

Exploring Perception of Gender Portrayals in Social Media Advertisements

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Abstract

In the digital era, social media powerfully shapes societal views on gender roles. Indian ads often depict traditional gender roles, reinforcing stereotypes that influence individual expectations and behaviours. A survey conducted by UN Women¹ highlights that both men and women in India are often shown in conventional roles across media. This research analyses how gender portrayals in social media advertisements influence attitudes, behaviours, expectations, and emotional responses, aiming to promote more responsible and equitable advertising that challenges gender biases rather than perpetuating them.

Introduction

Gender representation in advertising has long been studied. Goffman's Gender Advertisements (1979)² demonstrated that ads often depict women in subordinate roles, reinforcing existing power structures. Research shows advertisements often frame women as objects of desire and men as symbols of success and dominance, shaping societal expectations and influencing individuals' emotions and decisions.³ Such portrayals shape societal expectations and influence decision-making and emotions, including feelings of empowerment or marginalization.

The Bollywood film Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani⁴ shows how Dhanlaxmi Laddu, a traditional family business, struggled with

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outdated gender-stereotypical ads but experienced significant growth after adopting inclusive advertising that challenged gender norms.

Objective

To analyze individuals' perceptions and interactions with gender portrayals in social media advertisements, assessing their influence on attitudes, behaviours, and expectations related to gender roles and stereotypes.

Review of literature

Azmi et al. (2021)⁵ investigate gender bias in Mattel's Facebook toy ads, finding a prevalence of ads targeting girls with stereotypical feminine traits and lacking emotional aspects, reinforcing nurturing and appearance-focused roles for girls while excluding boys from these portrayals.

Deng et al. (2020)⁶ analyse Coca-Cola's Instagram use across countries, revealing a lack of cultural adaptation as it reinforces masculinity and Western ideals even in low-masculinity regions, prioritizing a global brand image over local cultural nuances.

Bingol et al. (2023)⁷ investigate Facebook's cultural impact on purchasing in Turkey and the USA, finding Turkish women more engaged with brands and highlighting the need for tailored marketing to cultural and gender differences.

Castronuovo et al. (2021)⁸ examine how social media food marketing targets children and adolescents, reinforcing gender stereotypes. They highlight social media's role in shaping youth gender perceptions and call for understanding these influences to promote healthier eating by either challenging or reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Kögler (2022)⁹ examines gender stereotypes in German TV ads on private and public channels, finding persistent stereotypical gender roles despite changing cultural views, and calls for stricter advertising oversight aligned with recent EU initiatives.

Björkqvist (2023)¹⁰ expands the study of gender portrayals in Finnish YouTube ads, revealing ongoing gender stereotypes and stressing the importance of promoting more inclusive and diverse media representation in Finland.

Pan (2021)¹¹ investigates social media advertising's negative impact on women's body image, linking ads' unrealistic beauty

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standards and stereotypes to body dissatisfaction and self-criticism. The study calls for further research and advocates promoting healthy lifestyles over unattainable ideals to support well-being.

Nyström and Forsberg (2020)¹² investigates women's attitudes toward sexism in fast fashion advertising, revealing a conflict between their preference for quality attributes like durability and sustainability and the industry's sexist marketing, showing that women prioritize product quality over sexist portrayals.

Michaelidou et al. (2022)¹³ explores femvertising on social media, showing luxury brands rely more on traditional, sexualized portrayals with limited beauty standards, while non-luxury brands more actively promote empowerment and challenge gender norms.

Septianto et al. (2023)¹⁴ delves into social media advertising's role in empowering female consumers using regulatory mode theory, finding that ads tailored to promote action (locomotion) boost empowerment, engagement, inclusion, and diversity more effectively than those focused on contrasting assessment (decision-focused).

Dixon (2019)¹⁵ delves into the construction and spread of media stereotypes, examining their impact on individuals and society, and highlighting how media content shapes perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in complex ways.

Steindl (2023)¹⁶ emphasizes growing consumer acceptance of gender-neutral marketing to reduce stereotypes in child development, highlighting that companies must adapt to avoid financial risks. Tailoring marketing with diverse channels and subtle messaging, like avoiding stereotypical colors and categories, promotes inclusive play and gender neutrality.

