

Third Gender in Advertisements: A New Wave of Inclusiveness

Ashwini Shama*

Department of Journalism, Government First Grade College, Karnataka, India

Abstract

When we open a newspaper in the morning, it will be flooded with advertisements. In fact one can come across more advertisements than news! Further when people put on radio or television, they are bombarded with advertisements. When one steps out of the house, it becomes impossible to escape outdoor advertisements in the form of hoardings, bill boards, electronic ads, Transit ads, wall writings and so on. Even without their knowledge, people are exposed to a large number of advertisements. So practically, it is impossible to escape advertisements these days. The matter of concern here is the kind of messages that gets passed on through the advertisements. Portrayal of various concepts in the advertisements has always been an interesting area of research or study. Extensive studies have been conducted on depiction of women in advertisements. It is the same with the depiction of children in advertisements. The social and economic effects of advertisements, the cultural aspects are widely studied. But one aspect that has been completely sidelined is the actual understanding of gender issue in advertising. When the phrase 'Gender and advertising' is used; it is usually understood as the portrayal of the roles played by men and women in society. But what about the Transgender population? This perspective is rarely covered in advertisements.

This paper tries to look at advertisements from a new perspective. The paper shall be descriptive in nature and concentrates on the latest television advertisements and campaigns of various products which includes Trans people in their advertisements. The paper shall also try to peep into the advertisements from other countries bearing the same concept. It focusses on how the third gender is being portrayed in advertisements. The latest wave of Trans' genders being included in the advertisements shall be studied. The paper shall also try to understand the reaction of public to this inclusiveness.

Keywords: Advertisements • Trans' gender • Gender perspective • Stereotypes • Inclusiveness

Introduction

Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising said Mark Twain. This highlights the importance of advertising and its' power. Advertising is a modern medium, and its influence pervades modern life. There is practically no area free from its effects, from mass media to consumer products and even to nature itself – billboards obscure our views from highways, and planes drag advertising banners at our beaches (Carroll 612).

American Marketing Association has defined advertising as "Any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services of an identified sponsor." This means that advertisement is paid publicity and the expenses shall be borne by the sponsor. Advertising is as old as human civilization. We have found traces of advertisements in the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilizations. It is said that the first evidence of advertising was found among Babylonian empire. Studies on advertising and its impact are also not new. Umpteen studies have been conducted on

the effect of advertisements; but this area hold importance even to this day. The greatest advantage of advertisements is that they provide knowledge about various goods and services to the viewers. Even before going to the market; the choice of the brand and the product can be made by the public. This is possible only because of advertising. Every product we use is advertised through various media. They play a major role in the buying decision of the consumers. In their blog on September 16th 2019, team EPW writes, "The impact of advertising on society has brought in a great change [1]. It has made people think beyond their compact world of stability. It has made society to change their way of living".

'Sex' usually refers to male or female. Trans' genders also termed as third gender are usually kept out or sidelined. One should understand that there lies a lot of difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological differences while gender is a social construct. According to WHO, gender refers to the

*Address for Correspondence: Dr. Ashwini Shama, Department of Journalism, Government First Grade College, Karnataka, India; Tel: 9980597113; E-mail: shama.ashwini@gmail.com

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characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors' and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy as well as relationships with each other. WHO further says that gender discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability, age, geographical location, gender identity and sexual orientation among others [2].

Tran's gender can in simple terms mean that the person does not belong to the two sexes-male or female.

Now talking about Tran's gender in advertisements; if we try to recollect the advertisements we have watched on television which includes Tran's gender as a character, we might be surprised to realize that not many advertisements are made including them. Society has never been inclusive of the Tran's gender population. They have always been kept away. Be it movies, advertisements, stories or any other creative form, the characters of Tran's genders are hardly thought of. Their problems, feelings, life and culture have always remained low key.

Supreme Court recognizing the community as 'Third gender' was a landmark judgment that paved way for new dreams and hopes among Tran's genders. If we observe keenly, it becomes clear that despite the law of the land, the community has been kept aloof. It is difficult to gain admission in schools and colleges even today, though the law says that everybody irrespective of caste, creed, religion and sex have a right to education. Despite their interest in gaining a job for livelihood; it becomes difficult to find a job. It is difficult for a Tran's gender to co-exist in the society. To find a smile, a hand shake, a warm hug or a friend in a person who is not from the same community is not at all easy. Even when we look at the entertainment shows on television, number of shows is made that include the participation of common public. Game shows, reality shows are open to all segments of population. But how many of them include a Tran's gender as a participant? The change is yet to be seen.

