

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE WOMEN WE SEE: EXPERIENCES OF GENDER AND DIVERSITY IN ADVERTISING IN LONDON'S PUBLIC SPACES

RESEARCH REPORT BY UCL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

The Mayor of London's #BehindEveryGreatCity campaign is focused on tackling gender inequality in and around London. Earlier this year, UCL was commissioned to carry out a study, exploring how women experience gender in London's out-of-home advertising.

'The Women We See' research collected the stories of 16 women (aged 21-65) and 22 teen girls (14-16) from a range of backgrounds to explore how they experience advertising content that they see in London's public spaces. A quantitative survey also captured the views of 2,012 women and men on gender and diversity in London's advertising.

While there have been some important positive changes in advertising content, the research found that gender equality and diversity in advertising remains a problem for all media channels across London. The Women We See report focuses specifically on the impact of out-of-home advertising and provides recommendations for advertisers on how to tackle this issue. The Women We See report recommends that advertisers tackle this issue by considering the intersecting issues of age, ability, culture, religious, ethnicity, gender and sexuality shaping Londoners' identities and experiences.

This research has been sponsored by Exterior Media and JCDecaux to help encourage brands and the advertising industry to create content which will engage more deeply with London's diverse audiences.

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of advertising is improving but more work is needed

- 49% of people feel the quality of public adverts has improved over the last few years
- Almost 1 in 2 Londoners find the adverts they see during their commute interesting (47%)
- Despite improvements, some 39% of Londoners feel badly represented in London advertising with less than one in three (27%) Londoners feeling that adverts are relevant to them. Furthermore, just 26% of women felt London's adverts were relevant to them
- The most problematic advertising platforms were ranked in order of concern: online (35%), TV (13%), newspapers (8%), public spaces i.e. billboards (8%), and public transport (7%).

Advertising in public spaces (OOH) cannot be avoided and must therefore be held to a high standard

- Advertising in public spaces was viewed differently than media consumed in private because it cannot be turned off or as easily ignored.
- Londoners want advertisements to represent London's diversity
- Participants listed the diversity of people and cultures in London as their second favourite aspect of the city (after activities/things to do)
- However, over half (51%) of BAME Londoners stated that their ethnicity is not well-represented in London's advertising – compared to a fifth (22%) of White Londoners
- Less than one in four (22%) think women in London adverts are culturally diverse
- Three in four (75%) think that adverts in London should reflect the diversity of the city's population
- Amongst the BAME groups, 71% of Black Londoners think that there are not enough Black people in London advertising; whilst 61% of British Asian/Asian Londoners think the same of Asian people.

Advertisements need to consider mobility/(dis)ability

- 18% of survey participants could recall seeing an advertisement featuring a disabled person and 65% of women and 51% of men said they did not see enough images of disabled people.

Age diversity is not well-represented in London adverts

- The group that feels the best represented in London are 18-34 year-old men (69%)
- Those who feel the least represented are women over the age of 55, with 55% of this group saying that they felt 'fairly badly' or 'very badly' represented
- Only 9% of over-55s feel that London adverts are relevant to them.

Advertisements need to include a range of sexual orientations

- Individuals from the LGBT community felt unrepresented and excluded as adverts lacked gender and sexual diversity or gender neutrality. Just 35% of LGBT Londoners said their sexuality is well represented in London's ads.

Lack of body size diversity continues to be a concern

- Women in this study feel more concerned over the lack of diversity in relation to their body size and shape in London adverts than men, with over half (51%) of the women saying their body shape is not represented in London adverts
- 52% felt that plus-size people are not represented enough.

Photoshopping is regarded as unacceptable

- Survey respondents were highly critical of the retouching and alteration of pictures, which was understood as an all too common practice
- Only a third (35%) of participants stated that photoshopping was acceptable, with more of the participants stating that it was unacceptable (42%). Over two thirds (69%) said that companies should state when they used photoshopped images.

The sexualisation of women and girls' bodies is inaccurate and unacceptable

- Participants were highly critical of products that used women's bodies to sell an unrelated product or that used sexualised slogans and taglines
- 68% of Londoners feel that women are often shown in revealing clothes when it's not relevant in London adverts. The sexualisation of women and indeed men was also the top answer given as to why respondents found advertisements inaccurate and unacceptable. Sexualised imagery of Black women was not seen as evidence of positive representation of diversity, but as something contributing to stereotypes of Black women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Londoners want advertisements to showcase diverse representations of race, culture, age, ability and religion
2. Londoners want to see diverse body types
3. Londoners want advertisers to stop photoshopping images or at the very least state when adverts are altered
4. Londoners want advertisements based on the product with realistic, useful and interesting information
5. Women like advertisements that use inclusive, positive humour
6. Londoners want more adverts that promote gender and sexual diversity

The Women We See report can be read in full at: www.london.gov.uk/the-women-we-see