

Title: Embracing diversity, gender and race equality in advertising

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Introduction

Advertising fulfils several diverse functions, dynamically developing and changing commensurately with the economy, technology, and environmental conditions. For a long time, advertising was mainly a tool for promoting goods and services, and now much more is expected. It is gradually moving away from simple advertising messages. Today it is supposed to arouse emotions, affect the attitudes of customers, as well as raise specific problems of the modern world (Korenkova et al., 2020). Advertising has gained importance, which implements the goals set for corporate social responsibility calling for a change in their perception and attitudes. Therefore, many advertising messages worldwide promote diversity, gender equality and race in advertising. Many advertisements with their content approached discrimination (Kotler, Roberto and Lee, 2002).

The social goals of advertising are to raise public awareness and modify attitudes. The issues of diversity, gender equality and race in advertising are not limited only to combating stereotypes about women and men, or people of colour, physique. The goal is much more complex since this problem affects many spheres of life. For many years, advertising has promoted modified false patterns of perfect appearance. Messages are full of sexism, negating the principle of equality between women and men and preserving stereotypes. Fortunately, we can see a change in this area for some time. We can observe messages that say being different is okay, just as good as being a human. The direction of advertisers and various institutions combating equality fills us with hope and optimism, provided that it continues developing.

This paper aims to discuss the issue of promoting diversity, gender, and race equality in contemporary advertising. In terms of the objectives of social advertising, the problem of

inequality, good and unfavourable practices, and the impact of marketing on marketing solving this problem. The main thesis adopted in this study is the assumption that promoting diversity and equality of gender and race is increasing in contemporary advertising. Marketing can have a real impact on changing society's attitudes towards diversity by moving away from stereotypes.

Social advertising and its objectives

Considerations on the indicated topic should begin with explaining what social advertising is. It is a relatively new type of social communication (Doner, 2003).

Although it uses media and influence techniques, its primary goal is to promote socially valuable patterns of behaviour, attitudes, and society's attention to problems. However, most often, they refer to communities that, for some reason, are marginalised. Thus, comparing social advertising to commercial advertising, it can be concluded that it performs informational and promotional functions. However, at the same time, it is intended to change recipients' attitudes. The subject of social advertising is very diverse (Kotler, 2007). Among the main problems raised through it can be indicated (Kotler and Lee, 2011).

- prevention of health and addiction.
- health promotion.
- human rights.
- equality.
- ecology and environment.
- the fight against violence.
- the fight against social exclusion and discrimination.
- education.
- road safety.

The task of social advertising and social campaigns aim to promote values, norms, attitudes, and patterns perceived as socially desirable in relation to specific social problems, such as

tolerance for diversity, care for the natural environment, respect for human rights, and opposition to violence. Companies that implement such campaigns raise socially important issues to change social attitudes and shape their image as socially responsible and open to change (French and Gordon, 2015).

Acceptance of diversity, gender equality and race as an important postulate of the modern world

For many years, diversity, gender, and race have been the leading cause of discrimination in society, observed in the professional, educational and many other spheres. However, the progress that accompanies it has contributed to a change in the perception of this issue. Today, acceptance and respect for diversity and equality in fighting for human rights and freedom has priority. Promoting equality is a tool to combat discrimination, exclusion, social inequalities, and divisions. Regarding diversity, this means that regardless of gender, race, religion, political beliefs, sexual orientation, appearance, attitudes, every person should be equally respected, treated, and entitled to the same rights. We meet people who differ in many characteristics, which does not mean that any of these people are better or worse than the others (Sandhu, 2019).

Supporting gender equality nowadays focuses on moving away from the stereotypical perception of the role of a woman and a man in every aspect of life (Eisend, 2010). By equality of race, in turn, should be understood as the non-discrimination of people of different origins, skin colour, speaking a different language from others. The promotion and acceptance of diversity, gender equality and race is now one of the main demands of human rights defenders and is required of employers, advertisers, law-making bodies, various institutions, and all members of society. Thus, advertising is not free from the discrimination faced with the challenge of shaping messages but encourages society to adopt correct attitudes towards individual differences (Veenhoven, 2012).