Clark (2023)¹⁷ explores how consumers define inclusivity in beauty advertising and its impact on attitudes and behaviour. It finds that embracing diversity in campaigns positively influences brand reputation, consumer engagement, and overall perceptions of beauty products.

Sharma & Bumb (2021)¹⁸ explore women's portrayals in ads that impact consumer perception and brand success, revealing some progress but persistent stereotypes. It urges featuring women in diverse roles and avoiding submissive or weak depictions to improve advertising effectiveness.

Sandhu (2022)¹⁹ examines gendered cues in advertising from 1973 to 2019, revealing how these cues shape consumer perceptions, purchasing decisions, and societal gender norms by reinforcing or challenging stereotypes in complex ways.

Methodology

The research surveyed social media users via convenience sampling. It collected data on participants' perceptions of gender representation in advertisements and examined how these portrayals influence their views on societal gender norms.

The survey questionnaire was prepared and distributed via the Google forms application to friends and family. For collection of data, Google sheets were used. The research used the quantitative survey method.

Data interpretation and analysis

Table 1: Age of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18	2	2
19	7	7
20	14	14
21	9	9
22	10	10
23	7	7
24	10	10
25	4	4
26	4	4
27	1	1
28	7	7
29	5	5
30	3	3
31	6	6
33	2	2
34	3	3
35	3	3
36	1	1
37	1	1
38	1	1

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Table 1 shows that 68 (68%) respondents were aged between 18 and 27 and 32 (32%) respondents were aged between 28 and 38.

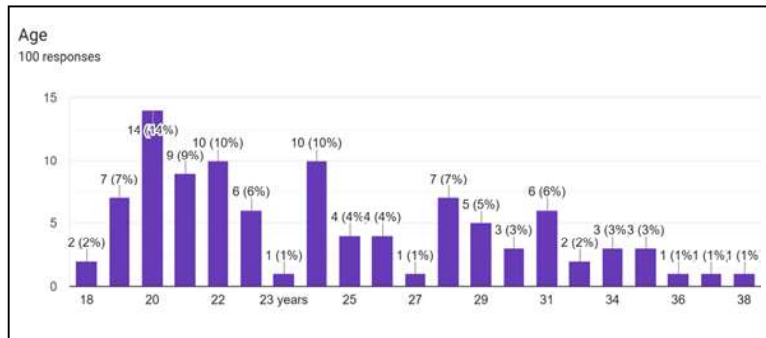


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that 68 (68%) respondents were aged between 18 and 27 and 32 (32%) respondents were aged between 28 and 38.

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	65	65
Female	34	34
Prefer not to say	1	1

Table 2 shows that 65 (65%) respondents were males, 34 (34%) were females and 1 (1%) respondent preferred not respond.

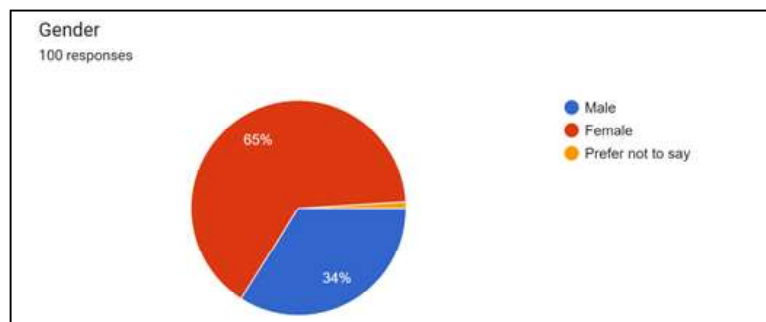


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that 65 (65%) respondents were males, 34 (34%) were females and 1 (1%) respondent preferred not speak.

Table 3: Seen any advertisements on social media in the past week

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	92	92
No	8	8

Table 3 shows that 92 (92%) of respondents saw advertisements while 8 (8%) of respondents did not see any advertisements on social media in the past week.

