

# India Advertising Midline

Gender Representation and Inclusion Trends



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# Foreword

We live in a world where the call for gender equality is clearer and more urgent than ever before, but it is also a period when some of the most critical targets under the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goal 5 — to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls — have been at their slowest global pace. Despite India's marked progress toward ending child marriage, the global numbers of child marriages are declining at too slow of a pace to eliminate the practice by 2030 — and perhaps not even in this century.

There is hope. Young people are challenging old norms and demanding to see themselves represented fully — in their homes, schools, workplaces, and in the media they consume every day. Yet, despite important progress, persistent gender biases continue to limit the choices and opportunities of girls and boys alike.

Advertising and marketing play a pivotal role in shaping these perceptions. In this digital age, children and adolescents are surrounded by stories and images that can either reinforce outdated stereotypes or open doors to new possibilities. How people are portrayed on our screens can help determine whether the next generation grows up bound by narrow roles or encouraged to imagine and pursue their full potential.

At UNICEF, we believe that advancing gender equality is about more than policy and programming — it is about shifting social norms and attitudes. In India, promoting the value of girls remains at the heart of this effort. In 2020, our baseline study with the Geena Davis Institute and the India chapter of the International Advertising Association offered vital evidence on how gender roles are portrayed in India's most viewed advertisements. The findings have informed our continued advocacy with the advertising industry, sparking initiatives such as the "Voice of Change" movement, which promotes positive and inclusive gender norms.

Now, in 2025, we must ask: Has our collective effort made a difference? This new midline study measures what has changed, what still needs to change, and how we can move ahead together. By using robust research tools, including UNICEF's model for assessing stereotyping, this study provides fresh insights for advertisers, policymakers, civil society, and young people themselves.

UNICEF views this study as a catalyst — a way to turn analytical data into action and one that inspires concerted action and better content and practices. The ultimate goal is not just fair representation but also gender-sensitive advertising that helps girls and boys envision limitless possibilities, free from outdated norms.

**Cynthia McCaffrey**

Representative, UNICEF India

# Executive summary

Media — and notably advertising — has the power not only to influence purchase decisions and behaviors but also to influence perceptions of gender norms among an impressionable, young audience. This makes it important to thoroughly understand what messages people are receiving from advertisements in India.

In 2021, UNICEF India partnered with the Geena Davis Institute to study gender prevalence, stereotypes, tropes, and portrayals in the country's most viewed advertisements. Overall, the study, which looked at data from 2019, found that advertisements reinforced gender stereotypes and tropes, such as more girls and women being shown in domestic roles or wearing revealing clothing, while boys and men were more often shown in work and leadership positions and to have positive personal traits, like humor and intelligence. These gender gaps revealed not just differences in portrayal but an underlying imbalance in whose experiences and identities were centered in ads. The distance between how men and women are depicted in ads exposes an asymmetry in how ads communicate their social roles and value.

The purpose of this new midline study is to track progress or change in Indian advertisements since the 2021 report was released. This midline compares gender gaps in Indian ads from 2019 with gender gaps in ads from 2024. By systematically analyzing gender representation in advertising over time, this report will identify whether gender gaps and gender stereotypes have improved, stalled, or worsened. Highlighting these patterns should inform creators and stakeholders, leading to more balanced depictions of women and men, which, in

turn, supports a broader goal of promoting gender-sensitive advertising. This new study also compares 2019 ads with 2024 ads regarding the share of female characters in particular roles, to account for narrative-related shifts in advertising.

In general, we observe many positive shifts in India's advertising landscape, suggesting movement toward more balanced representation. In 2019 ads, there were large gender gaps (5 percentage points or more) for nine key variables, with male characters advantaged in leadership roles, paid occupations and work settings, and male characters more often shown as smart and funny. Meanwhile female characters were advantaged in parental roles and were more likely to be shown caregiving and in revealing clothing or partially nude. Additionally, male characters' ages were more diverse, while female characters generally skewed younger.

Those disparities have perpetuated norms that limit gender equality. But in 2024 ads, all but one of those nine gender gaps narrowed. Moreover, in 2024 ads, only five variables saw gender gaps that were greater than 5 percentage points: revealing clothing, partial nudity, paid occupation, shown working, and depicted parenting. While these gender gaps deserve our continued attention, the overall data suggests concerted efforts to improve gender representation in advertising. Notably, the gender gap also narrowed for depictions of humor, intelligence, and character settings like the outdoors and sporting events.

There have also been positive shifts in how female characters are shown. For instance, more female characters were ages 50 and older in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (6.2% compared with 5.0%). Fewer female characters were sexually objectified in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (3.9% compared with 4.7%), fewer female characters were shown partially nude (6.6% compared with 7.6%), and far fewer female characters were shown in sexually revealing

clothing (6.6% compared with 11.2%). While some of these differences are small, they indicate positive movement toward gender equality in ads.

That said, the report did surface one new pitfall: Gender disparities widened when looking at skin-tone diversity, with male characters seeing larger gains than female characters in medium- and dark-skin-tone representation.

Below is a summary of the study's main findings, highlighting areas of progress and the challenges that remain. The findings are grouped into three parts: places where women appeared more often (like in domestic roles), places where men appeared more often (such as in the workplace and leadership positions), and patterns related to appearance and common gender tropes.

#### \* Domestic roles

- **Shown caregiving:** Fewer male and female characters were shown caregiving in 2024 ads compared with 2019 ads. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown caregiving (7.1% compared with 3.0%), but the gap was smaller than in 2019. In 2019 ads, female characters were more than three times as likely as male characters to be shown caregiving (18.3% compared with 5.2%).
- **Parenting:** Fewer female characters were shown as parents in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (13.1% compared with 18.7%), and more male characters were shown as parents in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (6.6% compared with 5.9%), closing this gender gap. In 2019 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown as parents (18.7% compared

with 5.9%). In 2024 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be a parent, but the gap was much smaller (13.1% compared with 6.6%).

- **Making household decisions:** Fewer female characters were shown making household decisions in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (2.4% compared with 4.9%). This decline may point to a shift away from framing women as the primary decision-makers at home. Still, in both years, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown making household decisions — 4.9% compared with 2.0% in 2019, and 2.4% compared with 1.0% in 2024 for men.

#### \* The workplace and leadership

- **Paid occupation:** More female characters were shown with a paid occupation in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (16.7% compared with 11.6%), which indicates a positive shift in female representation and work, or in their role outside of the home. But in 2019, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to have a paid occupation (24.2% compared with 11.6%). Similarly, in 2024, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to have a paid occupation (27.1% compared with 16.7%).
- **Leadership:** Both female and male characters were shown as leaders to a lesser degree in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads. While male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be shown as leaders in 2024 ads (5.5% compared with 3.5%), the gap was much smaller than it had been in 2019 ads (26.3% compared with 19.3%).

- **Shown working:** More female characters were shown working in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (11.9% compared with 9.3%). But male characters were still significantly more likely than female characters to be shown working in 2024 ads (21.2% compared with 11.9%), like in 2019 ads (16.4% compared with 9.3%).
- **Office settings:** The gender gap for office settings declined from a 2.4-point gender gap in 2019 to a 1.4-point gender gap in 2024. In 2019 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be shown in an office setting (7.1% compared with 4.7%). In 2024 ads, male characters were also significantly more likely than female characters to be in an office setting, but the gap has been nearly eliminated (5.5% compared with 4.1%).
- **Body size:** There were more female characters who were fat in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (6.2% compared with 5.0%), which shows signs of progress in body diversity in ads. However, male characters were more likely than female characters to be fat in both 2024 ads (8.6% compared with 6.2%) and in 2019 ads (8.0% compared with 5.0%).
- **Gender tropes or stereotypes:** Fewer female characters were shown with a gendered trope or stereotype in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (1.3% compared with 2.9%). However, a small but statistically significant gender gap did emerge in 2024 ads. In 2019 ads, the differences between male and female characters portrayed with a gendered trope or stereotype was not statistically significant (2.9% female, 2.0% male). In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be portrayed with a gendered trope or stereotype (1.3% compared with 0.2%).

\* **Character appearance and gender tropes**

- **Age:** More female characters were ages 50 and older in 2024 ads than in 2019 ads (6.2% compared with 5.0%). If ads include more 50-plus women, the gap will close further.
- **Skintone:** In 2024, more female and male characters had a dark skin tone than in 2019. In 2024, 12.6% of female characters had a dark skin tone, and in 2019, 9.0% of female characters had a dark skin tone. In 2024, 26.4% of male characters had a dark skin tone, and in 2019, 18.3% of female characters had a skin tone. Although there was still a large gender discrepancy wherein men were significantly more likely than female characters to have a dark skin tone, the overall increase of those with a dark skin tone in general is positive.

