







Gender Equality in India: an emerging nation changing the perception through advertisements

Noveena Chakravorty^{1*}, Sayak Pal², Sharmila Kayal³, G. Nikita⁴

¹Department of Media Studies, School of Media and Communication, Adamas University – Kolkata, India  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1372-3377>
noveena.jimmc@gmail.com

²Department of Media Studies, School of Media and Communication, Adamas University – Kolkata, India  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3342-1883>
palsayak01@gmail.com

³Department of Media Studies, School of Media and Communication, Adamas University – Kolkata, India  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5574-4910>
sharmilakayal@gmail.com

⁴Symbiosis School of Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University) - Pune, India  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6961-7111>
nikita.g@scmsbengaluru.siu.edu.in

Abstract:

Equality between gender and sustainability is deeply connected and one of the major areas that are getting international attention as gender inequality exists not only outside the household but also dwells within the household. Principle 20 of the 'Rio Declaration' in 1992 identifies women's participation as an essential element in sustainable development, along with the fifth SDG amended by United Nations in 2015, which focuses on improving gender equality in society. It is impossible to achieve complete sustainability without eliminating gender inequalities. Formulation of strategies is certainly not enough unless people are not educated to change their gender-biased perspectives and attitude. Advertisements are one of the potent ways to spread awareness of gender equality on a large scale. The observation from FGD helps to understand the reaction and responses of the audiences to selective advertisements addressing gender equality directly and indirectly. The responses also bring out certain components the advertisements are lacking like female education, independence, payrolls and eligibility differences, unequal opportunity, and recognition that varies over gender.

Keywords: Gender equality, Economic inequality, Advertisements, Emerging nation, India, Gender perception

Introduction

Gender is often illustrated in works depicting women as inferior to men, backed up by statistical data. Some common phenomena like lower wages, higher unemployment, more unpaid labor, under-presence in a higher position at organizations, lower expectations, and sometimes lesser control over work are parts of the long list that often surfaces through studies (Chafetz, 1989) (Debra L. Nelson, 2000). Fundamentally, gender offers distinct differences between male and female or masculine and feminine. Gender also helps in understanding individual work life as well as their struggle in inculcating skepticism, encouragement, suffering, and support received in an organization, along with the issues like inequality, male dominance, etc. (Acker, 1992). Studies suggest cases, where gender discrimination in labor pulls out the cases of female laborers who are considered cheap and compliant resources in organizations. Studies on gender also help in understanding the career-oriented preferences, dedication differences between males and females, social norms and beliefs on 'male breadwinners', etc. Gender studies cover the documentation of progress in society for both genders and related fields (Mats Alvesson, 2009).

Gender Economics is an interesting discipline that is based on economic theories while connecting gender, economics, and sociology. Under macroeconomics, gender economics deals with the decision-making process of gender that influence the economy and how it impacts gender further. Two pertinent issues on gender equality have long been an integral part of the discussion and propounded a series of activities 'gender pay gap' and 'women in leadership', however, the growth is still slow. It is imperative to make the business environment, institutions and corporate understand the connection between gender equality and sustainability which would lead to overall economic development (Moore, 2017).

RQ1: How pre-existing gender inequalities are reflecting in Indian advertisements?

RQ3: How Indian advertisements claiming to be promoting gender equality are depicting gender through their campaign?

RQ4: How audience reacts to those campaigns?

The objective of the study is to understand the standpoint of direct and indirect Indian advertisements in limiting gender inequality, leading to improve in sustainable development.