Promoting diversity, gender equality and race – good practices of advertising creators

The meditation book by Marcus Aurelius (180 AD) says that one should behave properly, not out of compulsion. However, of one's own will, stoicism emphasised self-examination to teach us how to live well, wisely, and happily. "To stand up straight, not straightened", these words of Marcus Aurelius seem to reflect the problem of the still

existing lack of acceptance of being oneself and deviations from norms. Linking this problem with the advertising industry is a real challenge. However, at the same time, its strength creates hope for the formation of positive social attitudes and thus a beneficial change in the discussed area. Currently, in the examples presented below, we can see several activities of advertising creators focused on promoting diversity, gender, and race equality (Carolyn Mae Kim, 2021).

One of the main topics related to diversity, strongly promoted in modern advertising, particularly clothing brands, is diversity in terms of silhouette, age, or skin colour. Until a few years ago, only slim women appeared in advertising. Today, however, international brands promote diversity in both women's and men. Such activities aim to promote diversity, acceptance of one's own body and being oneself.

An example of such activities can be the spring campaign of a powerful e-commerce company – Zalando, entitled "It all stays with us for good". This campaign is a celebration of diversity and inclusivity. It promotes skin colour diversity, sexual orientation, and acceptance of disability (Fig.1).



Figure 1 Zalando Launches Spring Campaign to Laud Society's Champions & Celebrate Their Values, (2021)

Advertising activities promoting diversity, particularly gender equality, also include Mars global campaign #HereToBeHeard, which calls for global businesses to listen to women from around the world and implement actions that will allow them to develop their potential. The main goal of the campaign (Fig.2) is to shape the openness of society as well as



Figure 2 Mars Launches #HereToBeHeard Campaign to Advance Action on Gender Equality, (2021)

to implement the postulate distinguished in the Unstainable Development Goals of gender equality

Another noteworthy campaign promoting diversity in the Diesel brand's advertising spot is its provocative and stereotype-breaking advertising messages. In 2015, the company launched a campaign entitled #DIESELHIGH. The main role played by the American model Winnie Harlow. This woman has been suffering from vitiligo since childhood, manifested by the depigmentation of fragments of her body. This campaign targeted young people signalling the problems that every person can face and familiarising the audience with diversity in appearance, which should not affect outstanding people (Fig.3).



Figure 3 Winnie Harlow stars in Diesel's new campaign, (2015)

Influenced by Oliviero Toscani, who joined the company in 1982, United Colours of Benetton addresses taboo topics such as racism, isolation of AIDS patients, violence in its advertisements while building its image as a socially engaged company. One of the campaigns calling for an anti-racist attitude (Fig.4).



Figure 4 In the jungle of marketing communication, (2018)

In addition to the examples discussed, many other international brands such as Netflix, Tommy Hilfiger, and others promote diversity and gender equality and race. Some of them use provocative, often drastic images in their advertisements, aiming to awaken society and make it notice specific problems. River Island's, in their messages, involve people of different races, genders, ages, sexual orientations, people with disabilities to indicate acceptance of diversity (Fig.5).

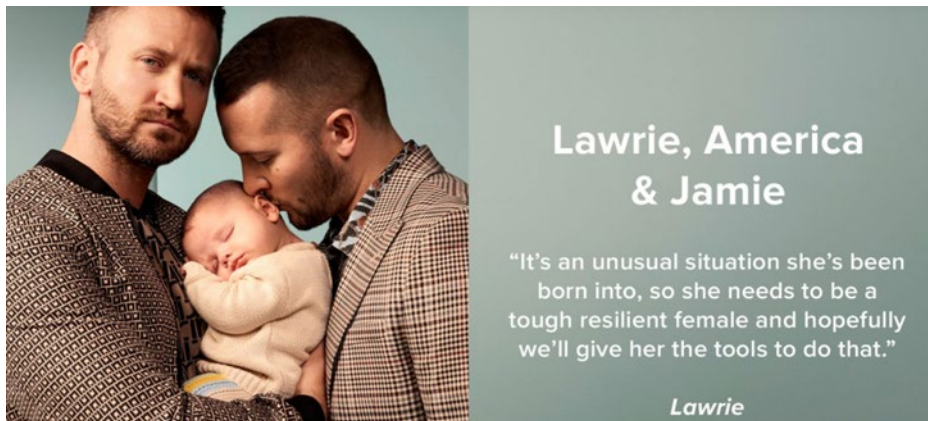


Figure 5 River Island's This is Family campaign to promote diverse families, (2018)