# Background

Gender socialization — the process by which children learn what is expected of them as boys and girls — starts at birth and intensifies throughout childhood and adolescence. Individuals, families, schools, communities, and the media all shape these expectations. In India, as in many parts of the world, regressive gender norms limit what girls and boys believe they can do or become, and that affects their choices, opportunities, and well-being.

India continues to find ways of addressing deep-rooted gender inequalities and social norms. However, parents are sometimes comfortable with norms passed on through generations, such as the belief that their daughters should get married earlier in life. Girls also face unequal access to secondary education, unequal school-to-work transitions, an unequal burden of unpaid care work, and thus unequal access to leadership opportunities. These inequalities persist despite significant progress through policy, programmes, and advocacy.

Over the years, the International Advertising Association's India Chapter has actively engaged with various advertising agencies and industry stakeholders through roadshows, summits, and meaningful interactions. These interactions have highlighted the evolving landscape of gender representation in India's most widely viewed advertisements.

Several exceptional campaigns have marked this positive shift. A Vim Liquid advertisement featured men taking on kitchen roles (traditionally portrayed as women's domain), and it stands out as a powerful example of breaking gender stereotypes. Harley Davidson ran an ad that features a woman riding a Harley, challenging the male-only biker stereotype and redefining freedom on the road. Ariel's "Share the Load" campaign sparked conversations

on gender equality at home by urging men to share household chores, shifting responsibility narratives around women. Aditya Birla Group ran an advertisement that placed a female protagonist at the heart, challenging gender bias in financial decision-making and representation. A Cadbury Dairy Milk advertisement revisited its nostalgic 1990s cricket ad by flipping the original's gender dynamics, showing a woman batting and her male friend cheering from the crowd.

Such campaigns signal a broader movement within the industry, with brands becoming increasingly sensitive and deliberate about portraying gender in a more balanced and progressive manner. Even traditionally male-dominated sectors, like automobile advertising, are gradually embracing inclusivity. This sustained engagement with the industry has allowed us to observe both quantitative and narrative shifts in gender portrayal.

Advertising and marketing play a powerful role in shaping and sustaining gender norms. UNICEF India's 2021 baseline study, conducted in partnership with the Geena Davis Institute and the International Advertising Association's India Chapter, provided crucial insights into how gender is represented in some of India's most widely viewed advertisements on television and YouTube. While the study found that women and girls appeared on screen as often as men and boys — and often spoke more — the quality of representation highlighted deep gaps. Women were predominantly shown in domestic roles, defined by beauty standards, or depicted in ways that reinforced traditional stereotypes. Girls were underrepresented compared with boys, and male characters were more likely to appear in public spaces, workplaces, or leadership positions.

These portrayals directly influence how children and young people see themselves and each other. They can either reinforce limiting roles or inspire new possibilities. Over the past three years, UNICEF

India and IAA Voice of Change campaign have actively engaged with the advertising industry to raise awareness of these findings and encourage more gender-sensitive, empowering storytelling. This platform has become an important catalyst to engage with the content creators to always keep gender equity as a central facet while creating inspirational advertising.

This study's midline research builds on that foundation. It aims to measure how far the industry has come since the baseline study, and to assess what has changed and where harmful gender stereotypes still persist. The insights generated should help guide the advertising community, policymakers, and partners to be aware of and intentionally advance positive gender norms in media and marketing — creating an environment where every child, regardless of their gender, can imagine and achieve their full potential.

In sum, this report addresses these research questions:

How far has the advertising industry in India progressed since the baseline study?

- \* What changes have occurred in gender representation?
- \* Where do harmful gender stereotypes still persist?

# Methodology

## Study design

For this study, content analysis methodology was used, which is an objective, systematic, and quantitative analysis of mediated messages. Content analysis is the only quantitative method that allows for the analysis of major patterns and themes in mediated messages, like ads. Because the 2021 report also utilized content analysis methodology, this report's findings are easy to compare and look at change over time.

## Expert human coding

Expert human analysts evaluated characters and identified patterns and themes across ads. A team of 10 expert analysts underwent training to reliably identify variables of interest with the guidance of a codebook. The codebook operationally defined variables in such a way that the team could reliably interpret messages in the same manner. Training was carried out on five ads not included in the final sample, with a total of 53 individual characters. An acceptable level of inter-rater reliability was reached for quantitative variables measured, using Fleiss's kappa.

## Ad sample characteristics

The data analyzed in this report consists of 3,917 characters from 996 ads from 2024<sup>1</sup> that received the most reach in the country.<sup>2</sup> Of these ads, 800 were television and 196 were digital.<sup>3</sup> The ads were compiled and translated by the India Chapter of International Advertising Association.

The sample consisted of ads that received the most reach in India for two main reasons. First, for us to assess change from 2019, the sample of 2024 ads needed to be similar to those analyzed in the 2021 report, which looked at ads that received

the most reach in the country. Second, in-depth analysis of ads with the most reach is attractive because it can help us understand what is most consumed in the country, thereby allowing us to get a more comprehensive understanding of what the population is exposed to. The analysis of 2024 ads is compared with the analysis of 2019 ads, collected in a previous study titled “Gender Bias and Inclusion in Advertising in India.”<sup>4</sup> In the 2021 report, the data set consisted of 3,416 characters from 1,000 ads.

## Findings

### Analytical approach to identifying statistical significance

In the analysis below, the report presents the share of male and female characters on screen in the 2024 and 2019 ads, and in a variety of roles and portrayals. The focus is on progress and change over this time frame. All reported differences between men and women within each year are statistically significant at the 0.05 threshold unless otherwise indicated. Statistical-significance tests were conducted using chi-square analysis, which evaluates whether the differences observed between groups are likely due to chance or reflect a real underlying pattern. The study analyzes data at the character level.

### Profile of the advertising sample

This study of 2024 ads in India replicates a 2019 study, assessing whether there has been change in gender representation. Below, the sample profile includes general information about which ads were analyzed, as well as the character representation in ads in 2019 and 2024. In both 2019 and 2024, the data includes a mix of TV and digital ads (but mostly

TV ads). Table 1 shows the breakdown of TV ads compared with digital ads in the sample for both years.

**TABLE 1. TV & Digital Ads**

	% OF SAMPLE	
	2019	2024
TV Ads	82.0%	80.3%
Digital Ads	18.0%	19.7%

The ads in each year come from a mix of Indian languages. Table 2 illustrates that most 2024 ads were in Hindi (56.3%), followed by English (19.2%), Marathi (10.8%), and Bengali (10.4%). Less than 1% of 2024 ads were in Telugu and Tamil. In 2019, most ads were in Hindi (56.6%), followed by English (22.7%). Ads from 2019 were slightly more diverse with respect to language.

**TABLE 2. Ad Language**

Ad Language	% OF SAMPLE	
	2019	2024
Hindi	56.6%	57.0%
Telugu	5.2%	0.2%
Tamil	5.9%	0.9%
Bengali	4.9%	10.7%
Marathi	4.7%	11.0%
Kannada	–	0.8%
English	22.7%	18.5%
Another language (e.g., Assamese, Gujarati, Indonesian, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi, or music-only ads)	–	1.2%

Note. In 2024, percentages will add up to slightly more than 100% because three ads were in multiple languages.

For 2024, ads from 15 market sectors were analyzed as shown in Table 3. Most ads were from Medical, Health, and Personal Care (35.9%), followed by Food and Drink (26.0%), Electronics, Technology, Apps, and Online Services (9.4%), and Utilities and Professional Services (7.5%). In 2019, ads from 19 different market sectors were analyzed, as shown in Figure 4. In 2019, most ads were from Personal Care (26.6%), followed by Food and Beverage (19.4%), Consumer Electronics (13.6%), and Home Care (11.9%).