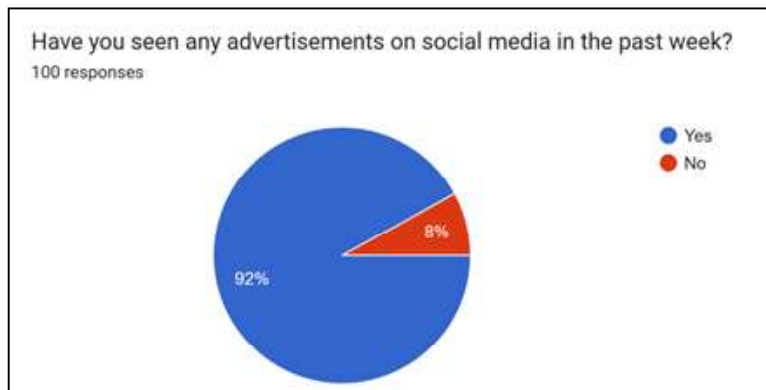


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows that 92 (92%) of respondents saw advertisements while 8 (8%) of respondents did not see any advertisements on social media in the past week.

Table 4: Advertisements on social media are targeted towards a specific gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	40
No	26	26
Maybe	34	34

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Table 4 shows that 40 (40%) of respondents think social media advertisements target a specific gender, 26 (26%) disagree, and 34 (34%) are unsure.

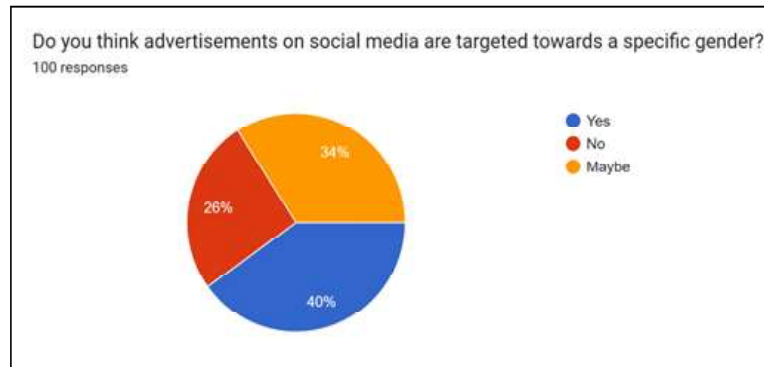


Figure 4

Figure 4 shows that 40 (40%) of respondents think social media advertisements target a specific gender, 26 (26%) disagree, and 34 (34%) are unsure.

Table 5: Advertisements on social media reinforce gender stereotypes

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	11	11
Rarely	15	15
Sometimes	45	45
Often	22	22
Always	7	7

Table 5 shows that 11 (11%) of respondents chose never, 15 (15%) rarely, 45 (45%) sometimes, 22 (22%) often, and 7 (7%) always felt that advertisements on social media reinforce gender stereotypes.

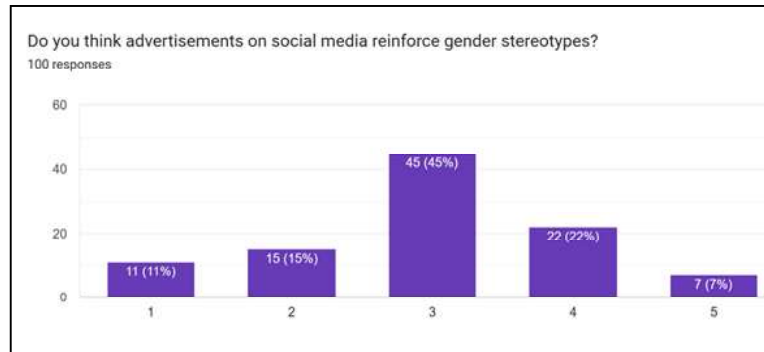


Figure 5

Figure 5 shows that 11 (11%) of respondents chose never, 15 (15%) rarely, 45 (45%) sometimes, 22 (22%) often, and 7 (7%) always felt that advertisements on social media reinforce gender stereotypes.

Table 6: Offended by an advertisement on social media due to its portrayal of gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	21	21
Rarely	20	20
Sometimes	29	29
Often	21	21
Always	9	9

Table 6 shows that 21 (21%) of respondents never felt offended by social media ads due to gender portrayal, 20 (20%) rarely, 29 (29%) sometimes, 21 (21%) often, and 9 (9%) always felt offended.

