

The Kantar logo is displayed in white, bold, uppercase letters against a dark blue background.

Changing the
advertising
narrative for good
with the
Unstereotype
Alliance

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Changing the advertising narrative for good with the Unstereotype Alliance

When last did you actively challenge your own unconscious bias and stereotypes? [Watch the following](#) and see whether you score among the 66% of our session attendees, who just couldn't unravel the riddle...

Continuing the inclusion, equality and diversity theme of our most recent episodes, we focus on the collective power of the Unstereotype Alliance. An industry-led initiative convened by UN Women to end harmful stereotypes often perpetuated through advertising, Unstereotype Alliance [first launched globally](#) at Cannes Lions in 2017. With the South African chapter [announced during Loeries Creative Week 2019](#) and [launched in February 2020](#), member Unilever shared tips on how to use advertising as a force for good, to lead society in breaking down bias by promoting equality and empowerment in the new era of progressive marketing.

[Fortune magazine](#) reports that the number of women running America's largest corporations has hit a new high, as 37 of the companies featured in the [latest Fortune 500](#) are CEOs. While the increase is certainly something to celebrate, there's clearly lots of work to still be done in levelling the playing field. Unfortunately, as the riddle challenge from our opening proves, stereotypes are still very much alive in most of us.

For example, Wave 7 of Kantar's [global C-19 barometer study](#), conducted among 100,000 individuals in 60+ markets, shows that discrimination and lack of opportunity based on gender, race, religion and disability is one of the top three current concerns in South Africa. As advertising has infiltrated all aspects of our lives, it's one of the main ways to address the issue. That's where UN Women's Unstereotype Alliance comes in.

Unpacking the Unstereotype Alliance's vision of an unstereotyped world

The Unstereotype Alliance feels collective action is the most powerful ingredient in the mix as not only a social imperative but a business one, too, as stereotyped ads have proven to be bad for business, while diversified teams generate better ideas.

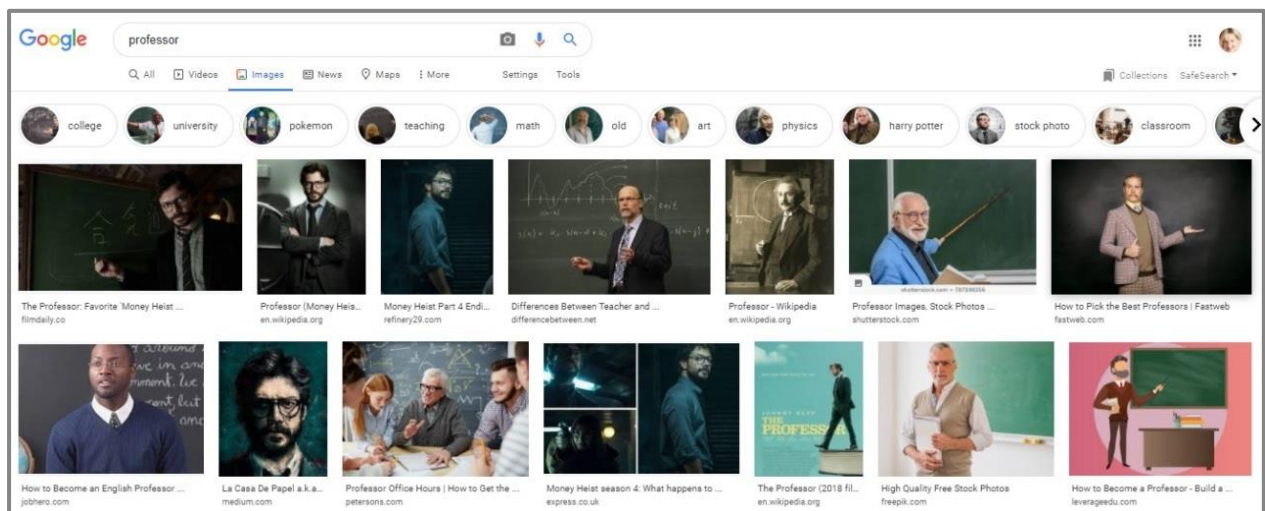
After all, research from ANA, Kantar and McKinsey reveals that brands that deliver progressive ads are associated with a higher purchase intent of more than 25% for all consumers; progressive advertising has 25% more impact and improves purchase intent by 18%; 70% of all brand purchasing decisions are made by women and 64% of all consumer spending is controlled by women, while 75% of women identify themselves as the primary shopper for their household.