Gender inequalities leading to unsustainability

The understanding of gender inequality differs from the other variations of inequality, making it distinctive and different from the rest of the genre. Gender inequality dwells both inside and outside of a household (Samuelson, 1956). The economic endowment (like wealth, income, etc.) between women and men existed within the social norms and perception where it was embedded ideologically among the people who consisted in the society. Inequalities between gender are not restricted within the pre-existing forms but may arise through newly-defined procedures and rules (Agarwal, 2002). Three dominant patterns that are heading toward a disturbing range are the production, consumption, and distribution of resources. Since human civilization continued its overexploitation and possession of natural resources, pollution increases on multiple levels, loss of habitat, and depletion of natural resources follows (ipcc, 2014), (Rockström, 2009). Unfortunately, the unsustainable patterns of development lead to gender inequality because girls and/ or women often become the easy victim of economic, environmental, and social stresses (Plümper, 2007).

Gender inequality and unsustainability are deeply connected through their root causes. One of the major drawbacks that are pulling inequality further is the exploitation of women's labor and women being unpaid caregivers. The similar intentional trajectories are also causing environmental hazards and exploiting natural resources ultimately destabilizing the economy and undermining future progress (Wichterich, 2012). The global debate promises to push out or take precautions for crises and catastrophes, promising prosperity through 'green economics', however, the policy has not always prioritized addressing the issues of gender equality at the forefront (Agarwal, 2002), (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2002), (Blerta Cela, 2014), (Johnsson-Latham, 2007).

Gender inequality			
<i>Pre-existing</i>		<i>Institutionally created</i>	
Categories	Inequalities unique to the women	Categories	Inequalities unique to the women

<i>Inequalities in access to private property resources</i>	Denial of access to the private property	<i>Rules of membership</i>	Rare to have women in GB (general body) and EC (executive body)
	Lesser earning opportunities		Fewer states allow equal opportunity for both genders
	Burdened with the responsibility of fuel and fodder		
<i>Gendered social norms</i>	Women-specific tasks	<i>Rules of closure</i>	Banning the collection of forest essentials majorly burdens women
	Prohibition on public interaction		
	More hours of daily work (labor hours)		
	Largely responsible for cattle care, firewood collection, and fodder		
	Restriction of mobility (labeled as 'good character')		
	Selected visibility, mobility, and behavior		
<i>Gendered Perceptions</i>	Male's perception of women	<i>Rules for benefit sharing</i>	Less number of women are allowed to migrate for employment opportunities
	Perceived as less capable		Lesser benefits are shared with women depletes the household income
	Inappropriate/ unnecessary public participation		Women's labor hours are mostly neglected when they are working jointly with their husbands
	Considered less educated		

Table 1. Categorization of gender inequalities(Source: Bina Agarwal, Gender Inequality, Cooperation, and Environmental Sustainability, citeseerx.ist.psu.edu, 2002)

BinalAgwarwal has categorically segregated gender inequalities into two categories, (i) the inequalities that are pre-existing and (ii) inequalities that are created by institutions (Table 1). While the first category covers the areas of unequal distribution and norms on property distribution and ownership, social prohibitions, and males' perception of women. The second category, however, is largely applicable to the rural populations where they depend heavily on the collection and possession of natural resources to support their households(Agarwal, 2002), (Jean-Marie Baland, 1996), (Rajiv Sethi, 2001)(Meena Acharya, 1981), (Akram-Lodhi, 1996)(Sumeet Saksena, 1995), (Sen, 1987), (Raju, 1993).

Gender equalities through sustainable development

The three major areas, gender equality, the realization of women's rights, and women's empowerment intertwined to achieve sustainability have been in the limelight in the recent decade. This includes the international agreements, norms, and principle 20

of the 'Rio Declaration' taken in 1992 to identify women's participation as an essential element in sustainable development. In the outcome of the 'United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development' in 2012, both women empowerment and gender equality have been recognized as important for economic, social, and environmental development(UN-General-Assembly, 2012). The fifth SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) amended by United Nations, which was to be fulfilled by 2030 entirely focuses on upholding fundamental rights to set the foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Unfortunately, the major key areas like domestic work, unpaid care, decision-making authorities, and reproductive as well as sexual health are not showing enough progress to match the level of optimum sustainability by 2030. The major drawbacks lie in the poorly funded infrastructure and support for women's healthcare(UN, 2022).