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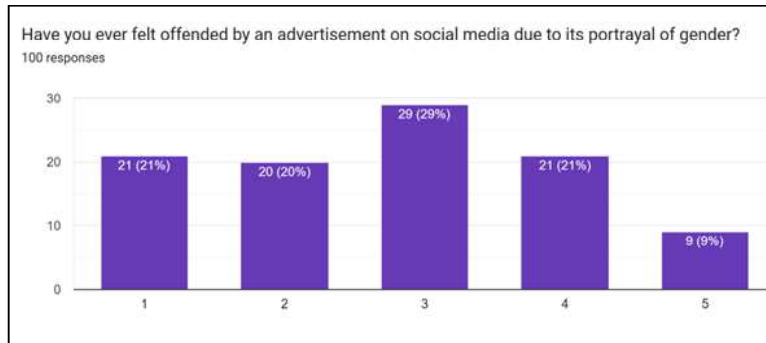


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that 21 (21%) of respondents never felt offended by social media ads due to gender portrayal, 20 (20%) rarely, 29 (29%) sometimes, 21 (21%) often, and 9 (9%) always felt offended.

Table 7: Advertisements on social media influence the perception of gender roles

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	47	47
No	25	25
Maybe	28	28

Table 7 shows that 47 (47%) of respondents believe social media advertisements influence perceptions of gender roles, 25 (25%) disagree, and 28 (28%) are uncertain.

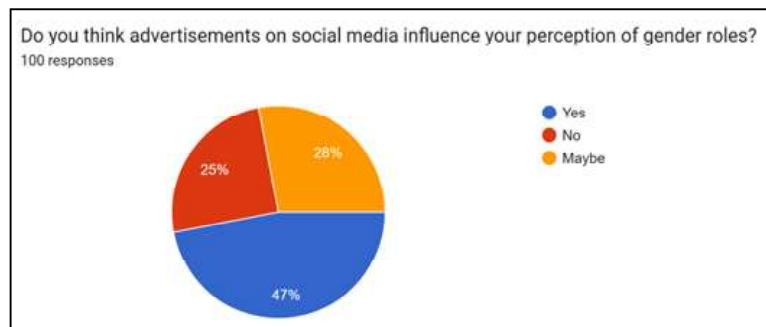


Figure 7

Figure 7 shows that 47 (47%) of respondents believe social media advertisements influence perceptions of gender roles, 25 (25%) disagree, and 28 (28%) are uncertain.

Table 8: Advertisements on social media influence your purchasing decisions

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	5	5
Rarely	10	10
Sometimes	21	21
Often	33	33
Always	31	31

Table 8 shows that 5 (5%) of respondents never, 10 (10%) rarely, 21 (21%) sometimes, 33 (33%) often, and 31 (31%) always felt influenced by advertisements.

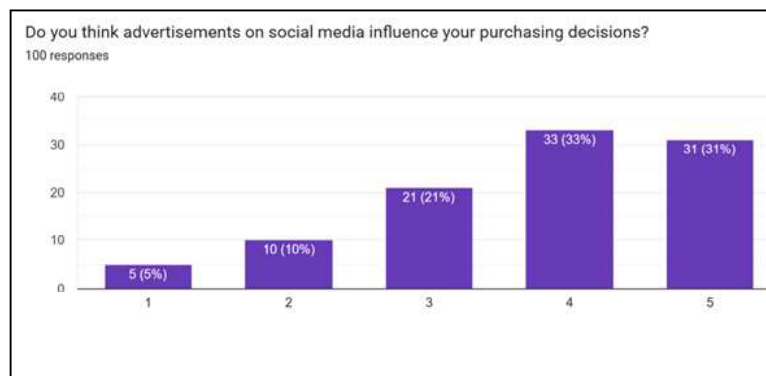


Figure 8

Figure 8 shows that 5 (5%) of respondents never, 10 (10%) rarely, 21 (21%) sometimes, 33 (33%) often, and 31 (31%) always felt influenced by advertisements.

Table 9: Shared an advertisement on social media because you found it empowering or relatable to your gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	40
No	44	44
Maybe	16	16

Table 9 shows that 40 (40%) of respondents shared an advertisement on social media because they found it empowering or relatable to their gender, 44 (44%) did not, and 16 (16%) were uncertain.