Literature Review

Chintan Girish Modi in his article titled "What do Tran's people think of Tran's representation in Indian Ads?" quotes Biraja Mishra, a Tran's woman from Bhubaneswar who is pursuing her degree in gender studies [3]. "I do not appreciate ads that speak of Tran's people as sacred beings with links to mythology. We want to be treated as equal citizen's not exotic creatures." He further quotes Q, a Tran's person from Mumbai saying, "I would love to see an advertisement where a Tran's person is employed without their Tran's-ness being the central feature of the ad- the melodramatic, emotional fishing rod to reel in a sentimental customer".

In their research article, titled 'Gender stereotypes in advertising: A review of current research', published in International Journal of Advertising, Stacy Landreth Grau and Yorgos C. Zotos mention that recent research shows that, in general, gender stereotyping in advertising still exists and is prevalent in many countries around the world [4]. Eisend set out to explore the degree of gender stereotyping as well as any changes over the years. He found that some stereotyping still persists - particularly for women. Occupational status still showed the highest degree of stereotyping, despite the education, occupation and status changes earned by women over the past several years.

Barnana Hemorprava Sarkar in his article "Why are Tran's Women missing in the advertising industry?" published in FII mentions "Tran's women are constantly excluded in the narrative when it comes to advertising for these beauty brands [5]. But they form a significant portion of the consumer group, all the while constantly fighting against the concept that only external appearance can define who a real woman is. The concept of this real woman has been so concocted by beauty brands that several Tran's women feel a much superimposed need to use makeup."

This requires a serious understanding and introspection. Women are expected to dress up in a particular way. The external appearance or dressing up is considered a necessity to be considered as a woman and Tran's people become victims of innumerable beauty brands and products. The commercial agenda lies behind the image of 'perfection' put forward by cosmetic companies and Tran's people too fall prey to this.

A view into advertisements from other nations UK

In 2017, in UK Heineken came up with a digital film entitled 'Worlds Apart'. The advertisement had a different narrative technique. It included debate over a man and a Tran's person over beer. The man is not so comfortable with Tran's people and considers them odd. This idea undergoes a change over debate. The advertisement concludes with a change in the man's attitude towards Tran's people and he finally accepts them as 'women'. In his article "Tran's gender Advertising- should brands promote political and cultural agendas in Ads?" Bryan Cave writes, this advertisement has been praised for rising social awareness about Tran's gender rights [6]. The advertisement has been described by online community as 'non-judgmental and full of meaning and context. But he further says that the advertisement has also been criticized for free and uncensored expression of Tran's phobia.

A view into advertisements from other nations USA

Dove's advertisement in the year 2017 in US titled 'Real Moms' also took a huge step ahead in creating awareness about rights of Tran's women. As Bryan Cave says that "This advertisement attempts to redefine motherhood and what it means to be a good mother. The advertisement features six families one of which is a Tran's gender mother who says- Theirs is no one right way to do it all". However Cave mentions that though there has been admiration expressed for the advertisement, the number of dislikes is far more than the likes for this advertisement on You Tube as on 6th June 2017.

Advertisements can be considered as short films. They carry a narrative. They include a story line that can be effectively communicated to the audience. Advertisements have proved to have a great impact on the mind of the viewers. Repeated exposure of advertisements makes them more effective. The creative team can pass on a message to the society in a matter of seconds. A long tale can be beautifully said through creative presentation. Here lies the power of advertisements. The power of the medium is yet to be utilized completely. It has the capacity to deliver a strong message apart from brand promotion. It has the capacity to alter the thought

process of the audience. Advertisements have the power of shaping and changing the public opinion. Of course, this cannot happen overnight. But it is a gradual process.

Advertisements telecasted over television are a reflection of the socio-economic and political aspects prevalent in a society. When we observe it becomes clear that the advertisements have changed from time to time depending on the values existing in the society. They shall continue to change in future too. The gender bias existing in the society gets reflected in the advertisements too. To substantiate this statement, let us take a look at the USHA sewing machine advertisement from the 1970s. It very openly makes a statement which cannot be acceptable in these days. 'Train her to be an ideal house wife...buy her an USHA sewing machine/ was the headline in bold. This holds a mirror to the social and gender values that existed during that time. But the current scenario is not the same. The advertisements have moved out of this thought frame and they try to provide a better image of women.

When we refer to sex of an individual, even to this day it is usually one of the two-male or female. The society has not been inclusive of the third gender in majority of the areas. Only recently, the application forms have started to include third gender as one of the options. Few educational institutions have started offering educational opportunities for people from third gender. We are witnessing more movies which try to provide a realistic portrayal of Tran's genders. Likewise, we are also witnessing more advertisements which are passing a message of inclusiveness. A wave of Tran's formation has taken over. It is overwhelming to find more advertisements made which include Tran's genders. The bias that has been crystal clear. It is glaringly visible to the naked eye that the community has been excluded for centuries. But the advertisements of late are made with a positive mindset. Including them in the advertisements depict that the community is considered while preparing advertisements. It is a sign of inclusion. The public have also received these advertisements in a positive sense. That comes as a ray of hope for the community.

