

## Press release

### Female characters in ads are prominent but highly stereotyped

Indian advertising study reveals women dominate screen and speaking time; portrayals bolster harmful stereotypes

*A new study released by UNICEF and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media reveals persistent gender stereotyping in India's television and YouTube advertisements. The International Advertising Association chapter in India commits to taking action on the report's recommendations.*

**Los Angeles/New Delhi, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021** – Although female characters are prominent in ads in India, they are still highly stereotyped. Women are less likely to be shown in public spaces and in paid employment; more likely to be selling domestic products and food to other women as well as responsible for childcare and shopping. Female characters in ads also tend to be thin, unlike men who are portrayed as different body types. These are some of the findings of a study released today by **UNICEF and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDI) on [Gender Bias and Inclusion In Advertising In India](#)**. The study explores how popular Indian advertisements can replace such harmful typecasts with balanced portrayals to inspire girls and boys of their possibilities, unrestrained by gender stereotypes.

"Gender socialization is a learned behaviour from childhood," says **Dr. Yasmin Ali Haque, UNICEF India Representative**. "Children observe and learn social cues from parents, family, and the society around them, including the advertising they see around themselves. UNICEF is committed towards ensuring gender equity and girls' empowerment, which forms the core of our gender responsive programming. This report will help us challenge biases and advocate more effectively with the Indian advertising community, and across South Asia with all businesses, to support our goal of achieving gender equality for the benefit of all children."

**Geena Davis, Academy Award Winning Actor, Founder and Chair of the Institute** says "Misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes of women in advertising have a significant impact on women - and young girls - and how they view themselves and their value to society. While we do see female representation dominate in Indian ads, they are still marginalized by colorism, hypersexualization, and without careers or aspirations outside of the home. The stark inequality evident in portrayals of females in these advertisements must be addressed to ensure an equitable society. This collaborative study with UNICEF and its partners sets the foundation for improvement in India and across the globe."

Conventional gender norms constantly devalue women and girls, making it difficult to secure their

rights and reach their full potential. From a declining sex ratio, girls dropping out of schools, marrying before 18 years, and not being supported to work outside the home: these all reflect a significant gap in investments in her future pathways beyond marriage. Media can help shift the narrative and provide diverse and powerful templates to fuel her aspirations and simultaneously shift people's perceptions around her.

The research measures over 1,000 television and YouTube advertisements aired across India in 2019. The ads were provided and translated by the International Advertising Association (IAA), which is also committed to translating the recommendations into action, beginning with a round-table discussion to be organized by the IAA with leading business representatives. IAA will also work with members to launch campaigns to deconstruct harmful stereotypes, in support of UNICEF's priorities.

**Megha Tata President - IAA-India Chapter/ MD, Discovery Communications -South Asia** said, "Advertising and marketing play a powerful role in the process of gender socialization and women and girls' empowerment, and the India Chapter of the IAA has been at the forefront of many initiatives concerning creative nuances in communicating gender issues. Being a strategic partner to this effort has not just been exciting but also very satisfying. The Association has supported the sample base for the study and will lead the dissemination of findings in India on the importance of modelling equitable gender norms. We hope this will become a benchmark for similar meaningful studies to be conducted in different parts of the world."

The study would not have been possible without the expertise and support provided by UNICEF's partners, including the advisory board members from UN Women, Population First, the Centre for Women's Development Studies, and Jamia Millia Islamia University.

**UNICEF and the Institute will discuss the study findings and recommendations and identify opportunities for action, with a group of influential stakeholders at the Virtual See Jane Global Salon, at 9am PST / 21.30 IST on 21 April 2021.** To join us for an interactive session, register [here](#).

### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work with our partners for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. *UNICEF India* works across India to save children's lives, help them fulfil their potential and defend their rights. We rely on support from businesses and individuals to sustain health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education and child protection programmes for all girls and boys. *For more information on UNICEF India and our work to help every child survive and thrive, visit [www.unicef.org/india](http://www.unicef.org/india).* Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

### **About the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media**

Founded in 2004 by Academy Award-Winning actor Geena Davis, the Institute is the only research-based organization working collaboratively within the entertainment industry to create gender balance, foster inclusion, and reduce negative stereotyping in family entertainment media.

The Institute is the go-to resource and thought leader on gender in media. Our data-driven research, education, and advocacy empower and inspire advertisers and content creators to reimagine the media landscape to reflect our ever-changing society. Our expertise has yielded a significant change in messaging at major networks, studios, production companies, guilds, and agencies. Visit <https://seejane.org>.

### **About IAA**

The International Advertising Association is the world's only globally focused integrated advertising trade association with membership representing advertising agencies and the media. The IAA comprises Corporate Members, Organizational Members, Educational Affiliates, as well as 56 Chapters with individual members and young professionals from 76 countries including the top 10 economies in the world. IAA has a chapter in India. IAA is over 80 years old and is headquartered in New York. See [www.iaaglobal.org](http://www.iaaglobal.org).

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**Key highlights from the study:**

- While women have equal screen presence and more speaking time in Indian ads, they are still stereotyped as young and beautiful or caretakers and parents: to drive gender equality: balanced portrayals are needed to inspire girls and boys of their possibilities, unrestrained by gender stereotypes.
- Women are less likely to be shown in public spaces, in paid employment, as leaders or making decision about their futures: increased quality representation can inspire girls to stay in school and show girls marriage and taking care of home and family is not their only option for the future.
- Women in ads tend to be selling domestic products and food to other women: involving men in the purchase and preparation of meals shows all that everyone should participate in household duties and nutrition choices.
- Female characters in ads tend to be thin and less likely to be shown involved in sports while male characters appear with a variety of body sizes: show women across a variety of body shapes, in line with men and promote sporting activities for girls by increasing participation.
- Women and girls are much more likely to be shown undertaking or being responsible for childcare or shopping as well as responsible for sanitation decisions: by showing more men speaking about cleaning products, it will help show that everyone is responsible for sanitation and housework.
- Indian advertising promotes colorism by presenting characters with lighter skin tones as more physically attractive than characters with darker skin: ads could show a more diverse range of skin colours and tones to ensure children see representation across skin types and caste and increase self- confidence.