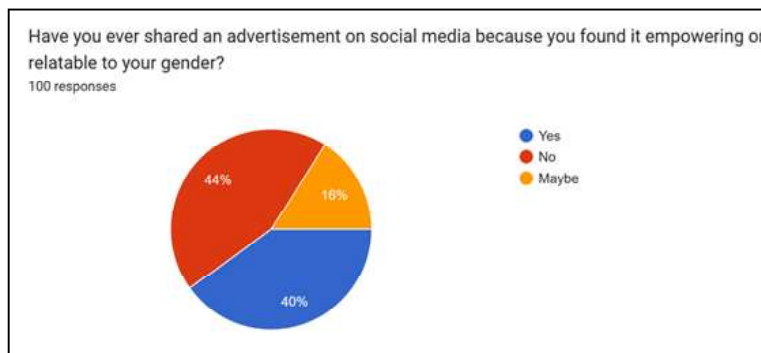


Figure 9

Figure 9 shows that 40 (40%) of respondents shared an advertisement on social media because they found it empowering or relatable to their gender, 44 (44%) did not, and 16 (16%) were uncertain.

Table 10: Advertisements on social media should represent a diverse range of genders

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	73	73
No	9	9
Maybe	18	18

Table 10 shows that 73 (73%) of respondents believe social media ads should represent diverse genders, 9 (9%) disagree, and 18 (18%) are uncertain.

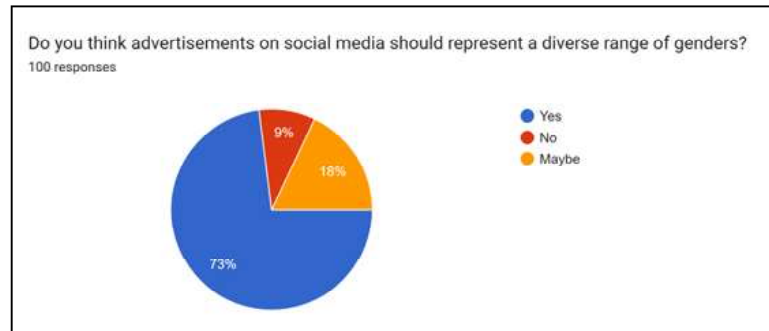


Figure 10

Figure 10 shows that 73 (73%) of respondents believe social media ads should represent diverse genders, 9 (9%) disagree, and 18 (18%) are uncertain.

Table 11: Advertisements on social media should challenge traditional gender roles

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	11	11
Rarely	7	7
Sometimes	24	24
Often	26	26
Always	32	32

Table 11 shows that 11 (11%) of respondents chose never, 7 (7%) rarely, 24 (24%) sometimes, 26 (26%) often, and 32 (32%) always believe social media ads should challenge traditional gender roles.

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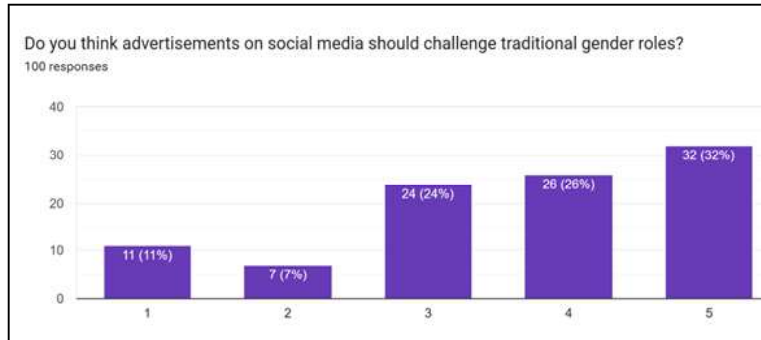


Figure 11

Figure 11 shows that 11 (11%) of respondents chose never, 7 (7%) rarely, 24 (24%) sometimes, 26 (26%) often, and 32 (32%) always believe social media ads should challenge traditional gender roles.

Table 12: Advertisements on social media should avoid using gender stereotypes

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	68	68
No	12	12
Maybe	20	20

Table 12 shows that 68 (68%) of respondents believe social media advertisements should avoid using gender stereotypes, 12 (12%) disagree, and 20 (20%) are unsure.

