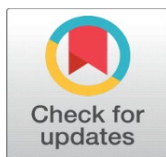


INCLUSIVITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING: WAY AHEAD FOR BRANDS

Neeru Joon ¹, Meenakshi Hooda ²

¹ Research Scholar, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

² Head of Visual Art Department, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India



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Corresponding Author

Neeru Joon,
neeru.rs.varts@mdurohtak.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

India is one of the most populous and diverse countries in the world. Its diversity is reflected by hundreds of languages spoken, tribes, religions, ethnicities, cultures, and social structures across the population of over one billion.

Advertisements on social media platforms like Instagram have provided massive opportunities for today's dynamic businesses to collaborate and develop strong networks with diverse target customers. This diversity could be very beneficial for India's development and growth. But lack of inclusivity in advertising is a long-standing problem in India. Despite growing awareness, many minorities remain under or inappropriately represented. In managing brands and targeting consumers, advertising must understand and contend with India's social and cultural diversity.

The content published on the social platform should be diverse and inclusive of all sections of society because people want to see themselves represented in advertisements. However, if an advertiser fails to maximize inclusion by ignoring the fact that every brand and community are different, then they will also fail to maximize their campaign's reach because brands that are inclusive in their marketing are viewed as more authentic and trustworthy.

The purpose here is to discuss the different ways in which brands can successfully follow an Inclusive Approach. Being truly comprehensive on social media means finding ways to make gender, race, ethnicity, and age-inclusive content. Hence, the rise in inclusivity in Social Media Advertisements is the way ahead for the success of brands.

Keywords: Inclusivity, Diversity, Advertising, Social Media, Brands

1. INTRODUCTION

What does it reflect when a woman is shown insecure about her job interview because of her dark complexion? What does it mean when a boy is shown to be more capable of doing outdoor work and a girl is shown doing household chores in an advertisement? What impression does it give when a skinny model is considered appropriate to advertise various things like clothes, bags, or shoes instead of an average or oversized one? Isn't this advertising approach responsible for making so many people feel left out of the social order? For decades, Indian advertising companies have been producing commercials which lack an inclusive approach towards gender, race and differently-abled people.

India is an immensely diverse nation. This diversity makes the land of India very Unique. If represented fairly, it could be very beneficial for the development of any business. But lack of an inclusive approach in the business environment, especially in advertising, could negatively impact the people who see it and those who are not represented fairly. Social media have filled the gap of inclusivity to some extent. According to [Kotler et al. \(2017\)](#), Social media has changed how individuals engage with one another in the online world because now, people use social media to feel connected to their communities and be more socially inclusive. The explosion of social media has resulted in increased consciousness and efforts by various advertising companies in the lack of an inclusive approach toward certain groups or communities of society.

According to Cambridge's dictionary, inclusivity is explained as the trait of making an effort to integrate individuals of many different sorts and treat them equally [Cambridge University Press. \(n.d.\)](#). This quality of pursuing inclusivity becomes imperative to be included at the very initial stage of conceptualising an advertisement. It must form the core of the creative process.

Social media advertisement has played an essential role in attracting a large number of people because of the vast Internet connectivity. Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube have billions of followers from every strata of society. Easy accessibility to smartphones with an Internet connection has made a significant part of the Indian population a potential target customer. The traditional medium of advertisement was mainly a one-way communication channel. The message would reach the specifically targeted group only, but the shift from traditional to digital media has given access to the content to anyone who has been using Instagram or Facebook. Billions of people are just a click away from the advertised product. So business organisations using social media to promote their product can't afford to neglect following an inclusive approach in their campaign.

In this research paper, it has been hypothesised that brands that allowed inclusivity in their campaigns have not just made a very positive impact in breaking the various stereotypes prevailing in Indian society but also attracted many customers to their products. Below are the different ways discussed that make the brand more inclusive in its approach:

1.1. BY NOT BEING GENDER-STEREOTYPICAL

Advertising can play a decisive role in eradicating gender stereotyping found on social platforms like YouTube. Recently UNICEF, with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender, analysed 1,000 most viewed advertisements in 2019 to assess the role of advertising media in reinforcing and challenging harmful gender roles that shape the lives of girls and women in the country to drive more gender-sensitive advertising [Geena Davis Institute of Gender in Media and UNICEF. \(2021\)](#). According to the research, women in Indian Advertising share more screen time than men, but they are still stereotyped to be represented as young, fair complexion, partially nude, sexually objectified or as a caretaker of the house as compared to men. The way that males are often portrayed in higher positions and women are typically portrayed in subordinate and submissive roles in traditional gender roles is hierarchical [Tsuchla \(n.d.\)](#).