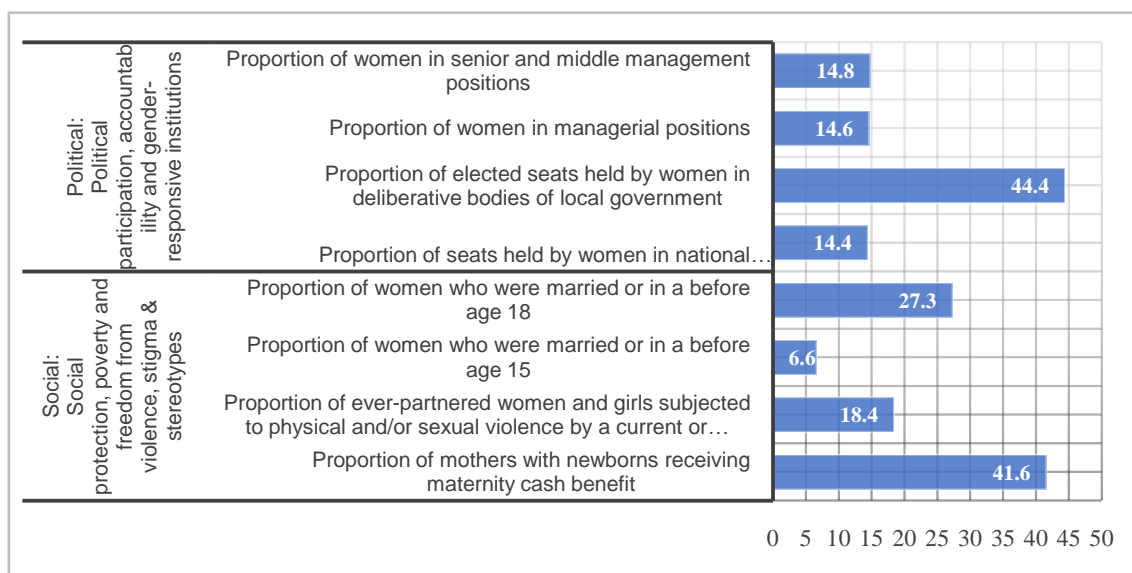


Figure 1: Political and social indicator pointing out the recent gender sustainability dispositions in India (Source: UN Women, unwomen.org, 2023)

Social and political aspects are two major determinants that defines the stand point of gender sustenance and growth of India in gender equilibrium. Since the SDG are taken up as to reach maximum sustenance in seventeen prospected areas, global progress in women's rights has improved. In India, 83.3 percent legal frameworks based on the promotion and maintaining gender equality under SDG indicator is focused primarily on violence against women are already in place. However, the adolescent birth rate increased from 10.7 percent per 1,000 (women aged between 15-19 years, in 2016)

to 12.2 percent in 2018. The gap still exists in the key areas for women-centric indicators like unpaid care and domestic work, gender pay gap, key labor market, and ICT skills. The unavailability of data also causes disruption in calculating the overall equality gap between the genders, for example, only 44.3 percent of SGD indicators were available from the gender perspective till December 2020. The political and social performance indicators (Figure 1) suggest eight recent standpoints to identify the gender sustainability dispositions in India (Women, 2023).

Secondary data analysis

Audio-visual advertisements have been one of the most potent vehicles to emanate powerful messages to the mass (Sayak Pal, 2022). Some dedicated advertisements have played a significant role in bringing the issues of gender equality into the limelight and these spectacular ads have also helped in advocating and educating viewers on the importance and relevance of gender equality for economic progression.