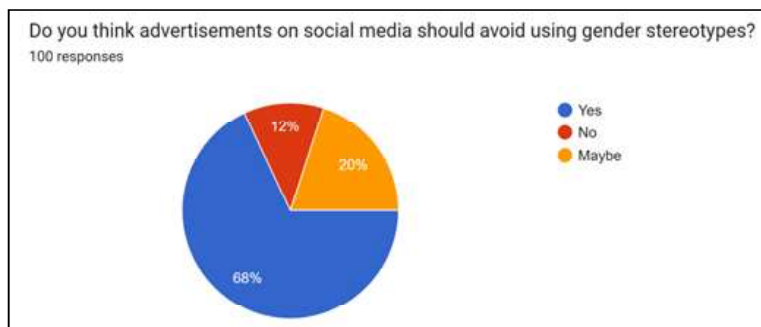


Figure 12

Figure 12 shows that 68 (68%) of respondents believe social media advertisements should avoid using gender stereotypes, 12 (12%) disagree, and 20 (20%) are unsure.

Table 13: Reported an advertisement on social media for its portrayal of gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	20
No	80	80

Table 13 shows that 20 (20%) of respondents reported an advertisement on social media for its portrayal of gender, while 80 (80%) did not.

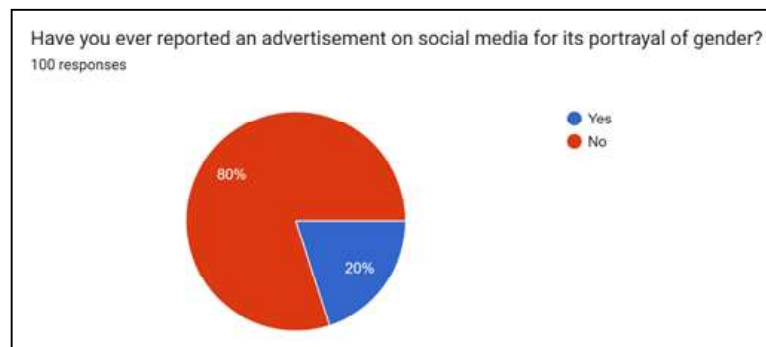


Figure 13

Figure 13 shows that 20 (20%) of respondents reported an advertisement on social media for its portrayal of gender, while 80 (80%) did not.

Table 14: Social media platforms should regulate advertisements that perpetuate gender stereotypes

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	69
No	31	31

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Table 14 shows that 69 (69%) of respondents believe social media platforms should regulate advertisements that perpetuate gender stereotypes, while 31 (31%) oppose such regulation.

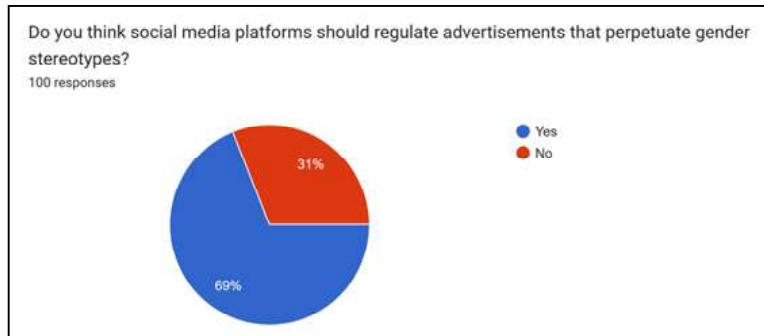


Figure 14

Figure 14 shows that 69 (69%) of respondents believe social media platforms should regulate advertisements that perpetuate gender stereotypes, while 31 (31%) oppose such regulation.

Table 15: Social media platforms should provide guidelines for advertisers to avoid gender stereotypes

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	80	80
No	20	20

Table 15 shows that 40 (40%) of respondents think social media platforms should provide guidelines for advertisers to avoid gender stereotypes, while 20 (20%) disagree.

