ads much more believable and persuasive – attributes which are known to lead to short-term sales boosts.
- The industry struggles to make great ads starring women. Ads featuring only women are less impactful overall and less likely to make people feel proud or to generate excitement than ads featuring only men.
- Creating gender-based creatives is less necessary than has been traditionally imagined. There is no identifiable overall difference in response to ads across gender lines. Good adverts are usually good for everyone and bad adverts are bad for everyone - irrespective of intended gender targeting.
- Women do show a slight preference for ads with a 'slice of life', children, and well-known music. There are very few other specific creative elements which guarantee success among one gender.
- Everyone has a funny bone – humour works well across both genders – but ads featuring only women use comedy less than half the time as ads featuring only men (22% vs 51%).
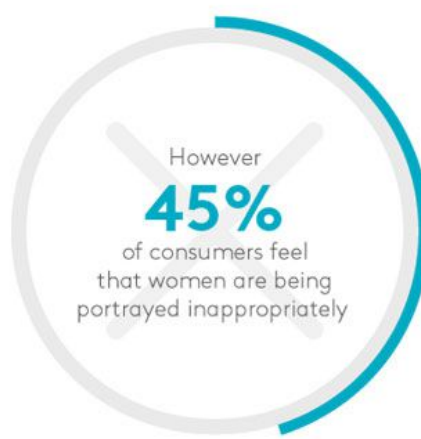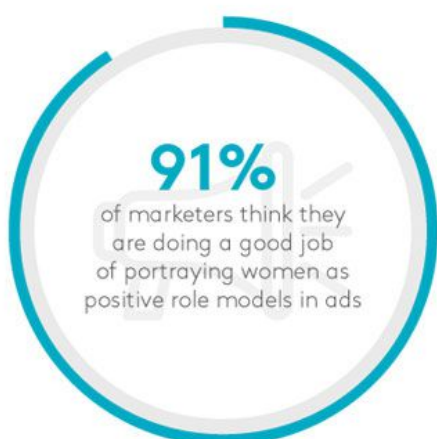
Additionally, key targeting and media effectiveness findings include:

- Average brand value is highest among gender-balanced brands ($20.6bn vs $16.1bn among female-skewed brands and $11.5bn among male-skewed brands); yet just 33% of global brands achieve this balance.
- Over-simplistic targeting approaches of some brands fail to acknowledge that decision-making roles extend across genders in most categories.
- Ad format has a strong role in effectiveness. In particular, online ads are failing to deliver for women; in 2018 they generated 28% less brand impact than among men, and fewer women find online ads to be reliably relevant.
- Women much prefer shorter online video, and strongly dislike non-skippable ad formats which create a sense of 'loss of agency'.
- Beyond paid advertising, point of sale activity and word of mouth are often more impactful touchpoints among women.

KANTAR   AdReaction

Getting Gender Right

Gender illiterate brands are leaving money on the table.
How can gender progressive advertising help grow your brand?

What's to 'get'?

91%
of marketers think they
are doing a good job
of portraying women as
positive role models in ads

However
45%
of consumers feel
that women are being
portrayed inappropriately

On average, male-skewed brands are valued

US$ 9 billion

less than gender-balanced brands

Gaining ground

Embrace gender differences

In some categories stereotypical targeting is resulting in lost opportunities.

98% of baby and laundry products, and household cleaner ads are targeted at women.

But in most categories, both men and women are decision makers.

▷ Take action: Target progressively by challenging outdated and over-simplistic assumptions.

Portray progressively

Marketers believe they are progressively representing men and women, but something is amiss.

When both appear in ads, men are **39%** more likely to be featured prominently than women.

Just 6% of ads show women or men in authoritative roles. Yet women portrayed authoritatively result in much more engaging, believable and persuasive ads.

▷ Take action: Stop adhering to common stereotypes; authoritative portrayals of both men and women can help you achieve brand growth.

Design to the edges

There is no overall difference in response to ads across gender – so creating gender-based creatives is less necessary than you would imagine.

Humour is used less in ads featuring women (**22%** vs **51%** for ads featuring men).

However, both men and women strongly prefer ads using humor.

▷ Take action: Design creative to the edges to cater for both feminine and masculine needs.

Extend gender targeting beyond media

Be clear on the role of gender in your audience segments before defining placement strategy.

Fewer women think online ads are reliably relevant (**42%** of women vs **49%** of men).

Word-of-mouth is **22%** more impactful among women than men.

Websites have **12%** more impact among men than women.

▷ Take action: Brands targeting women need to ensure online content is relevant rather than invasive and generate conversation to win.

Commenting on the study's findings, Rosie Hawkins, Chief Offer and Innovation Officer, Kantar Insights Division, said, "It is clear from our findings that some introspection is required on the part of creative and media agencies and their clients. The failure to meaningfully connect with female audiences is selling brands short and limiting their brand value. It is disappointing that female portrayals are generally less powerful, but encouraging that ads featuring more authoritative women are seeing greater success."

Hawkins continued: "It is not a simple journey though. Brands need to tread with care, and have good self-awareness of how they are perceived. Some more progressive brands have greater permission to challenge gender stereotypes, and brands also need to account for local socio-cultural attitudes."

AdReaction recommends some key steps for creatives, media agencies and their clients to achieve more effective engagement across different gender groups:

- Most brands should "design to the edges" by catering to feminine and masculine needs within the same campaign idea and creative executions.
- Consistent copy testing which includes gender equality metrics will help you avoid the worst mistakes, and learn how to optimise portrayals.
- Gender balanced creative and media planning teams and processes will likely result in more gender nuanced campaigns.
- Walk the talk beyond the campaign; comprehensive progressiveness programs don't stop at gender and get embedded far beyond the marketing department.

The *'AdReaction: Getting Gender Right'* study can be found at www.kantar.com/adreaction.

Sign up for one of our webinars here which will explore the study findings.

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