Break the bias, Titan Company Limited, a part of the Tata group created a television commercial for their Raga series in 2017 on the occasion of Women's Day. The commercial typically illustrates an office scenario where a team of senior managers was preparing the recommended promotion list for their employees when one of the team members was struck with the name 'Kiran' recommended by a male superior 'Rajat'. Other team members got intrigued by the name 'Kiran' when one of them explained the dedication of 'Kiran' on various occasions like working extra hours, working even after office hours, and putting in hard work and dedication to prove to be an asset of the team. A senior member sarcastically asked to meet 'Kiran', the recommended candidate from 'Rajat's' team. The young and newly joined employee named 'Kiran' was called out into the room and most of the members got surprised to find a young man standing at the doorway named 'Kiran'. The commercial aims to break the stereotypical perspective of male dominance and gender inequality towards women inflicted through the dominance in the societal perspective.

Let's raise a generation of equals, Flipkart Private Limited, an e-commerce organization raised a pertinent question through this commercial on parental support in the upbringing of male and female kids. The ad has a series of instances where the boys

and girls are opting for choices that are long been categorized by society for the opposite genders like a boy celebrating his birthday with a cake made out of colorful candies while toy trucks and builders' image is printed over a girl's birthday cake. There are also instances where both a male and female child is shedding tears, playing with cars, dressed up in pink clothes, practicing basketball and judo, helping parents with household work, dreaming to become an astronaut or a ballet dancer, or a superhero or live in style. The male and female voices from the kids then appealed to the parents not to judge them based on their gender or the ways their parents have been raised as they are not in competition with the opposite gender but to be raised and live as equals. The ad is an eye-opener, especially for the parents who judge and implore their choices based on their gender but not on their choices.

It's Time to Change the Equation, Oley Foundation, an organization based out of the United States came up with an advertisement where a series of situations were played across multiple areas of India that demands to change the age-old equation between the genders. The commercial started with two children standing on their rooftops, looking for the NorthStar with a binocular. An adult male interrupted their search and complimented the boy with a prospective future of an astronaut and predicted the girl to be a film star. The next scene brings the story of a girl working in an electronic repair store when a middle-aged couple entered the store with a television to repair and asked for her father or brother to take the task when the girl asked to give it to her as her father and brother would also ask for her support. The next two stories are about two sets of school children, in the first one the pair is working on a science project and when the teacher asked for an explanation, the boy fumbles and the girl explained the project with ease. The second story in the set shows a pair of school children at a bookstore that is selling books since 1886 when the storekeeper brings the books and hands over the computer coding books to the boy and the History and English books to the girl, However, they interchanged the set of the book immediately. The shopkeeper got surprised and enquired the girl if she can code, to which she agrees. The next story was surprisingly showing a modern and working mother refereeing her daughter to her friend and getting agitated as her daughter dressed up as a robot while other girl children from her school would dress up as princesses. The last story in this long advertisement brings a daughter who wishes to help her father in repairing the car as she learned about the technique online, to which her father asked her to go inside as

her clothes might get dirty. The brand asked to change the biased perception of the people and society restricted to gender.

Nanhi Kali, an intriguing commercial from Nestlé India Limited directly targeted gender inequality in the field of education. The commercial begins with a small girl chopping off her hair in front of a mirror when she was suddenly interrupted by another girl of her age. The girl who was chopping her hair stopped and explained that her elder sister was again crying as she was denied to go to school because she was a girl while her brother gets the opportunity to attain school. The little one explained further that she was chopping her hair and would eventually dress up in clothes to look like her brother which she thought would allow her to go to school. The advertisement highlights a very pertinent area of inequality between genders when it comes to availing basic education.

The Mirror, UNAIDS is an extension of the United Nations that aims to eradicate AIDS by 2030. The Mirror is a recent advertisement from UNAIDS that shows gender equality in an unusual way. The narrative starts with a family having a good time enjoying kite flying on the rooftop while a boy sat with a gloomy face. The Mother of the boy insisted he joins her in kite flying, to which the boy resisted and went downstairs to a corner where he stood on a stool to watch himself in the mirror. He then put on a 'bindi', 'glass bangles', applied 'lipstick', fashioned a 'dupatta', and glared at his transformed reflection in the mirror. The boy then took to dancing with the accessories and makeup to imitate a female character. The affectionate performance is abruptly stopped by the sudden appearance of his mother and grandmother, while the boy shivers from the unforeseen fear of punishment. Surprisingly, the mother reacted with a positive gesture and encouraged the boy to continue his performance while joining him in the process. The commercial urges parents and society to "see their children the way they see themselves". The advertisement carefully features women who are engaged in male-dominated activities while a male dressing up with accessories and attires that are meant for women.