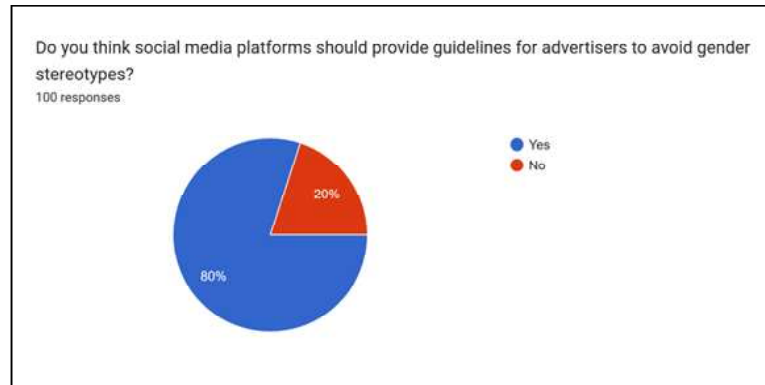


Figure 15

Figure 15 shows that 40 (40%) of respondents think social media platforms should provide guidelines for advertisers to avoid gender stereotypes, while 20 (20%) disagree.

Table 16: Social media platforms should prioritize advertisements that promote gender equality

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	89	89
No	11	11

Table 16 shows that 89 (89%) of respondents believe social media platforms should prioritize advertisements that promote gender equality, while 11 (11%) do not.

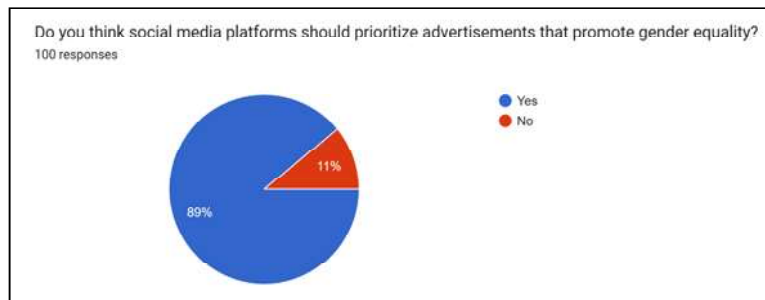


Figure 16

Exploring Perception of Gender Portrayals in Social Media

Figure 16 shows that 89 (89%) of respondents believe social media platforms should prioritize advertisements that promote gender equality, while 11 (11%) do not.

Table 17: Social media platforms should prioritize advertisements that represent a diverse range of gender.

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	69
No	14	14
Maybe	17	17

Table 17 shows that 69 (69%) of respondents believe social media platforms should prioritize ads representing diverse genders, 14 (14%) disagree, and 17 (17%) are unsure.

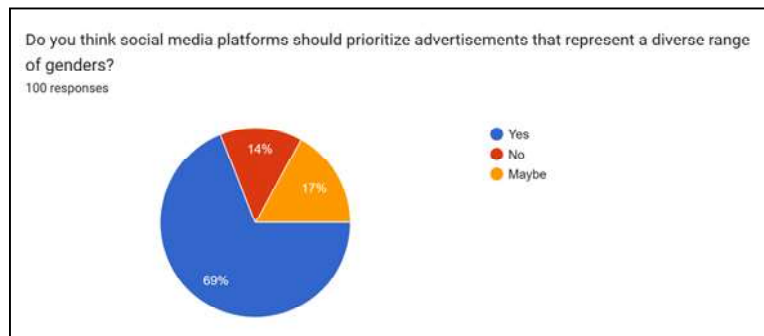


Figure 17

Figure 17 shows that 69 (69%) of respondents believe social media platforms should prioritize ads representing diverse genders, 14 (14%) disagree, and 17 (17%) are unsure.

Table 18: Social media platforms should prioritize advertisements that challenge traditional gender roles.

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	56	56
No	22	22
Maybe	22	22

Table 18 shows that 56 (56%) of respondents think social media platforms should prioritize ads challenging traditional gender roles, 22 (22%) disagree, and 22 (22%) are uncertain.