**TABLE 3. 2024 Ad Market Sector**

Market Sector	% OF SAMPLE
Medical, Health, & Personal Care	35.9%
Food & Drink	26.0%
Electronics, Technology, Apps, & Online Services	9.4%
Utilities & Professional Services	7.5%
Home Care, Décor, & Appliances	5.1%
Automobiles	4.0%
Clothing, Grooming, Beauty, & Appearance	3.7%
Entertainment	3.2%
Education	1.3%
Banking & Insurance	1.2%
Travel & Tourism	1.1%
Government & Political	0.7%
Restaurants & Food Service	0.4%
Miscellaneous	0.3%
Non-Profit & PSA	0.1%

**TABLE 4. 2019 Ad Market Sector**

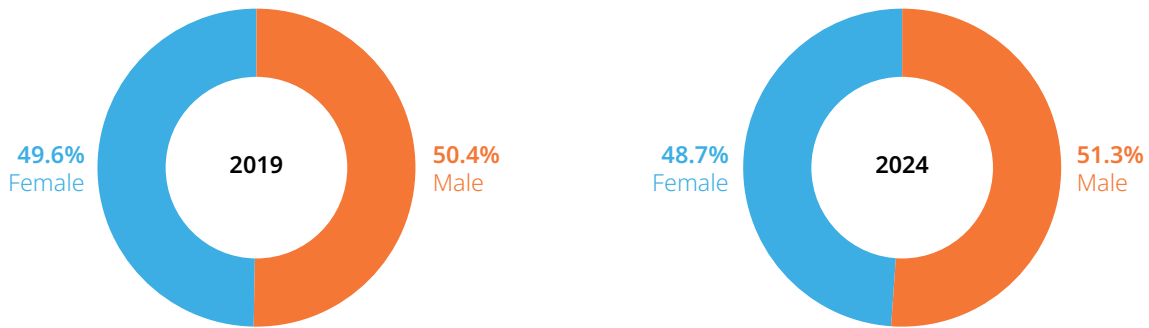
Market Sector	% OF SAMPLE
Personal Care	26.6%
Food & Beverage	19.4%
Consumer Electronics	13.6%
Home Care	11.9%
Pharmacy, Hygiene & Wellness	5.0%
Online Commerce	4.5%
Automobiles	4.3%
Technology	3.9%
Telecom & Digital Services	2.3%
Fashion & Accessories	2.1%
Banking & Finance	1.8%
Consumer Durables	1.0%
Home Décor & Infrastructure	1.0%
EduTech	0.8%
Insurance	0.7%
Travel & Tourism	0.5%
Sports	0.4%
Corporate	0.1%
Media & Entertainment	0.1%

## Representation analysis in ad sample

Figure 1 presents the gender breakdown of the characters for 2019 and 2024. Gender representation in each year was broadly similar. Female characters were 49.6% of all characters in 2019 ads, but 48.7% of all characters in 2024 — a decline of 0.9 percentage points.

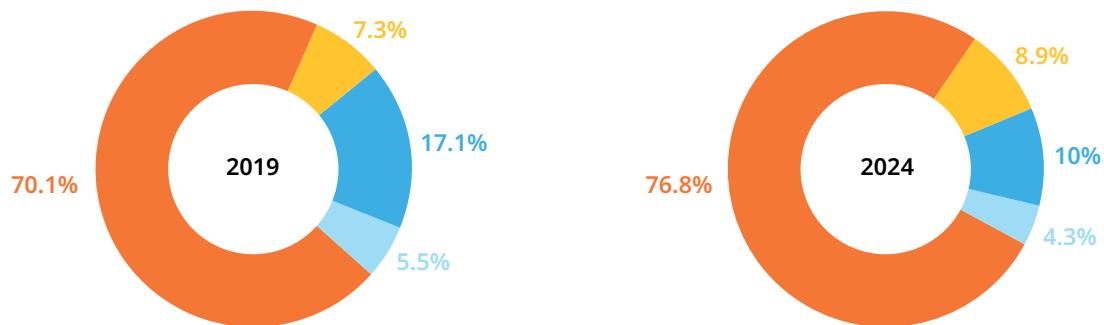
Figure 2 presents the age breakdown of characters for 2019 and 2024. In comparison with 2019, characters' ages were broadly similar in 2024. In 2024 ads, most characters were ages 20–49 (76.8%) or ages 1–12 (10.0%); only 8.9% of characters were ages 50-plus, and 4.3% of characters were ages 13–19. In the 2019 ads, most characters were also ages 20–49 (70.1%), followed by ages 1–12 (17.1%), ages 50-plus (7.3%), and ages 13–19 (5.5%).

**FIGURE 1. Character Gender, 2019 and 2024**



**FIGURE 2. Character Age, 2019 and 2024**

● Child (1–12) ● Teens (13–19) ● Young Adults (20–49) ● Older Adults (50+)



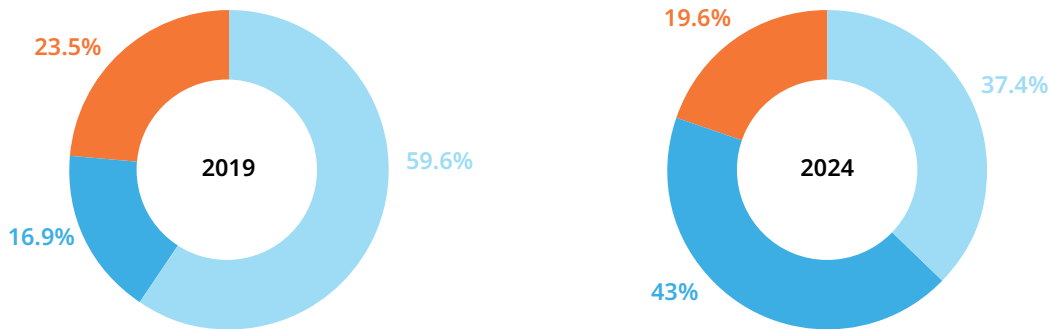
From 2019 to 2024, there is a marked increase in the share of characters with a medium skin tone. In 2024 ads, most characters had a medium skin tone (43.0%), followed by those with a light skin tone (37.4%) and those with a dark skin tone (19.6%). In 2019 ads, most characters had a light skin tone (59.6%), followed by those with a dark skin tone (23.5%) and those with a medium skin tone (16.9%). These findings were also observed in a study looking at skin tone among characters in popular scripted TV series in India from 2018–2022.<sup>5</sup>

From 2019 to 2024, there was little change in LGBTQIA+ representation. Figure 4 presents the breakdown of sexual orientation among characters in our dataset. In 2024 ads, only 0.3% of all characters were LGBTQIA+. In 2019 ads, only 0.2% of all characters were LGBTQIA+, thus indicating a 0.1-point increase.

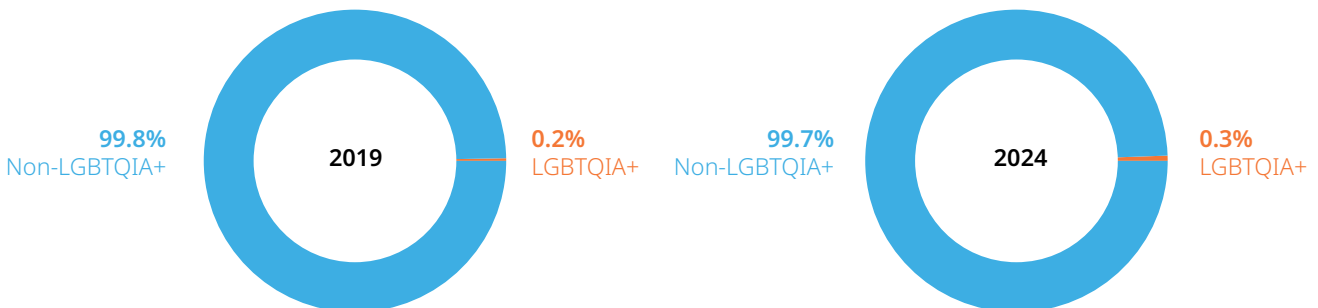
From 2019 to 2024, there was no change in disability representation. Figure 5 presents the breakdown of disabled and nondisabled characters in our dataset. Only 0.3% of all characters in both 2019 and 2024 were disabled.