A recent survey by Ipsos Global Survey along with Buzz feed and Williams Institute showed that at least 72% Indians want the discrimination against Tran's genders to stop. India has become the topmost nation to believe that it is a natural occurrence

The responsibility lies high on the advertising agencies. They have a huge role to play. One should break the ground and take a bold step. The fear of the advertising agencies was that an advertisement including a Tran's gender might be rejected by the society. The fear was also that the brand might lose its value. The companies were also hesitant to come up with such advertisements. Finally, the advertising agencies have dared to take a step forward and today we are witnessing advertisements depicting Tran's gender community. Only when we start discussing about an issue, it gains momentum. The issue can be brought to the forefront only when it is discussed. Advertisements have the ability to create an ambience or provide a platform for discussion. We will be able to comprehend the pulse of the public towards an issue only when a discussion is raised. Manita Nath in her article titled 'How Tran's gender advertising is breaking bias in India's social construct' mentions the words of Rajiv Dingra, Founder and CEO, Watconsult [7]. He opines that "the trend of featuring Tran's genders in advertisements, whether as a marketing gimmick or a change seeker, doesn't matter. If brands are using them as marketing props, it is great in the sense that at least they are

getting a platform on TV and social media. Earlier brands shied away from featuring Tran's genders. Now they are becoming inclusive. That's the first step. I think inclusivity is the start of talking about the issue that Tran's genders is facing. Once you start featuring them as part of the society, then only people will start to talk about their issue. We are at the first step where mainstream advertisers are featuring them. The next step now is to pick up the issues and the final and the most important step is to make a real difference."

Supreme Court in the year 2014 though gave a benchmark judgment that Tran's gender people have equal rights this has not been the reality. The ill treatment or discrimination continues to exist even to this day. One should remember that the bias stems out of fear. The myths existing in our society about the Tran's gender community has led to apprehension or fear that directly results in rejection of the community. The taboos associated with the community should be erased and advertisements can go a long way in making that happen.

One advertisement that drew the attention of the nation is the Vicks digital film titled 'Touch of care'. The advertisement made by Publics advertising agency from Singapore and directed by Neeraj Ghaywan passed on a strong message [8]. The advertisement has been highly applauded and received well by the audience. The advertisement depicts the real story of a young girl named Gayathri who has been adopted by a Tran's gender Gauri Sawant. She was the first to file a petition in the Supreme Court of India demanding her rights for adoption. The advertisement has been inspired by this real life incident and voices the perspective of the daughter. The emotional appeal has been ultimately depicted in the advertisement. It continues to haunt the audience as the girl firmly says at the end of the advertisement that she wants to become a lawyer; so that she can fight for the rights of her Tran's gender mother. The message conveyed through this narrative is the need of the hour. It strongly raises a voice in favors of the Tran's gender community. Motherhood need not be a biological process- is another strong message passed on to the society. But the most important point driven here is that a Tran's gender can adopt a kid and shape its' life. This attitude of acceptance is rarely exhibited. The advertisement created a land mark and set an example for many such concepts in future.

Another ground breaking advertisement that has to be mentioned is the 'Pure as love' advertisement created by Bhima jewellers. It breaks the concept that marriage is only for boys and girls. A concept that deserves much appreciation, it talks about the journey of a young boy into a woman. The most wonderful part of the advertisement is the inclusion of a Tran's gender into the family. Majority of the problems faced by Tran's genders is because of the rejection they face from their own family. On the realization of the fact that their kid is a Tran's gender, 99% of the families refuse to accept it as normalcy. Being deserted by one's own family is the worst pain that can be faced by any individual. This naturally also leads to deprivation of all opportunities in education or securing a job. They are deprived of opportunities to lead a decent life, to follow their dreams and to attain economic independence. The circumstances, society and the taboos push them to the edge and force them to resort to prostitution or begging. Such being the reality, the Bhima jewellers advertisement created by Animal Ad agency based in Delhi offers a strong message of a Tran's gender son being accepted by his parents. This provides a ray of hope

towards inclusiveness of Tran's genders into the family [9].