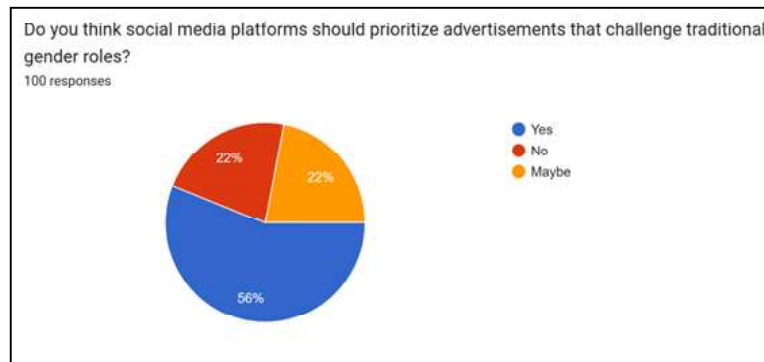


Figure 18

Figure 18 shows that 56 (56%) of respondents think social media platforms should prioritize ads challenging traditional gender roles, 22 (22%) disagree, and 22 (22%) are uncertain.

Table 19: Social media platforms should prioritize advertisements that avoid using gender stereotypes

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	66	66
No	13	13
Maybe	21	21

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Table 19 shows that 66 (66%) of respondents think social media platforms should prioritize ads that avoid gender stereotypes, 13 (13%) disagree, and 21 (21%) are uncertain.

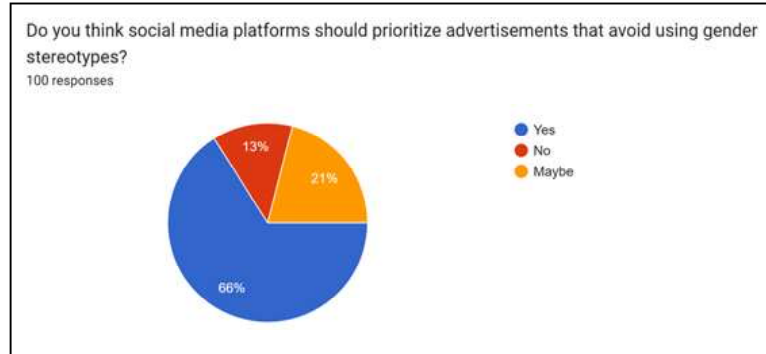


Figure 19

Figure 19 shows that 66 (66%) of respondents think social media platforms should prioritize ads that avoid gender stereotypes, 13 (13%) disagree, and 21 (21%) are uncertain.

Table 20: Social media platforms should be held accountable for the advertisements they allow on their platforms.

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	66	66
No	10	10
Maybe	24	24

Table 20 shows that 66 (66%) of respondents believe social media platforms should be held accountable for the advertisements they allow, 10 (10%) disagree, and 24 (24%) are unsure.

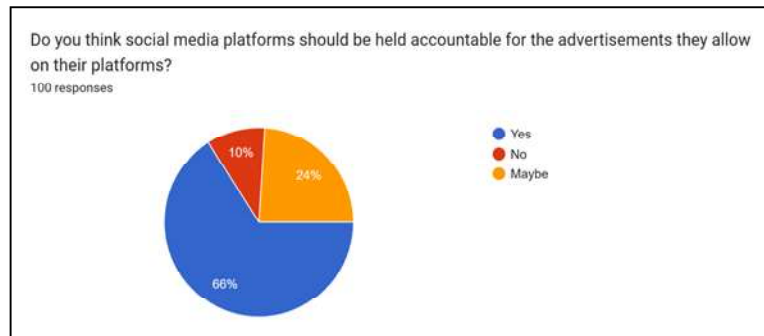


Figure 20

Figure 20 shows that 66 (66%) of respondents believe social media platforms should be held accountable for the advertisements they allow, 10 (10%) disagree, and 24 (24%) are unsure.

Conclusion

The study shows social media ads significantly influence gender perceptions, with 92% recently encountering ads, 40% seeing gender-targeted ads, and 45% sometimes noticing stereotypes, emphasizing the need for more inclusive advertising.

The study reveals divided views on gender portrayals in advertisements: 47% believe ads influence gender role perceptions, 25% disagree, and 28% are uncertain; 40% shared empowering ads, yet only 20% reported biased ones, showing awareness but limited action against stereotypes.

A strong preference for change is evident: 73% supporting diverse gender representation in ads, 68% wanting avoidance of stereotypes, 69% favouring regulation of biased ads, 66% holding platforms accountable, and 89% prioritizing ads promoting gender equality.

These findings highlight the crucial role advertisers and social media platforms have in promoting gender inclusivity by creating diverse, stereotype-free ads that foster a more equitable society.

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