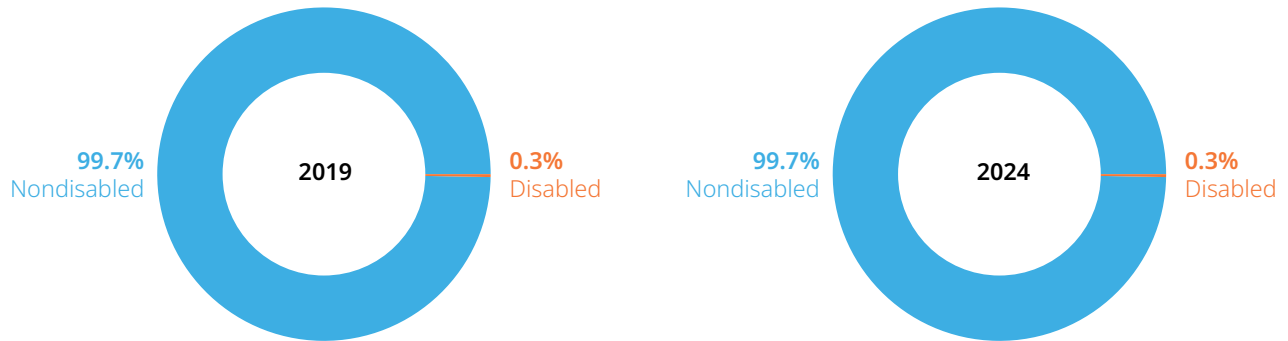
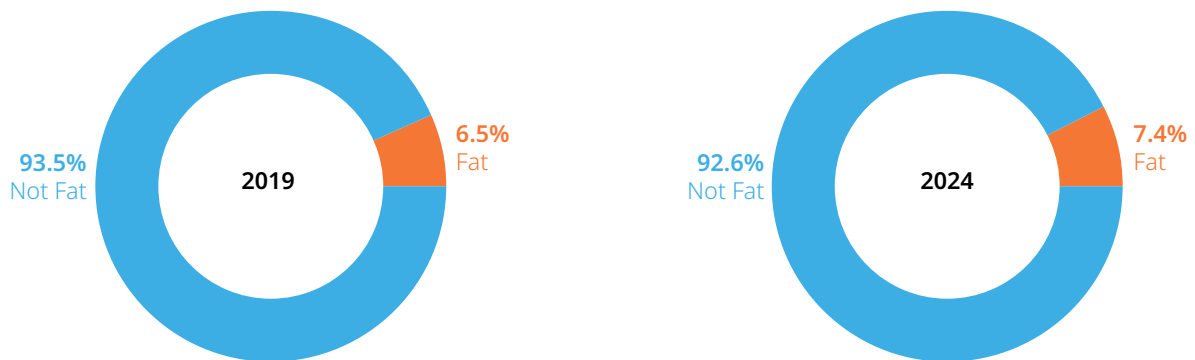
**FIGURE 3. Character Skin Tone, 2019 and 2024**

● Light ● Medium ● Dark



**FIGURE 4. Character Sexual Orientation, 2019 and 2024**



**FIGURE 5. Character Disability Status, 2019 and 2024****FIGURE 6. Character Body Size, 2019 and 2024**

Note. In 2019 ads, 25.5% of characters were assessed as small (25.5%), medium (68.0%) or large (6.5%). In 2024 ads, characters were assessed to be either fat or not fat.

# Ad portrayal findings by character gender

This section presents how gender differences in character prominence, sexualization and stereotypes, work and leadership, personal traits, gender roles, activities, and settings have shifted from 2019 to 2024. By comparing the 2024 findings with the 2019 baseline, we identify where gender gaps have narrowed, persisted, or widened over time.

## Prominence of female characters

In 2024 ads, the representation of female characters decreased very slightly compared with 2019 ads (female characters were 48.7% of all characters in 2024, compared with 49.6% of all characters in 2019). Therefore, gender parity in Indian advertisements is still just out of reach. (See Figure 5.)

## Gender at the intersection of other identities

Next, the report presents the intersectional assessment of which girls and women were represented in Indian advertising in 2024 compared with 2019. The report presents gender analysis by age, skin tone, and body size.

Figure 11 shows gender gaps by age. The gender age gaps in 2024 and 2019 are broadly similar, with male characters in both years more likely than female characters to be 50-plus and 12 and under. For all but the 50-plus demographic, gender gaps decreased in ads from 2019 to 2024.

The gender gap for characters 12 and under in 2019 favored men by 7.4 percentage points; it decreased to 4.8 percentage points in 2024. This indicates that the gender gap for characters 12 and under narrowed from 2019 to 2024.

- ✦ In 2024, a greater share of female characters than male characters were ages 20 to 49 (81.7% compared with 72.7%), for a gap of 9.0 percentage points. In 2019, the gender gap for this age group was 9.6 percentage points.
- ✦ The gender gap for 50-plus characters in 2019 favored men by 4.7 percentage points; it increased to 5.4 percentage points in 2024.

***For all but the 50-plus demographic, gender gaps decreased in ads from 2019 to 2024.***

Table 6 presents the intersection of gender with skin tone in 2024 compared with 2019:

- ✦ The gender gap in light-skin-tone representation widened between 2019 and 2024. In 2019, 66.9% of female characters had a light skin tone, compared with 52.1% of male characters — a gap of 14.8 percentage points. By 2024, that gap grew to 20.5 points, with 47.6% of female characters and 27.1% of male characters shown with a light skin tone. While light-skin-tone representation declined overall, nearly half of female characters had a light skin tone.

**TABLE 5. Character Gender, by Age**

Age	2019			2024		
	% Female	% Male	Gender Gap	% Female	% Male	Gender Gap
Child (1-12)	13.1%*	20.5%*	-7.4	7.2%*	12.0%*	-4.8
Teens (13-19)	6.7%	4.3%	+2.4	4.9%	3.7%	+1.2
Younger Adults (20-49)	75.1%	65.5%	+9.6	81.7%*	72.7%*	+9.0
Older Adults (50-plus)	5.0%*	9.7%*	-4.7	6.2%*	11.6%*	-5.4

Note. Asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant difference. For 2024, male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to be children (1-12) and older adults (50+); female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to be young adults (20-49).

\* Representation of medium skin tones increased across the board between 2019 and 2024 but more sharply for male characters — creating a new gender gap. In 2019, male (17.8%) and female (16.1%) characters were nearly equally likely to be shown with a medium skin tone. By 2024, representation rose significantly for both groups but more so for men: 46.2% of male characters had a medium skin tone, compared with 39.7% of female characters. This shift marks the emergence of a gender gap in characters with a medium skin tone.

The gender gap in dark-skin-tone representation widened from 2019 to 2024. In 2019, 18.3% of male characters had a dark skin tone, compared with 9.0% of female characters. By 2024, those numbers increased to 26.4% for male characters and 12.6% for female characters, showing that while representation of dark skin tones grew overall, the increase was more pronounced for male characters, doubling the gender gap.

**TABLE 6. Character Gender, by Skin Tone**

Skin Tone	2019			2024		
	% Female	% Male	Gender Gap	% Female	% Male	Gender Gap
Light	66.9%	52.1%	+14.8	47.6%*	27.1%*	+20.5
Medium	16.1%	17.8%	-1.7	39.7%*	46.2%*	-6.5
Dark	9.0%	18.3%	-9.3	12.6%*	26.4%*	-13.8

Note. Asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant difference. For 2024, female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to have a light skin tone; male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to have a medium and dark skin tone.

**TABLE 7. Character Gender, by Body Size**

Body Type	2019			2024		
	% Female	% Male	Gender Gap	% Female	% Male	Gender Gap
Not Fat	95.0%	92.0%	+3.0	93.8%*	91.4%*	+2.4
Fat	5.0%	8.0%	-3.0	6.2%*	8.6%*	-2.4

Note. Asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant difference. In 2019, 41.8% of female characters were small and 53.2% of female characters were medium; 9.4% of male characters were small and 82.6% were medium. In 2024 ads, female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to not be fat; male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to be fat.

Table 7 presents the intersection between body size and gender. We identified the following statistically significant differences:

- \* Male characters continue to be more likely than female characters to be depicted as fat, but the gender gap narrowed slightly from 2019 to 2024. In 2019, the gap was 3 percentage points, with fat body types more common among male characters. By 2024, the gap decreased to 2.4 points, with 8.6% of male characters shown as fat compared to 6.2% of female characters. Despite this small shift, fatness remains more strongly associated with male characters. This pattern stems from the tighter beauty standards imposed on women, which are then mirrored in media portrayals, including advertising. Men, by contrast, are not subjected to the same expectations around thinness.