Social media advertisements can act as a powerful tool for change because the message over here reaches a large population in a concise period. People have become very sensitive about the way gender roles are portrayed.

Below is an example of an advertisement #ShareTheLoad movement that Ariel India launched to reflect the inequality that exists within Indian households.

Figure 1



Figure 1 Singh (2020)

This advertising is a sensible piece portraying typical domestic life across the country. A busy housemaker mother gets a call from her married daughter while doing all the work like laundry, cleaning and giving breakfast to her son in bed. Her daughter informed her about quitting her dream job as she is unable to manage both home and work all by herself. The ad plays out from her mother's perspective. She became upset to see her daughter struggle with domestic chores while her husband does nothing to help. She realises that she has set a bad example for her son by not teaching him that doing household chores is not just the women's responsibility. She vows to change this by telling her son to do his laundry by himself.

1.2. BY PORTRAYING POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

"Body positivity is a movement focused on the acceptance of all bodies, regardless of size, shape, skin tone, gender, and physical abilities, while challenging present-day beauty standards as an undesirable social construct" [Body Positivity. \(2021\)](#).

These days advertisers have set such high beauty standards by presenting flawless images of skin or hair. The majority of magazine advertising attempt to show models as realistic representations for customers, particularly women, to compare themselves to, and their influence seems to be ubiquitous given how frequently women are portrayed in the media—on TV, in magazines, and on billboards—in society [Roy and Augustine \(2019\)](#).

Such unrealistic parameters to sell products like makeup, diet pills, cosmetic surgery, fairness creams, etc. make customers think they will become better by using these products. Companies, for decades, have been advertising such products to change public opinion. Body dissatisfaction is defined as a disruption in one's self-image or perception of one's weight or body shape that can damage one's mental health and quality of life [Sasirekha \(2017\)](#). But now, advertisements on social media have caused advertisers to look at this thinking differently. They must realise the impact it could portray on those who watch it. Brands have become more conscious

of who and what they are portraying. Recently, various brands did excellent work by attempting to shape the narrative around body positivity.

A Casual workwear brand, Allen Solly Women, recently launched a campaign targeted at women of different sizes. The campaign “own your shape” gathered much praise from people for establishing a size-inclusive and body-positive image.

Figure 2



Figure 2 Photograph showing body positivity. (2019)

Figure 3

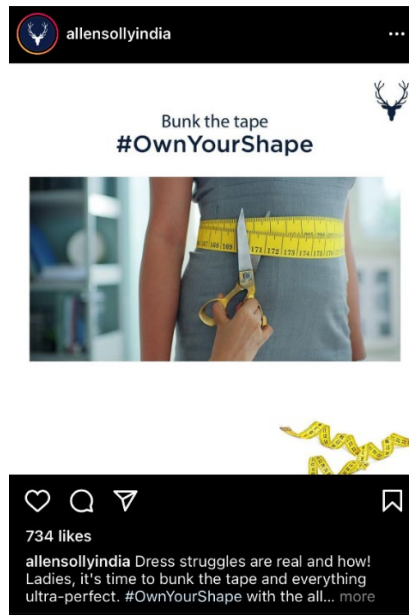


Figure 3 Allen Solly (2019)

Above shown are two ads of Allen Solly released on different platforms like YouTube and Instagram. This video ad embraces the different body shapes and sizes

of the Indian woman. In times when it has become essential to move away from the one-size-fits-all standard, this advertising came to the rescue. People with big sizes and shapes don't have to compromise on fashionable dresses because of their size; there is a brand that thinks for everyone.