Khana chahe koi bhibanaye, ghar ka khana, ghar ka khanahotahai, Fortune Soyabean Oil from Adani Wilmar Company, which manufactures a range of Fortune products has an interesting advertisement that breaks the concept of conventional household structure. The ad starts with a pair of young professionals enjoying their

lunch in the office while the male employee devours some food from the female employee and appreciates the taste of the food and also thanks her mother for the delicious food. The female employee asked him for a dinner on Sunday and he gladly accepts the invitation. The guy comes to the dinner on the scheduled date and asked to meet her mother to which she points him to the kitchen. The guy started to thank her mother for the delicious food and also for the invitation but stops midway when he found out that the father of the female employee is preparing the food for their dinner. The ad ends with a happy family setup where the father is distributing the food he made while everyone enjoys the occasion. The ad breaks the stereotypical perception of women being the caregiver and cooking for a household which is often adopted by many advertisements as well.

Alia Bhatt, MoheyManyavar, In an ad from Mohey, Alia Bhatt plays the role of a bride who is getting married and asked questions about the age-old beliefs of society. The bride sits down for the ritual and asks when a girl marries off according to the Indian customs, she gets to live with her husband and in-laws, does that mean that she loses her connection to her paternal home? The girls in Indian society often refer to “Paraya Dhan” (property of others) which means she would be handed over to her husband and in-laws when she would get married. The bride asks why no one protested that neither she is owned by someone nor should she be considered someone’s property. Then she asks why she would be obliged to her husband and in-laws. The actress Alia Bhat in the role of a bride finally asks for an explanation of a centuries-old tradition “kanyadaan” (giving away the daughter). The commercial ends with a new tradition being introduced ‘kanyamaan’ (respecting the women) where a bride would not be treated as a commodity that could be given away to someone but to be respected through holy marriage for a new beginning. The advertisement focuses on a very fundamental tradition of Indian society where girls are treated as property by their male counterparts and in-laws, which requires change and turned into mutual love and respect not only between a husband and wife but also among the families.

Sabhyata Diwali 2022, an advertisement from Sabhyata in 2022 emphasized the patient issues often faced by women at their working place. The commercial starts with a young woman entering an office for an interview. The woman hesitantly waits when a lady sitting behind her suddenly asked her to take a bite of her home-cooked food. Both

women then started having a conversation about the forthcoming interview that the young woman is about to face. When the young woman asked about the questions that she would face during the interview, the lady from the office shares that the interviewers would ask her about marriage, husband, and family planning which is usual for a women employee. The lady from the office then noticed her initial stage of pregnancy, to which the young woman replies that she wishes to work until the advanced stage of her pregnancy and resigned from her previous job because they refused to treat her eligible while she is pregnant. The lady from the office then handed the young woman a Diwali gift and assured her that she will get the offer. When the lady leaves, an employee who took her to the premise came and asked about her performance in the last round of interviews. The young woman then realized that she was being interviewed throughout the whole time and opened up the gift and found her offer letter is fitted into it. The Advertisement illustrates the work-related issues which are common for women and also spread hope for a better future where the inequalities towards women in the workplace would reduce.

