

Washing away the stereotypes

Laundry/detergent brands, much like other segments, are increasingly challenging and subverting the archetypal gender stance in their ads, reflective of an evolving society

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EARLIER THIS YEAR, United Kingdom's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), in a bid to push the advertising and brand community to opt for gender accurate portrayal of sexes in ads, banned gender stereotyping in brand communication. In an official statement, Guy Parker, CEO, ASA, shared, "While advertising is only one of the many factors that contribute to unequal gender outcomes, tougher advertising standards can play an important role in tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for individuals, the economy and society as a whole."

Closer home in India too, certain categories have long been pitched to the women of the house, vying for the attention of the *bhabhiji* and *deviji* as societal norms dictated. Changing times, however, present opportunities where brands can start a conversation and either reflect the progressive side of society or be the catalyst of such a conversation, and go beyond aiming solutions solely at women.

What has been seen post Ariel's #ShareTheLoad campaign is a testament to that. From garnering global attention, attracting awards and starting a conversation in the Indian consumer segment, it has



conducted activations with in-store demos showing consumers how the task of doing laundry can be divided between family members. "From a marketing standpoint, we are trying to create extra audiences for us," he adds. For washing machines, Lloyd's consumers fall between the 25-44 year age group belonging to SEC A and B in tier II and tier III cities. It is a concept that the brand continues with and is willing to carry further into its future strategy as well. Havells is known for its gender inclusive advertising.

A gradual shift in thought at the consumer level is also helping in creating an environment for brands to attempt such conversations. Harish Bijoor, brand consultant and founder, Harish Bijoor Consults Inc shares three levels of consumers such advertising resonates with. One is men who are actually using washing machines themselves. Two, even if men aren't, in progressive families women are teaching their children to use a washing machine. In the third scenario, the woman is still using the washing machine but she vicariously wants the husband to start using the machine as well. "Since these three movements prevail, advertising which twists the gender roles is beneficial to the marketers because it engages all three segments," he says.

opened up the road for a debate. Another brand in the laundry space that has opted for challenging traditional gender roles exercised in most Indian homes is Lloyd, with an ad for its Unisex Washing Machine.

"The idea is to not make laundry a woman's-only job," explains Amit Tiwari, vice president — marketing, Havells India, Lloyd's parent company. "Typically, the purchase decision is made by females but share of wallet comes from males with the eventual usage of product falling on females. The intention was to bring males into the conversation. The campaign created curiosity about the product among men."

To push the concept forward, Lloyd

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Earlier in June, the Unstereotype Alliance was announced, co-formed by UN Women, Unilever and other companies including WPP, IPG, Facebook, Google, Mars, Microsoft and J&J, to discourage stereotypical portrayal of gender roles in advertising and to encourage positive reinforcement of true gender portrayals.

Now consider how HUL's Comfort Fabric Conditioner recently launched the *Chota Step, Badi Baat* campaign wherein a mother involves her young son in the process of washing clothes when he assumes that it is something only his elder sister has use of. "The current brand campaign is just one execution. Gender equality is part of the narrative but it is not the core idea we are putting across or basing the campaign on," clarifies Harshad Rajadhyaksha,



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chief creative officer, Ogilvy India, while explaining the campaign.

Kainaz Karmakar, chief creative officer, Ogilvy India further points out that for the current campaign, the product attributes align perfectly with the gender inclusive tone. "Comfort is an international brand. It falls under the 'unstereo-