The evolution of photoshop model transformation

Nowadays, digital image manipulation has become a common problem, which largely applies to advertising, deceiving recipients about the existence of only perfect appearance. Such modified images of models attack us from every side, appearing in social media, TV commercials, billboards, magazines. Thus, specific patterns promote a world that is impossible to meet and, at the same time, detached from reality. Models appearing in advertisements are smooth and deprived of signs of ageing. Thus, advertising deceives us. It happens that photo manipulations are even considered works of art. Unfortunately, however, they are predominantly an unethical practice aimed at deceiving the public or improving the product's image (Thompson, 2000). The recipient is unaware that the character he observes in the advertisement and whom he often admires looks like this. Such widespread hypocrisy in advertising and the media raises many severe problems. Ideal appearance makes young people full of complexes, affecting their self-confidence and self-

esteem. In addition, such practices harm society and the attitude of acceptance and tolerance around otherness. Every day the ideals appear in advertising, viewers begin to think that image is an identification of beauty, thereby rejecting people who do not fit into this outline (Vickie Rutledge Shields, 2001).

From the findings, I argue that manipulation of photos in advertising and media should not be so widely practised, which has been postulated more clearly in society for some time. Promoting imperfectness has somehow translated into limiting the scale of promoting only ideals. Some advertisements even call for advertisers to stop bending reality. Dove launched in 2004 popular campaign showing a young girl who remakes her image on social media at the age of 13 to gain her peers' acceptance. Such messages should raise awareness of how harmful such practices are and how beneficial it is for young people's mental health to promote the beauty of diversity.

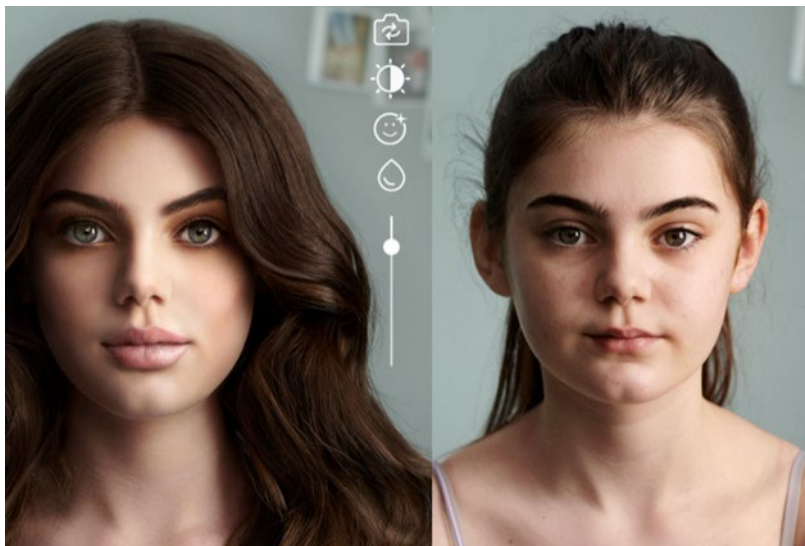


Figure 6 Dove Selfie – Self Esteem, (2004)

The fact that advertisers are increasingly trying to promote diversity and give up modifying the image of models fills us with optimism. Suppose the practice of photoshop model transformation has continued to develop and be encouraged. In that case, no advertising will show the truth in a few years. Meanwhile, more often in advertisements, even imperfections, stretch marks, wrinkles, slight overweight are marked to show reality as it is, not worse than the idealised one, but simply different and more likely (Ford 2008).

Sexism in the world of advertising

The combat against sexism in advertising that discriminates on the grounds of gender is currently gaining strength. Modern society is becoming aware and open to diversity, regardless of gender. Promoting stereotypes about the role of women, limiting women in different aspects, and about men who cannot become housewives because it is not manlike. Thus, modern advertising is changing. More it is seen in the image of a woman who is a liberated businesswoman or a man who is a great father and takes care of the house. Of course, these are only a selection of the stereotypes broken in advertising. However, we can see that advertisers are getting bolder in this aspect (Klein, 2010).

One of the biggest problems in sexism is the promotion of stereotypes about women and girls (Shrikhande, 2003). Advertising plays an important role in shaping social norms and attitudes towards various problems. Large companies implement campaigns that aim to combat sexism in advertising. The Association of Domestic Advertisers in the USA is implementing a campaign in this direction (#SeeHer, 2021). Aimed at improving public awareness of women's self-esteem are advertising messages supporting gender inequality (www.ana.net, n.d.).