***Male characters continue to be more likely than female characters to be depicted as fat, but the gender gap narrowed slightly from 2019 to 2024***

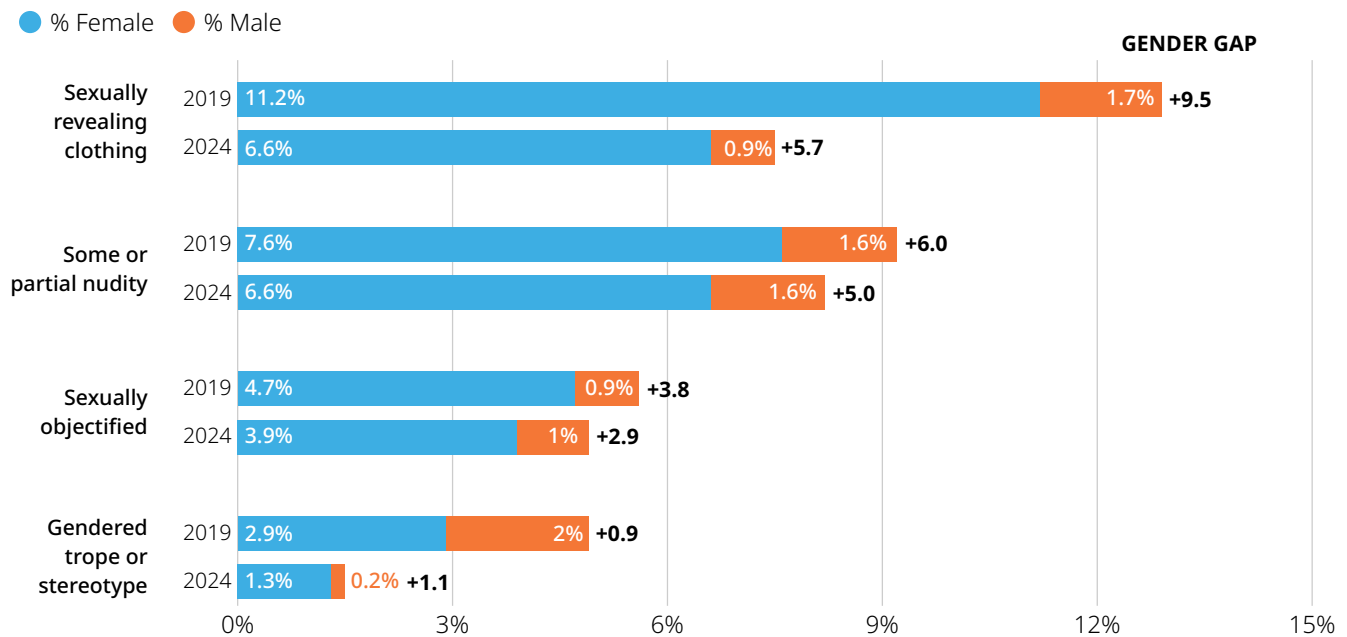
## Sexualization and stereotyping of female characters

Figure 7 presents the sexualization and stereotype breakdown by gender and skin tone, in 2024 compared with 2019:

- \* **Revealing clothing:** Female characters remained significantly more likely than male characters to be shown in sexually revealing clothing, though the overall rates declined for both groups. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to wear sexually revealing clothing (6.6% compared with 0.9%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be shown in revealing clothing, but the gap was larger and the overall share was higher (11.2% compared with 1.7%). While the gender gap persisted, the decline suggests a broader shift away from sexualized portrayals.
- \* **Nudity:** Female characters continued to be significantly more likely than male characters to be depicted as partially nude, though the rate has declined slightly for women. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be partially nude (6.6% compared with 1.6%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be partially nude (7.6% compared with 1.6%).

- \* **Sexual objectification:** Female characters remained significantly more likely than male characters to be sexually objectified, though the overall rates declined slightly. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be sexually objectified (3.9% compared with 1.0%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be sexually objectified (4.7% compared with 0.9%).
- \* **Gender tropes:** While uncommon, in 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be portrayed with a gendered trope or stereotype (1.3% compared with 0.2%). In 2019 ads, the difference was not statistically significant (2.9% female, 2.0% male). This shift reflects a slight reduction in gender stereotypical portrayals overall, but a sharper gender disparity emerged in 2024.
- \* In 2024 ads, there were no statistically significant differences in revealing clothing, nudity, or objectification by skin tone for male characters.
- \* In 2024 ads, female characters with a light skin tone were significantly more likely than female characters with a dark skin tone to be objectified (5.1% compared with 0.8%). In 2019 ads, female characters with light, medium, and dark skin tones were equally likely to be objectified.
- \* In both 2019 and 2024 ads, female characters were just as likely to be shown in sexually revealing clothing, nude, or portrayed with a gendered stereotype regardless of whether their skin tone was light, medium, or dark, indicating that skin tone did not influence these outcomes.

**FIGURE 7. Sexualization, by Gender**



Note. Asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

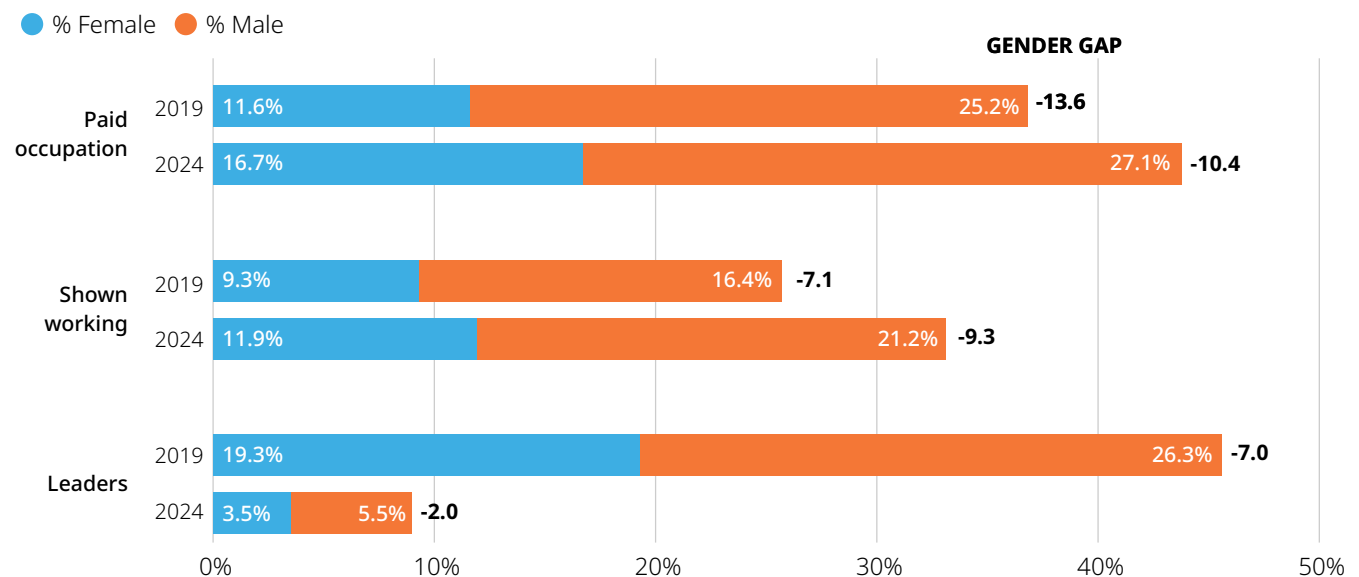
## Gender gaps in work and leadership

Figure 8 presents the breakdown of work and leadership by gender. We identified the following statistically significant results:

- \* Paid occupation:** Male characters continued to be significantly more likely than female characters to be portrayed with a paid occupation. In 2024 ads, male characters were more likely than female characters to be shown as having a paid occupation (27.1% compared with 16.7%). In 2019 ads, male characters were also more likely than female characters to be shown as having a paid occupation (25.2% compared with 11.6%). In other words, characters shown with an occupation were mostly male in both 2019 and 2024, reinforcing gender norms about men as the default earners and women as secondary or as nonworkers. Nonetheless, it is an optimistic finding that more female characters were shown with a paid occupation in 2024 than in 2019 (from 11.6% in 2019 to 16.7% in 2024).

- \* Shown working:** Male characters continued to be significantly more likely than female characters to be shown working. In 2024 ads, male characters were more likely than female characters to be shown working (21.2% compared with 11.9%). In 2019 ads, male characters were also more likely than female characters to be shown working (16.4% compared with 9.3%). Although the gender gap remained, the growth in representation for female characters indicates some progress.
- \* Leaders:** Male characters remained more likely than female characters to be portrayed as leaders, though leadership representation declined sharply for both genders. In 2024 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be shown as leaders (5.5% compared with 3.5%). In 2019 ads, male characters were also significantly more likely than female characters to be depicted as leaders (26.3% compared with 19.3%). Like with portrayals of working and holding paid occupations, leadership also continued to be shown as a male trait in 2024.