<i>Audio-visual advertisements addressing gender equality</i>			
Direct Approach		Indirect Approach	
Advertisements	Addressing issues	Advertisements	Addressing issues
<i>Break the Bias (Titan Company Limited)</i>	Gender perception for women employees; negative approach toward women's success	<i>The Mirror (UNAIDS)</i>	Gender diversity taboo; equal opportunity; parental acceptance;
<i>Let's raise a generation of equals! (Flipkart Private Limited)</i>	Gender equality; Separate perceptions for males and females; imposed choices on males and females; different treatment for males and females; parental perception of gender;	<i>Khana chahe koi bhibanaye, ghar ka khana, ghar ka khanahotahai (Fortune Soyabean Oil, Adani Wilmar Company)</i>	Gender perception; conventional role of women; gender preference
<i>It's Time to Change the Equation (OLAY)</i>	Gender equality; social perception; women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics); gender gap	<i>Alia Bhatt (Mohey, Manyavar)</i>	Women as property; women as something to be donated; Ritually bound; giving away the daughter; respecting the women
<i>Nanhi Kali (Nestlé India)</i>	Female education; gender inequality; gender appearance	<i>Diwali 2022 (Sabhyata)</i>	Challenges for working women; myth and prejudice against working women;

Table 2. Selected audio-visual advertisements those are directly and indirectly address gender equality(Source: Titan Company Ltd, UNAIDS, Flipkart Private Limited, Adani Wilmar Company, OLAY, MoheyManyavar, Nestlé India, Sabhyata)

Primary data analysis

Focus group discussion was arranged among twelve participants to understand the perception of gender equality among people, and the reflection of gender equality through Indian advertisements, leading to sustainability.

<i>Questions</i>	<i>FGD - (Keywords with no. of frequencies)</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>FGD - (Advertisements with no. of frequencies)</i>
<i>What do you understand by gender equality?</i>	Equal position at home, institutions, or corporate (2), Efficacy of a person (1), biologically different (1), difference in physical strength (1), men cannot procreate (1), equal rights and opportunities in every area (1), same amount of respect (1), equal payrolls (1), free choices (1), social parameter for judge a person should not exist (1), equality for both male and female (1).	<i>Which of the advertisements did you like most?</i>	Break the bias, Let's raise a generation of equals (4), It's Time to Change the Equation (2), Khana chahe koi bhibanayeghar ka khanaghar ka khanahotahai (3), Alia Bhatt MoheyManyavar, Sabhyata Diwali 2022, Nanhi Kali (2), The Mirror (3).
<i>Questions</i>	<i>FGD - (Statements from the participants with no. of frequencies)</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>FGD - (Statements from the participants with no. of frequencies)</i>
<i>Do you think, women are equal to men?</i>	Both genders are equal (1). Genders should not be compared (1). Choices of work, passion, and profession for genders may differ and become their identity (1). Both genders may have emotional and materialistic needs where they might need to support the opposite gender (1). Women are taking up jobs traditionally restricted for men (1). Women are	<i>Do you think gender equality is rightly portrayed through these advertisements?</i>	Yes (4). These ads are very thorough, impactful, and effortless (1). The better way to show gender equality in ads is to make it relatable to the audience (1). I have been victimized by gender equality for multiple times in schools, in workplaces, and when shown, those ads did put an impact on me at a personal level (1). These types of advertisements are very much important to make people aware and to bring change in

