

TOOLKIT:

Content Analysis of Gender Representation in Advertising in China

DECEMBER 2024



This toolkit points industry leaders in entertainment and media to recommendations on how to improve the representation of gender in Chinese advertising. The full report, “Content Analysis of Gender Representation in Advertising in China” analyzes the representation of gender in the 1,000 most played TV advertisements from 2022 in China, according to the China Advertising Association. The findings highlight the need for ongoing commitment to inclusion to ensure lasting, meaningful gender representation in future ad productions.

Research Insights

Gender representation in most played ads in China

- ◆ Men make up 55% of characters on screen and are three times more likely than women to be narrators.
- ◆ Women are four times more likely to be visually objectified and five times more likely to wear sexually revealing clothing.
- ◆ Men are 1.5 times more likely to be shown to have a paid occupation and almost twice as likely to be leaders.
- ◆ Women are nine times more likely to be shown cleaning and are more often shown in other domestic roles.
- ◆ Women are nine times more likely to be shown cleaning and are more often shown in other domestic roles.
- ◆ Female characters are more likely to have a slim body type.
- ◆ There are no gender differences in STEM professionals shown in ads.
- ◆ Young boys and girls are shown in school at a similar rate in ads.

Recommendations

Increase representation of female characters.

Most of our findings show that representations of female characters in ads still fall short when compared their demographic shares in their population. It is important to develop and produce ads with a higher proportion of female characters, especially in leading and supporting roles.

Highlight female empowerment and ambition.

Using visuals, messages, and real stories—emphasize female empowerment by showing women in leadership roles, encouraging ambition, and inspiring self-confidence.

Challenge gender stereotypes.

When creating roles for female characters, ensure they are prominent and have a wide array of roles and motivations (e.g., leadership, authority, and professions). Avoid reverting to gender stereotypes and tropes that reinforce harmful representations of women, such as showing women in domestic settings.

Encourage behind-the-scenes representation.

Behind-the-scenes representation is essential to enhancing gender representation. Encourage the development of a diverse workplace to reflect the stories that are being told on screen by creating mentorship programs and funding opportunities for female ad directors.

Reduce objectification and sexualization.

Focus on creating female characters who play important roles in the ad and are valued for

positive or nuanced traits. Avoid representing female objectified and sexualized in their roles in the ad.

Diversify depictions of female characters.

Show female characters with many body types, a range of skin tones, and over 50 to ensure ads address women and girls of all types.

Educate workers behind the scenes.

Utilize diversity, equity, and inclusion training in the workplace to create deeper understandings of inequality, stereotypes, and tropes on and off screen. Seek experts on these subjects to provide necessary context and materials to such sensitive topics.

Show female friendship on screen.

Beyond creating more prominent roles for individual female characters, show female friendship on screen. Avoid showing women in competition or in opposition to one another.

Support research and data-driven decision-making.

Fund efforts like the “GDI Film Report” report to create data-driven assessments of on-screen representation. This work provides a landscape of representation in the industry as well as has the power to hold industry leaders accountable to the annual state of representation.

Develop partnerships with women-focused organizations.

Partner with organizations like the Geena Davis Institute or other women-focused organizations that are focused on on-screen equity, to promote balanced and authentic storytelling and support gender equality.

Consider these questions before you begin

WHAT MESSAGE ARE WE SENDING MEN?

Do my ads adhere to rigid constructions of male identity, or do they show men in counter-stereotypical roles (e.g., performing domestic activities)? Stereotypical depictions of men include disproportionately depicting men as self-sufficient, acting tough, adhering to rigid gender roles, emphasis on physical attractiveness, heterosexuality, sexual prowess, and using aggression to resolve conflicts.

DOES THE AD INCLUDE DIVERSE WOMEN?

Do the ads show women with a range of skin tones, body types, marital status, class, ability, and ages?

IS THE AD AUTHENTIC TO WOMEN'S LIVES AND EXPERIENCES?

Are the women in ads relatable to many types of women in China? Are real-world female leaders in China included as spokespeople or given cameos in ads?

DOES THE LANGUAGE REINFORCE GENDER STEREOTYPES?

Are women shown as weak, emotional, fragile, irrational, or nurturing in ads? Is women's success framed in competition with male success in ads? Does the narrative use passive or active verbs when describing women's roles and abilities in the ad?

How to cite this study:

GDI, UNICEF China, & UN Women China. (2024). *Content Analysis of Gender Representation in Advertising in China: A Report Commissioned by UNICEF China and UN Women China*. Geena Davis Institute, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) China & UN Women China.