**FIGURE 8. Work & Leadership, by Gender**



Note. Asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

## Reinforcing gender norms through personal traits of humor and intelligence

Figure 9 presents the distribution of personal traits (humor and intelligence) by gender. We identified the following statistically significant results:

- \* Intelligence:** In 2024 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be shown as smart (3.3% compared with 1.9%). In 2019 ads, male characters were also significantly more likely than female characters to be shown as smart (32.2% compared with 26.2%). Thus, intelligence remained more of a male trait in advertisements.
- \* Humor:** Male characters continued to be depicted as funny more often than female characters. In 2024 ads, male characters were two times more likely than female characters to

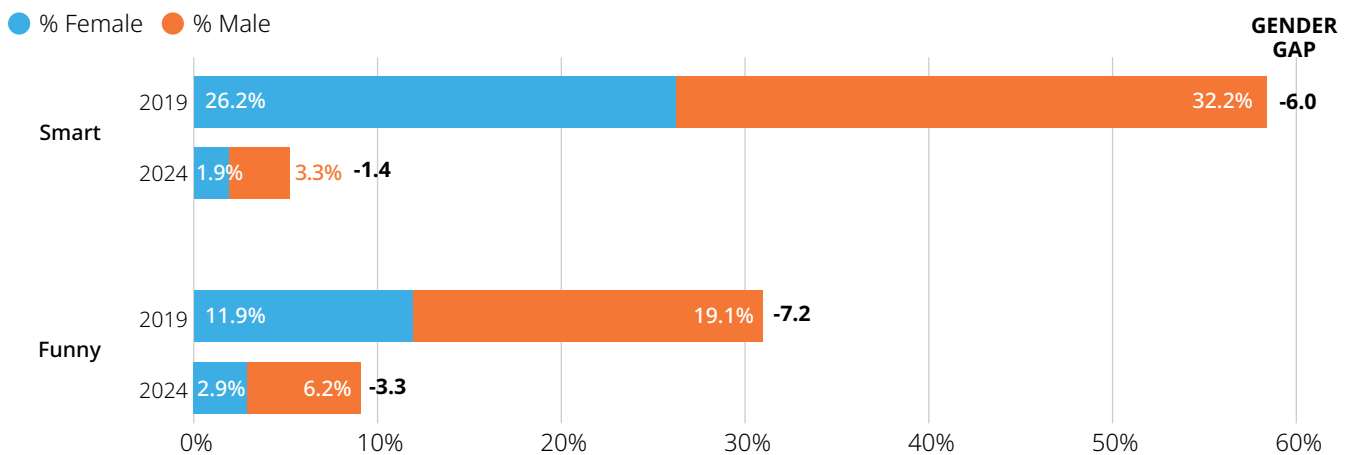
be shown as funny (6.2% compared with 2.9%), and this difference is statistically significant. In 2019 ads, male characters were also significantly more likely than female characters to be shown as funny (19.1% compared with 11.9%). Humor is a positive trait that makes characters more likeable overall, but the analysis finds it to be shown as a trait male characters in Indian ads are more likely to possess.

## Depictions of domesticity

Figure 10 presents the distribution of commonly reinforced gender roles by gender. We identified the following statistically significant results:

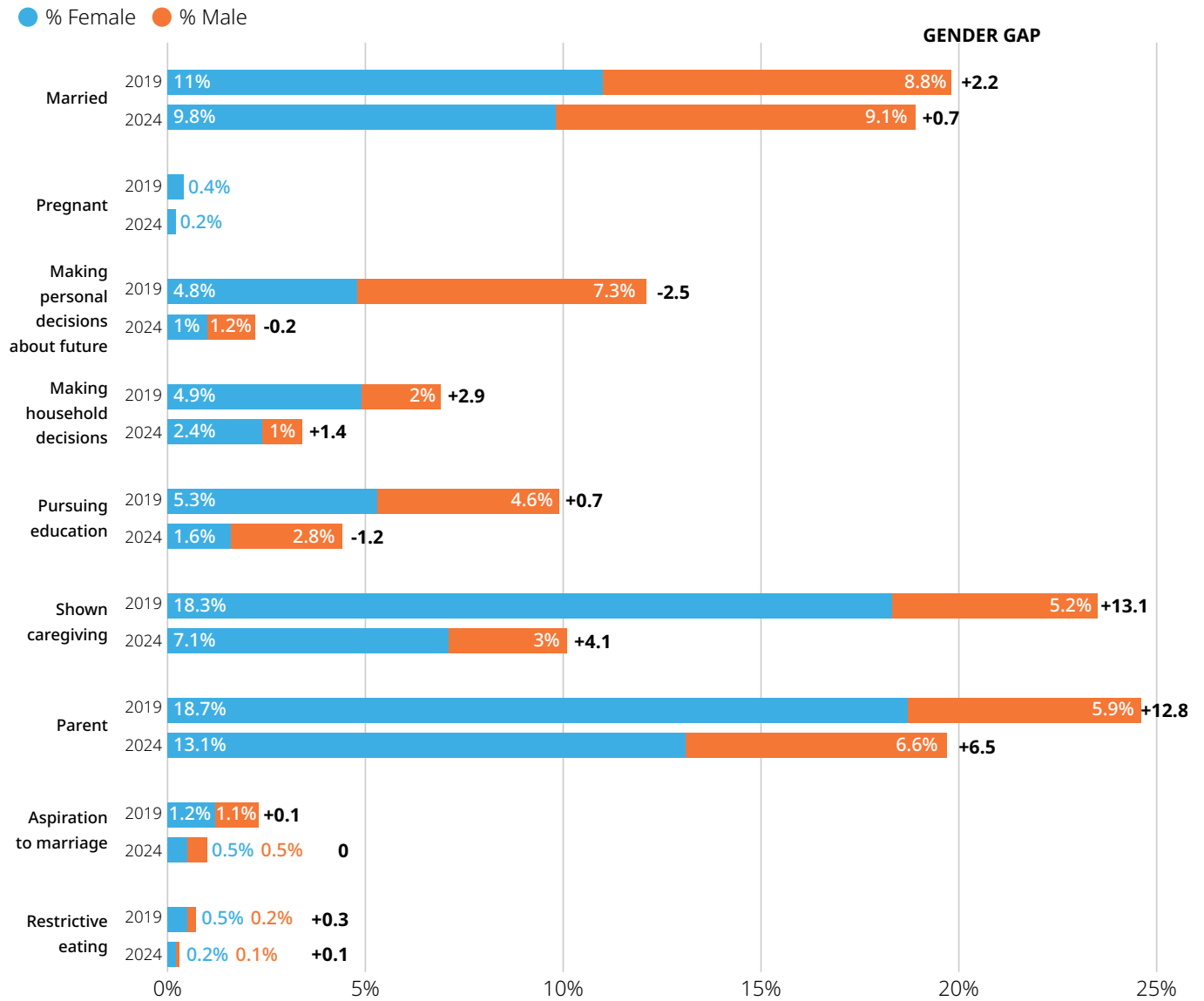
- \* Marriage:** In 2024 ads, male and female characters were equally shown as married. In 2019 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be married (11.0% compared with 8.8%). This shift suggests a move away from portraying women more often through their marital status.

**FIGURE 9. Personal Traits, by Gender**



- \* **Personal decisions about the future:** The gender gap closed for portrayals of making personal decisions about the future. In 2024 ads, male and female characters were equally shown making personal decisions about their future. But in 2019 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be shown making a personal decision about their future (7.3% compared with 4.8%).
- \* **Household decisions:** Female characters remained more likely than male characters to be shown making household decisions, though the overall rates declined for both genders. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown making household decisions (2.4% compared with 1.0%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be shown making household decisions (4.9% compared with 2.0%). This pattern suggests the ads continue to frame household decision-making as women's work.
- \* **Pursuing education:** The portrayal of male characters pursuing education rose between 2019 and 2024, reversing the earlier pattern of near-equal representation with female characters. In 2024 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be pursuing an education (2.8% compared with 1.6%). In 2019 ads, male and female characters were about equally likely to be pursuing an education (4.6% compared with 5.3%).
- \* **Pregnant:** In 2024 ads, 0.2% of all female characters were pregnant. In 2019 ads, 0.4% of all female characters were pregnant. Despite the slight decline in depictions, pregnancy is rarely shown in ads.
- \* **Caregiving:** Female characters continued to be significantly more likely than male characters to be depicted caregiving. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown caregiving (7.1% compared with 3.0%), but the gap was smaller than in 2019. In 2019 ads, female characters were more than three times as likely as male characters to be shown caregiving (18.3% compared with 5.2%), a difference that was also statistically significant. This finding reinforces the stereotype of women as primary caregivers, a message that persisted in advertising despite the narrowing gap.
- \* **Parenting:** Female characters remained significantly more likely than male characters to be portrayed as parents. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be a parent, (13.1% compared with 6.6%), but the gap was smaller than in 2019. In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be shown as parents (18.7% compared with 5.9%). This finding shows that ads continued to frame parenting as a woman's role, despite the smaller gender gap in 2024.
- \* **Married aspirations:** We did not identify any statistically significant gender differences when it came to aspirations to marriage in 2024 or in 2019. This is a positive finding, illustrating equal interest in romance and commitment for men and women.
- \* **Restrictive eating:** We did not identify any statistically significant gender differences when it came to restrictive eating in 2024 or in 2019.