	emotional while men are rational (1). Sometimes males also exhibit feminine attributes (1).		society (1).
<i>Do you think that advertisements like these will be able to bring positive changes to gender equality?</i>	Yes (4). Advertisements do create a positive change in society but on a partial level (1). Reach of the advertisement differs from urban to rural audiences (3). Patriarchy has been instilled within us from an early age (1). Gender equality should be practiced every day (2). Advertisements are not enough (1). Showing a bunch of montages does not help solve the problem (1). Self-realization is important (1). These ads have the capacity to influence people's mindsets gradually (1). These ads are restricted to a niche number of people (1).	<i>What do you think is the most challenging part for women when it comes to gender equality?</i>	Always struggling to ask for the same opportunities like quality of education, independence, or similar payrolls despite having same degree as their male counterparts (1). The absurd part is women need to ask for their rights and equality (1). Women are also sometimes questioned about their eligibility for a particular job role unlike males (1). In a country where girls are killed even before they are born, living itself is challenging (1). Everyone should be accepted, acknowledged, and provided with similar opportunities (1). Maternal leaves should be parental leaves (1). Social structure indicates a woman to be submissive and dependent (1). Women are often not recognized properly by society (1).
<i>How and what India is doing in equalizing gender?</i>	India is inculcating ways of equalizing genders (2). Women are seen in managerial roles in both government and private sectors with additional benefits (1). India is promoting womanhood but not enough (1). Women are still used in inappropriate ways (1). Women are still judged and treated unfairly (1). Women are given voting rights (1). Women-specific laws have been enacted for their protection	<i>What do you think an advertisement should be focusing on when showing gender equality?</i>	Nothing is lacking here (1). These kinds of advertisements are not seen often (1). Increasing the ad frequency may add to the awareness (1). These advertisements often come with generic content (1). It's difficult to relate these ads to everyone (1). A diverse approach is required to get the attention of both urban and rural India (2). They can picture different relevant human perspectives (1). Ads can focus on the parental view of a child's upbringing and education (1). They should

	(1). Government alone cannot do much (1).		include age-specific content, especially for teenagers (1).
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Table 3. Components and responses from the controlled group(Source: Primary data, Focus Group Discussion)

Participants from the focused group were asked about their understanding of gender equality and the responses were recorded in terms of the number of occurrences (frequencies). The variety of factors that surfaced (table 30) depicts the perception of gender equality among people. Similarly, when the participants were asked to choose their favourite ads among the chosen lot, “Let's raise a generation of equals” from Flipkart has the highest number of votes followed by “Khana chahe koi bhibanayeghar ka khanaghar ka khanahotahai” from Fortune and “The Mirror” from UNAIDS. Ironically, the Flipkart ad strongly advocates the gender equality directly, whereas Fortune ad portrays a different picture of gender in household activities. The UNAIDS ad strongly supports gender representation and parental support. When asked about equality, participants even raised their concerns about the very idea of comparison between the genders. While most of them stated that both genders are equal in all respects, the display of attributes of opposite genders is not uncommon. A question was also asked about the success of the advertisements in portraying gender equality and a fraction of the respondents agreed while few of them believed that the relevance could have been deeper and the ads were less impactful. A similar question on the relevance of the ads also managed to get a few positive responses while they also raised their concern on the ads are not efficient for rural audiences, have a partial impact, should emphasize more on practicing equality, and concentrated on a niche group. They were also asked about the challenging part of gender when it comes to gender equality and the areas like education, independence, similar payrolls, eligibility, equal opportunity, and recognition surfaced where inequality still exists. While they were asked about India's role in equalizing gender, respondents agreed on the role of India in supporting women but also stated that more such initiatives are required along with individual responsibility and awareness towards gender equality. Lastly, they were asked to suggest the issues that the ads should focus on while showing gender equality. The participants suggest that ads should not always be generic, more diverse, focus both on urban and rural audiences and be more human-centric and agecentric.

Conclusion

The differentiation between male and female gender in various aspects has always been identified at multiple levels. Interestingly, gender equality resides both outside and inside a household, which makes the task more challenging to eradicate inequality. The 'Rio Declaration' taken in 1992 identifies the contribution of women as essential for sustainable development, setting the ground for policies and regulations to work towards improving gender equality. However, a few major areas like domestic work, decision-making authorities, unpaid care, and reproductive as well as sexual health are not making enough progress. Advertisements with their direct and indirect approach are one of the best ways to aware people of their responsibility towards improving gender equality, but few of them are broadly accepted by the audience for their unconventional approach and difference in presentation while also being straightforward in their appeal. The FGDs conducted to understand the perception of the audience on the selective ads leads to identifying several factors that the ads are lacking while areas like female education and independence, difference in payrolls and eligibility, unequal opportunity and recognition still need to cover through advertisements on a larger scale.

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