

The changing face of women within advertising creative concepts

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Looking at the perceptions of women communicated through advertising, Havas Worldwide Johannesburg MD Ursula McAlpine seeks to find out whether this has changed in recent years.



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Advertising plays a key role in shaping and communicating perceptions of society.

Advertising is always relevant to the time in which it features, because it reflects, and often shapes, the thinking and behaviour of its intended target audience.

In the past, perceptions about women in society differed greatly to those in recent years.

For example, vintage magazine and newspaper advertisements featuring women were centered around women being in the kitchen, taking care of their husbands, obeying their husbands, looking after their beauty (for their husbands) and cleaning the house - once

again, for the approval of their husbands.

It was most definitely perceived as a man's world where women were inferior to men, and brands and advertisers were not afraid to reflect this within campaigns aimed at driving product sales.

This was not only a product of the thinking at the time, but also caused this type of behaviour and perception of women to be seen as a societal norm.

Advertising is a very powerful tool that can shape the minds of people.

As societies have advanced, so too has advertising. However, while we have come a long way since the wife-beating, kitchen-bound women days, some perceptions about women in society have stayed somewhat the same.



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Watching a modern advert for domestic products like washing powder and cleaning products, it is still almost always a woman who features, using the products in her home. This is owing to the fact that society, by-and-large, still perceives the women's primary role to be the homemaker and child-minder.

This raises the question: how far has society actually come in this regard? Have we really changed, or has it become less truthful or evident?

Some modern advertisements are still derogatory to women, many of them also perceiving women as sexual objects. Advertisements still reflect women in roles where their physical beauty is paramount to their career success, and furthermore, women are still portrayed as the parent that deals with cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children.

But as society's understanding of the modern roles of women changes, so too will advertising. In addition, perhaps it is advertising's role to change these perceptions through concepts that promote a more equal representation of the sexes and their roles within the family and work environment.

Society has a much louder voice in the modern environment, through platforms like social media. If the audience does not



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appreciate something, they can and will say so and this cannot be ignored.

The workplace is also becoming more equal in terms of gender. The number of women in management positions is something that is regarded as important by the people and the government, which could play a part in shifting society's perception of women.

While it will probably never change that women will always be considered the primary role player in terms of homemaker and mother, they are also individuals who have goals and aspirations and are able to pursue these in modern society. Gone are the days of society believing that a woman's place is in the kitchen - unless she chooses to be there, that is.

Advertising agencies need to be cautious about the messages they deliver in the modern environment, as repercussions can be damaging to brands and agencies alike.



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Should an advertisement be perceived as being derogatory to women, the brands' female audience will react to this. With millions of people being connected, this message will quickly spread to other people around the world, and soon the brand will be associated with this perception.

A final thought to consider - as advertising can shape minds, is it up to advertising agencies to shape a more gender equal society?



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