FIGURE 10. Gender Roles, by Gender



## Gender gaps in activities

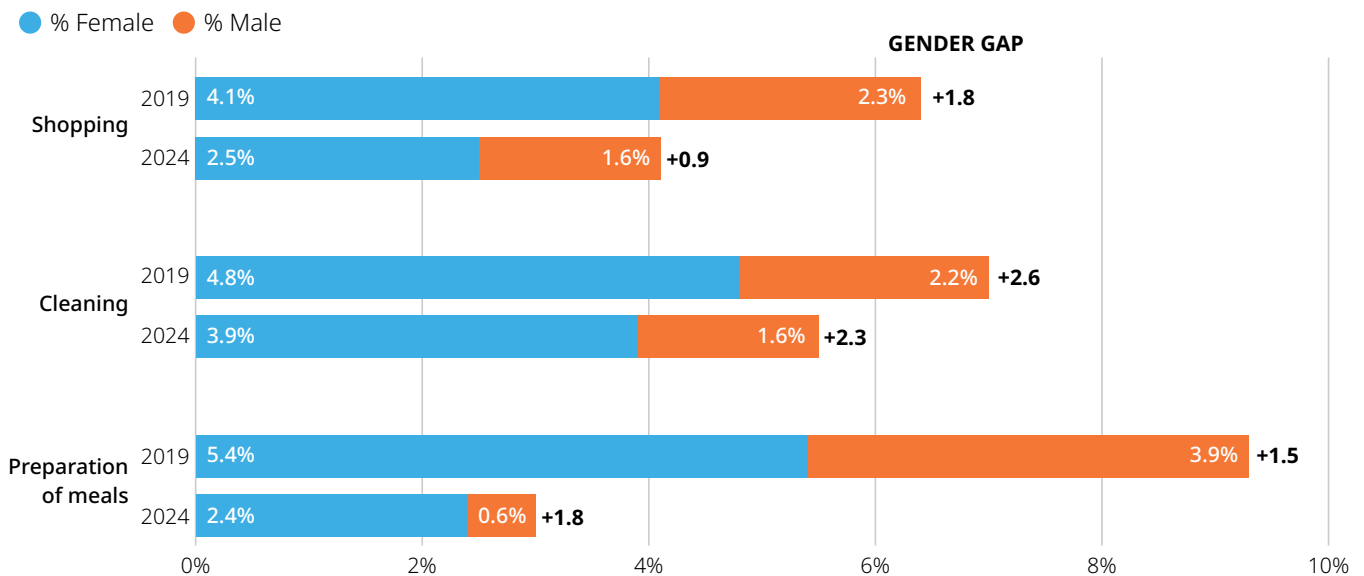
Figure 11 presents the distribution of several activities by gender. We identified the following statistically significant results in the noted activities:

- \* **Shopping:** Female characters continued to be more likely than male characters to be depicted shopping. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown shopping (2.5% compared with 1.6%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be shown shopping (4.1% compared with 2.3%). Shopping is stereotypically associated with women, a framing that persists in 2024 ads, underscoring the need for more balanced depictions of everyday activities like shopping across genders.
- \* **Cleaning:** Female characters continued to be more likely than male characters to be depicted

cleaning. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown cleaning (3.9% compared with 1.6%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be shown cleaning (4.8% compared with 2.2%). Cleaning has long been framed as women's work, a stereotype that persisted in 2024 ads, confining women to domestic roles.

- \* **Preparing meals:** Female characters remain significantly more likely than male characters to be shown preparing meals. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be shown preparing meals (2.4% compared with 0.6%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be shown preparing meals (5.4% compared with 3.9%). This continues to reinforce the stereotype that women's primary role is domestic.

**FIGURE 11. Activities, by Gender**

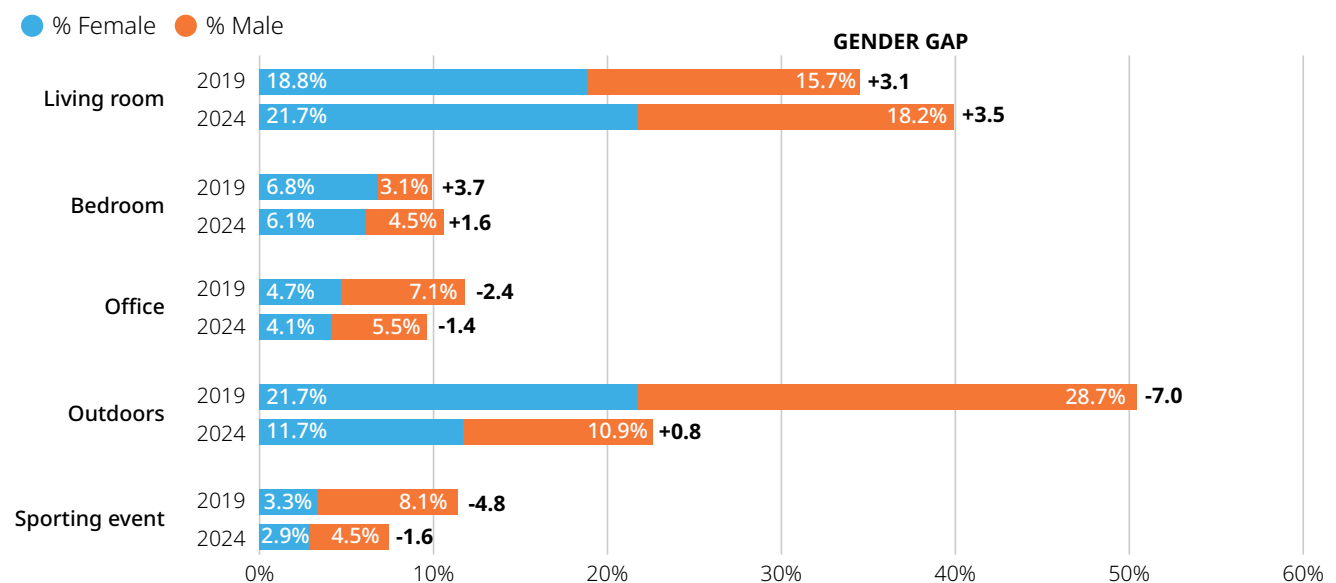


## Characters are shown in settings that reinforce gender stereotypes

Figure 12 presents the distribution of settings by gender. We identified the following statistically significant results in the noted settings:

- \* Living room:** Female characters remained more likely than male characters to be shown in living room settings. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than male characters to be in a living room setting (21.7% compared with 18.2%). In 2019 ads, female characters were also significantly more likely than male characters to be in a living room setting (18.8% compared with 15.7%). This pattern reinforces the association of women with home and domestic roles, in contrast to men not being shown carrying out household activities.
- \* Bedroom:** Female characters continued to be more likely than male characters to be shown in bedroom settings. In 2024 ads, female characters were significantly more likely than
- \* Office:** Male characters remained more likely than female characters to be depicted in office settings. In 2024 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be in an office setting (5.5% compared with 4.1%). In 2019 ads, male characters were also significantly more likely than female characters to be shown in an office setting (7.1% compared with 4.7%). This pattern also suggests that female characters were more often shown at home, while male characters were more frequently depicted at work.
- \* Outdoors:** The gender gap in outdoor-setting portrayals closed. In 2024 ads, male and female characters were equally shown in an outdoor setting. But in 2019 ads, male characters were

**FIGURE 12. Settings, by Gender**



significantly more likely than female characters to be in an outdoor setting (28.7% compared with 21.7%). This is a positive finding because it affords female characters greater complexity, depicting them in varied contexts beyond the domestic sphere.