How to implement the principle and equal opportunities for women and men

For women and men to have equal opportunities, it is necessary to promote an attitude that accepts diversity, to make society aware of the unreasonable divisions between women and men. Whether it refers to gender, skin colour, age, disability, the world needs to promote diversity, mainly through ubiquitous advertising. It is necessary to move away from the approach that certain behaviours are attributed only to men. Women are not appropriate to present them from the approach that a woman should be at home. It is not justified for her to strive for personal or professional development from the belief that a woman will never achieve anything that matches a man (Åkestam et al., 2021). To discard such harmful stereotypes, cooperation between institutions promoting equality is necessary. It is not easy to achieve the power of the message and specific goals without support. According to Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015), all media should promote diversity, directly oppose stereotypes, and call for acceptance and understanding of how harmful gender

divisions are. Without a doubt, a huge step forward is that there are more and more actions aimed at fighting for the acceptance of diversity and the departure from gender inequality. If this trend continues, there is a good chance that the world will be free of stereotypes (Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015)

The impact of marketing on equality between women and men

It is worth questioning whether marketing and campaign creators can impact equality between women and men. Many actions are engaged in this direction, and companies promoting their products try to solve this problem. In practice, advertising messages promoting gender equality are not enough to trigger radical changes in society's worldview and attitudes (Windels, 2016). The fact is that advertisers do not cover the problem in general. But in only a tiny part of the stereotypical treatment of women. Yes, sexist statements are more often about women, but this is not a firm rule. This is not just against women but, it is also about men. As seen in advertising, it is an uneven representation of men, reflecting on traditional gender stereotypes (Verhellen et al., 2016). Raising children is an example of sexism towards men. It is a stereotype that only a woman will bring up a child well (Digby, 2003). Promoting gender equality between both women and men and should continue. Suppose marketers do not see that this problem should be captured and understood as a whole. In that case, their actions will never effectively solve the existing problem (Tsichla, 2020).

Conclusion

The main thesis in this essay was the assumption that diversity, gender, and race equality in modern advertising can really change society's attitudes towards diversity and move away from stereotypes. Among the key arguments confirming this thesis are:

- The development of social advertising addresses the issues of diversity and equality between gender and race, which translates into an increase in the number of advertising messages promoting acceptance.
- the growing trend of showing in advertising messages people who stand out, of different ages, genders, with different silhouettes, makes us aware that beauty lies in differences and not just fitting into patterns.

- the fact that advertisers are increasingly promoting opposition to photoshop modification of models, companies are opening to showing reality. Thus, society is becoming more accepting, although promoting unrealistic patterns is expected.
- the growing strength of the fight against sexism in advertising, such messages that discriminate on the grounds of gender.
- undertaking marketing activities focused on the implementation of the principle of equality.

In addition to the arguments that support the thesis, there are a number of those that contradict it. Regardless of this, many indications promoting diversity, gender equality and race in advertising is moving forward. Thus, there is a good chance that in the future, marketing will contribute to solving the problem of lack of acceptance and negative attitudes in this area. Regardless of the media used, more and more companies worldwide must recognise the need to show diversity and support excluded environments. It is not only about the image of a socially responsible brand. Despite the persisting intolerance of diversity, the world is moving forward in this area. Advertisers are not afraid to shock, cross boundaries, and provoke to shape attitudes of social tolerance.

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List of figures

Fig.1. Zalando Launches Spring Campaign to Laud Society's Champions & Celebrate Their Values, (2021) Available at: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/zalando-launches-spring-campaign-to-laud-societys-champions--celebrate-their-values-301250920.html> (accessed: 1 December 2021)

Fig.2. Mars Launches #HereToBeHeard Campaign to Advance Action on Gender Equality (2021), Available at: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mars-launches-heretobeheard-campaign-to-advance-action-on-gender-equality-301214618.html> (accessed: 1 December 2021)

Fig.3 Winnie Harlow stars in Diesel's new campaign, (2015) Available at: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/23461/1/winnie-harlow-stars-in-diesel-s-new-campaign> (accessed 25 November 2021)

Fig.4 In the jungle of marketing communication, (2018) Available at: <https://www.media-marketing.com/en/opinion/in-the-jungle-of-marketing-communication> (accessed: 1 November 2021)

Fig.5. This is Family, (2018) Available at: <https://www.riverisland.com/editorial/this-is-family> (accessed: 25 November 2021)

Fig.6 Dove's Mission Combat, (2004) Available at: <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2021/04/28/reverse-selfie-dove-s-mission-combat-social-media-s-negative-effects> (accessed: 25 November 2021)