1.3. INCLUSIVE OF DIFFERENTLY-ABLED PEOPLE

"Indian athletes created history, by hauling 19 medals- their best ever- including five gold, eight silver and six bronze at the recently concluded Tokyo Paralympics"

[Media and Disability \(2021\)](#). It's time for society to realise that there is a person behind the label "disabled" who is capable of doing everything like others. Advertising through social media has the power to shift this narrative around disability at a much larger scale than any other medium of communication.

Advertisers should reflect the real-life experience and engagement of differently-abled people with products or services by not over-dramatizing the matter or by avoiding emotional appeal to the viewers. They must be portrayed as ordinary people doing things generally like anyone else. Also, brands who consider these people only as a target audience to sell their product or just to pick a social cause show a lack of sensitivity and faces backfire from viewers. They must not be taken advantage of to do business.

In recent years, Indian advertisements have begun to celebrate differently abled clients with zeal, as several advertisements seen in recent years are unapologetic about disability [Parameswaran \(2015\)](#).

There are some brands that have headed in the right direction; for example, shown below is an advertisement by KFC, 'friendship bucket' was received with great warmth by people. It featured two friends sitting at KFC. One of them is differently-abled and communicates in sign language. The advertisement showed their friendship in a regular manner like other normal friends without using any emotional appeal to highlight the differently-abled person. The advertisement ended with a voice-over saying, 'Dost jitney alag hotte hain, Friendship utni hi kamaal ki hoti hai!'

Figure 4

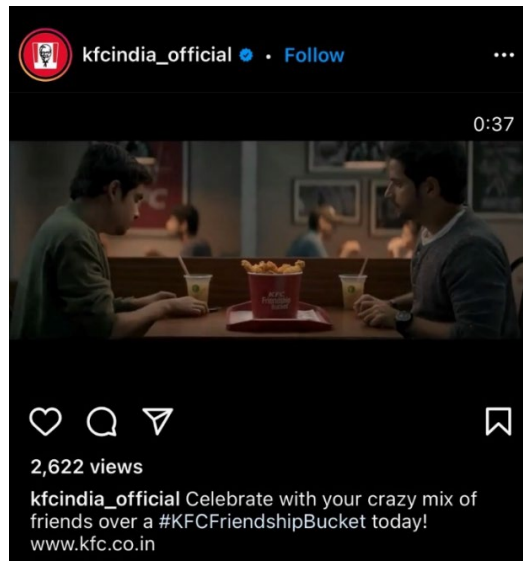


Figure 4 KFC India (2016)

2. CONCLUSION

Social media advertising has definitely revolutionised the way a message is conveyed to the audience. It is not just restricted to the target audience only but rather to anyone who has access to the internet and a mobile phone or computer. For the advertising sector, following an inclusive approach is not just a responsibility but also an opportunity. Realising the power of social media as a tool of communication, which is used by such a large number, it would be right if anyone who sees an advertisement on social media must feel represented. Also, it would be unethical if anyone who sees it didn't enjoy it or felt excluded or represented differently.

Advertisements play a significant role in shaping the perspective toward certain things or issues. It reflects the society we live in and the choice we make. Whether we realise it or not, as an audience, we are greatly impacted by the kind of message we are subjected to through advertisements. This impact is reflected when we make any purchase decision. There are more chances of choosing a product with whom we feel connected, not excluded. Inclusivity must be the core of any creative process and conceptualisation while forming an advertising campaign. It is crucial to realise that people like differently-abled, transgender people, the elderly, acid attack survivors, and dark complexion people are as much consumers as any normal person. Advertisement is a very glamorous field in which above mentioned people are looked at as not compatible or desirable to be featured. The position of gender in Advertising appears to be changing with the changing media trend. These revisions include portrayals of strong, energetic, confident, and sexually strong women, figurations of the "new male" and "new father," and an attempt to engage the LGBT community [Tsichla \(n.d.\)](#).

A significant chunk of social media users is millennials and Gen Z. These two generations are highly sensitive toward social matters. They would neither appreciate misrepresentation nor would like to be associated with any brand which lacks an equitable approach toward society. So, the level of inclusivity of a brand is directly proportional to its customer reach. Hence, the more inclusivity, the more the brand's chances of success.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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