- \* **Sporting event:** Male characters continued to be more likely than female characters to be shown in sporting-event settings. In 2024 ads, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to be in a sporting-event setting (4.5% compared with 2.9%). In 2019 ads, male characters were also significantly more likely than female characters to be in a sporting-event setting (8.1% compared with 3.3%). While sports are stereotypically seen as masculine activity or interest reserved for boys and men, it is important to show girls and women at sporting events too, to add dimension to their activities and interests beyond caregiving, shopping, and other household activities.

## Considerations

This study has three main limitations. First, the sampling approach focused on the ads with the broadest reach so this study could directly compare today's advertising to the sample from five years ago. While this is standard practice and necessary for measuring change over time, it also means it may have missed regional campaigns or digital-only ads that follow different creative trends or targeting strategies. Future research could use alternative sampling methods to capture that content, such as sampling by market sector or by the proportion of TV to digital advertising. Second, because so few characters were disabled or LGBTQIA+, the present study is unable to unpack deeper insights into the representation of these marginalized groups in Indian ads because they did not appear often enough. Only 0.3% of characters were disabled

and 0.3% were LGBTQIA+. Future studies will consider oversampling ads featuring these groups to produce a dataset large enough to draw these insights. Finally, while content analysis reveals patterns and frequencies in ads, it does not show their effects. Surveys or experiments could address how the portrayals identified in this study influence audiences.

## Interventions

Based on our findings, we recommend the following action steps to enhance the representation and portrayals of women and girls in Indian content.

### Action steps for stakeholders

- \* Strive for gender parity across all advertisements, and ensure that both men and women have speaking roles. Set internal standards for the representation of female and male characters.
- \* Think about intersectionality when casting. For example, cast more women who are older. Cast more girls and women with dark skin tones. Cast more girls and women and girls with large body types.
- \* Reduce the sexualization of girls and women. Think critically about depicting characters in sexually revealing clothing, and refrain from camera angles that focus or zoom in on sexual body parts.
- \* Be attentive to gender stereotypes and tropes, and actively work to counter them across ads, especially for girls and women, such as occupational tropes or roles in domestic scenes. Use resources, like those from UNICEF, that describe persistent gender stereotypes perpetuating harmful gender norms. To

accomplish this, refer to UNICEF's resources to help in creating ads that challenge stereotypes. Specific subjects include the areas of marriage, wherein marriage is not the sole interest of female characters but is instead something male characters fantasize about,<sup>6</sup> and education, where female characters are also seen pursuing learning.<sup>7</sup>

- \* Show more girls and women in work and leadership roles. Show them with a paid occupation, pursuing an education, actively working in their job, and as leaders (e.g., making decisions, giving orders, having a leadership role at work).
- \* Cast more female characters in comedic ads, where the female characters are carrying the narrative, to overcome the gender imbalance in who is shown as funny.
- \* Show more men in domestic roles. Show them making household decisions and in caregiving roles, shopping, cleaning, and preparing meals for their families. Such portrayals help challenge the stereotype that men do not belong in domestic spaces, and help normalize shared household responsibilities.
- \* Refer to advertisements that successfully challenge stereotypes as a starting point for content creation.

## Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest much progress in India when comparing 2019 ads with 2024 ads, though some gender-related disparities remain.

In a clear sign of progress, gender gaps have narrowed across nearly every domain analyzed. More male characters are shown as fathers, helping close the parenting gap. Fewer women appear in sexually revealing clothing, as partial nudity, or in scenes of sexual objectification, signaling a decline in the objectification of female characters. Domestic roles have also shifted: Compared with the previous study, fewer female characters are depicted as married, shopping, cleaning, preparing meals, caregiving, making household decisions, or appearing in bedroom settings. Instead, more women are portrayed with paid occupations and as actively working, which is an important move toward showing women with ambitions outside the home. Male and female characters now appear equally in outdoor settings and when making personal decisions about the future. Both genders are also featured in fewer stereotypical or trope-driven portrayals. Taken together, these trends point to meaningful progress.

At the same time, some disparities persist. Female characters remain significantly more likely than male characters to appear in caregiving and domestic roles, and male characters are still significantly more likely to be shown in paid occupations and workplace settings.

Altogether, while some progress has been made toward more balanced portrayals, significant work remains to challenge gender norms and ensure equitable representation in Indian ads. The UNICEF IAA Voice of Change aims to continue to work with the diverse stakeholders in advertising and marketing, to help push the needle slowly but surely toward gender equality.

# Lessons learned and good practices

When “Voice of Change” started, the baseline study and our ongoing engagement with clients, advertisers, and agencies in the advertising industry have already provided valuable lessons and good practices that can help shape future programs and organizational learning. We highlight these practices below:

1. **Establishing a clear baseline:** The baseline study set a crucial foundation by identifying existing gender stereotypes and gaps in advertising content, which has enabled more focused discussions and interventions.
2. **Industry collaboration is key:** Continuous engagement through agency roadshows, panel discussions, and workshops has fostered awareness and encouraged ownership of gender sensitivity among creative professionals and decision-makers.
3. **Importance of a detailed coding framework:** The baseline’s comprehensive coding of gender, age, skin tone, body type, and disability has proven effective in capturing nuanced representations and can guide future analyses.
4. **Highlighting positive role models:** Showcasing exemplary ads that break stereotypes — such as campaigns portraying women as leaders, decision-makers, and change agents — has inspired agencies to rethink traditional portrayals.
5. **Aligning with policies and advocacy:** Early alignment of findings with relevant policies and industry standards has laid the groundwork for systemic change and sustainable impact.

As the midline results become available, we anticipate gaining deeper insights that will further refine these lessons and help IAA partners enhance future initiatives toward greater gender sensitivity in advertising.

## ENDNOTES

1. We received the sample of 2024 ads in March 2025.
2. Selection of the sample was based on the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) ratings of the most viewed advertisements. In total, we received 200 digital and 800 TV ads from BARC. This is the same ratio as the 2021 study, making for an easy comparison. In the context of the “Voice of Change” study, the decision to include a larger proportion of television advertisements, compared with digital ads, for the midline evaluation was deliberate and grounded in the advertising landscape at the project’s inception. In 2019, when the baseline study was conducted, television was the dominant advertising medium in India, reaching a broad and diverse audience across both urban and rural areas. Although digital advertising has grown rapidly since then, its coexistence with TV has been essential for ensuring methodological consistency and comparability with the baseline data.
3. Of these 996 ads, 20 assets did not feature visibly prominent characters.
4. Geena Davis Institute and UNICEF, “Gender Bias and Inclusion in Advertising in India,” Delhi, April 2021.
5. Baruah, Sabyasachee, Digbalay Bose, Meredith Conroy, Shachi Dave, Sriram Giridharan, Sagar Gubbi, Rajat Hebbar, Michele Meyer, Shrikanth S. Narayanan, Romeo Pérez, Susanna Ricco, Komal Singh, Krishna Somandepalli, & Hao Zhao. 2023. “Reflecting India: An intersectional and longitudinal analysis of popular scripted television from 2018 to 2022.” The Geena Davis Institute.
6. UNICEF India (2024). The turning point transformative actions for ending child marriage in India: A compendium of case studies from 13 states. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/india/reports/turning-point-transformative-actions-ending-child-marriage-india>
7. UNICEF India (2018). Gender equality in primary and secondary education. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/education/gender-equality-primary-and-secondary-education>

## About the Geena Davis Institute

Since 2004, the Geena Davis Institute has worked to mitigate unconscious bias while creating equality, fostering inclusion, and reducing negative stereotyping in entertainment and media. As a global research-based organization, the Institute provides research, direct guidance, and thought leadership aimed at increasing representation of marginalized groups within six identities: gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, disability, age, and body type. Because of its unique history and position, the Institute can help achieve true on-screen equity in a way that few organizations can. Learn more at [geenadavisinstitute.org](http://geenadavisinstitute.org).

## About UNICEF India

UNICEF, the United Nations agency for children, works to protect the rights of every child, everywhere, especially the most disadvantaged children and in the toughest places to reach. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive, and fulfil their potential. UNICEF provides and advocates for child health and nutrition, safe water, sanitation and hygiene, quality education and skill building, and protection of children and adolescents from violence and exploitation, in a safe and sustainable climate, free from poverty. With the world's largest humanitarian warehouse and a global footprint, we are also the world's largest provider of vaccines. Before, during and

after humanitarian emergencies, UNICEF is on the ground, bringing lifesaving help and hope to children and families. Impartial, nonpolitical, and neutral, our focus is protecting every child and safeguarding their lives and futures.

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