Brooke Bond has carved a niche for itself in the field of advertising. It is known for creating advertisements with a strong social message. Brooke Bond has been successfully running its campaign- 'Swad apnepan ka'. Now it has taken over a campaign that touches upon the Tran's gender community. An advertisement created by Ogilvy India advertising agency, it strongly leaves a mark on the psyche of the audience and leaves them haunting. A spark is ignited and it leaves the audience awestruck at the end. A realization can happen and prejudices can be shattered through this advertisement. It surely makes a difference amidst innumerable advertisements with stereotyped messages. Brooke Bond was known for its advertisement that tried to sow seeds of secularism. It especially tried to erase the Hindu-Muslim divide strong prevalent in our nation (Table 1).

Table 1. Advertisements made in India that depict inclusiveness towards Tran's genders.

S.no	Product	Advertising agency	Year of advertisement or campaign
1	Fastrack	Lowe Lintas	2013
2	Anouk-bold is beautiful	Hectic content	2015
3	Urban company	Urban company	2016
4	Six pack band video by Red label	Ogilvy India	2016
5	Vicks	Publicis	2017
6	Ralco tyres	Mad over Marketing (M.O.M)	2019
7	Brooke bond Red Label	Ogilvy India	2020
8	Ariel	BBDO India	2021
9	Bhima jewellers	ANIMAL	2021

Discussion

But this sudden inclusion of Tran's people into the advertising sector is not free of criticism. This entire community had been neglected for centuries. How did this sudden realization happen? Why are the companies so keen to include Tran's people in their advertising campaigns all of a sudden? Did this enlightenment happen overnight? Definitely no. As Barnana Hemoprava Sarkar opines, "it is the recent realization of the buying power of the queer community which is as close to \$917 million [5]. They are creating exclusive issues and campaigns that only highlight queer people. It is nothing but Sheer Tokenism."

In the words of Sophie B Roy, a photographer who identifies as a Tran's woman, mentioned by Barnana Sarkar in the article "Make up products are not researched or developed keeping Tran's people in mind [5]. We have to include people from the community in the research and developing sector."

Another aspect that the advertising agencies should think about is creating job opportunities for this community. It almost looks like an unwritten rule that Tran's people can only be good in acting or modelling, apart from skin trade and begging which need not be mentioned. Hardly attempts are made to create opportunities for them to build a career. In the eyes of our society, 'Career' for a Tran'sgender is probably an unimaginable word. The advertisements can go beyond the concept of external appearance as a concept. The rights of education, a job, renting a house, having a family can all be included to change the mindset of the public. These are the real issues that demand attention. Metamorphosis is not easy. Only when the public are exposed to firm messages constantly can the change occur. Going a step ahead, the advertising agencies can also start offering jobs for Tran's people who suit the requirements of the profession. This has not been successful yet and something that needs attention.

The advertisements studied as a part of this research paper comes as a ray of hope for the Tran's gender community. It has to be agreed upon that attempts are made by various companies to exhibit an element of inclusion in their advertisements and campaigns. It is also true that more advertisements should include Tran's people as a part of their advertisements. An important aspect that requires understanding is that Tran's community needs not be depicted as 'different', 'unique', and 'pitied over' or even looked at with sympathy. The need is to accept them as 'Normal' and express the same in advertisements. Extreme care should be taken while developing a concept. A minute gap in communication can do untold damage to an entire community. Advertisements being the most powerful medium can gradually change the thoughts of the public or shape their opinion. Time should come where sex should naturally include Tran's gender individuals too along with male and female.

Another important aspect the advertising companies should comprehend is that the sentiments or emotional values of a community should not be exploited. The companies should in real feel the same for the Tran's community if they come up with an advertisement showcasing their emotions. Companies should never try to build their image or profit on the emotions of Tran's people. Passing on a wrong message to the society by depicting social responsibility; when the company in reality does not feel the same is unacceptable. Make advertisements on them only if you really care for them.

It is also important for the ad agencies to understand the customs, practices and culture of the Tran's community before designing any advertisement. Without having an understanding of their culture, wrong depiction can harm the community or lead to their wrath. There are women's organizations formed to fight against the degrading image of women portrayed in the mass media. But there is also a need to have organizations or for the society to raise a voice when Tran's community is wrongly depicted. Even when they are wrongly depicted in movies, it is hardly protested.

Conclusion

An analysis of the public response to the advertisements including Tran's people has not been very welcoming. The comments made on social media, hat redness, lack of understanding or warmth towards the community, failure in depicting an inclusive attitude can be clearly found.

This holds good especially for Gillette advertisement on their page which involves a Tran's boy having his first shave.

Finally, Acceptance does not come easy. Acceptance can only come through proper knowledge. And the advertisements can definitely do their bit in sharing that proper knowledge with the society. We have witnessed a start. Though it shall take some time, half a decade or a decade, the change shall be surely witnessed. Future holds up hope for the community and for the society.

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