In fact, if women played identical roles to men in the labour force – employed at the same rate, for the same number of hours, in the same industry sectors – this would add up to US\$28 trillion, or 26%, to global GDP by 2025. This impact would be roughly equivalent to the size of the combined Chinese and US economies today.

Once this hits home, we need to go beyond gender as the most obvious form of discrimination to also address intersectionality with race, class, age, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, language, education and other forms of discrimination.

Taking this further in pursuit of their mission, the Unstereotype Alliance believes that tangible global impact will only come from a clear understanding of each local market's social and cultural nuances; and through the commitment and actions of local creators – from brands and agencies to producers, advertising authorities and policy makers – coming together and agreeing to eliminate their country's advertising outputs from stereotypes.

Just run a Google Images search for 'professor' and chances are you'll see results lacking diversity:



But there are constant improvements underway. As a result of similar outcomes when 'CEO' is image searched, Google adapted its algorithm to ensure more diverse and inclusive results, a step in the right direction to change the narrative in society.

From #ProjectShowUs to #IsitOKforguys... How Unilever brands address stereotypes

As an Unstereotype Alliance member and champion, Unilever asserts that unconscious bias is important to acknowledge, as it lies beneath the stereotypes we enforce. As they're the product of our life experiences, remember that everything feeds us signals, from early interactions with the world around us to the bedtime stories our parents read to us and the TV shows we choose to watch. What lesson are we teaching and biases are we instilling in our children as a result? You simply cannot be what you cannot see. Luckily, storybook hero Nancy Drew was born quite early in the equality journey back in the 1930s. Raised by her father, this storyline showed that women can be strong, intelligent and adventurers and men can be primary care givers to children. But true equality goes beyond gender as identity is multi-faceted.

Women feel misunderstood and unfairly represented in SA, especially single black women, due to layers of stereotyping. Brands' daily work is therefore to be more progressive and challenge stereotypes in society.

Unilever's most commonly referenced work in this regard is from Dove, which strives to use real, un-Photoshopped, diverse representations of beauty. The [Project #ShowUs](#) campaign is another step in the right direction. In partnership with Girlgaze and Getty Images, over 5,000 images are now available, offering a more inclusive vision of beauty including non-binary, available to all media and advertisers.

Dove's Men+Care has also been progressive in shattering harmful male stereotypes, showing how male role models like Springboks captain Siya Kolisi also shine out of the spotlight by getting creative when caring for their children with the [#DadsCare](#) campaign. Axe takes this further in showing how brands can transform. The original Axe advertising may well have been focused on helping you 'get the girl', but their mission has become more progressive over the years, with their more recent work like ['is it OK for guys'](#) showing more diverse representations that challenge the harmful toxic masculinity in society today.



The good, the bad and the ugly: A view of women in advertising in SA

So, how are women portrayed in advertising? We know that 52.7% of South Africans are female and 48% of South African GDP is contributed by women (despite earning 27% less than men).

Unfortunately, not being progressive means marketers are reinforcing rather than helping eradicate harmful gender-based stereotypes. Both genders should be fairly represented, yet household and personal care ads are largely tested among females, with alcoholic drink ads tested among males – further perpetuating stereotypes.

So, we need to put more care into showing we truly understand all people, because just being present in ads is not enough. Targeting need also not be gender-exclusive. We need to better represent everyone in ads that have impact.

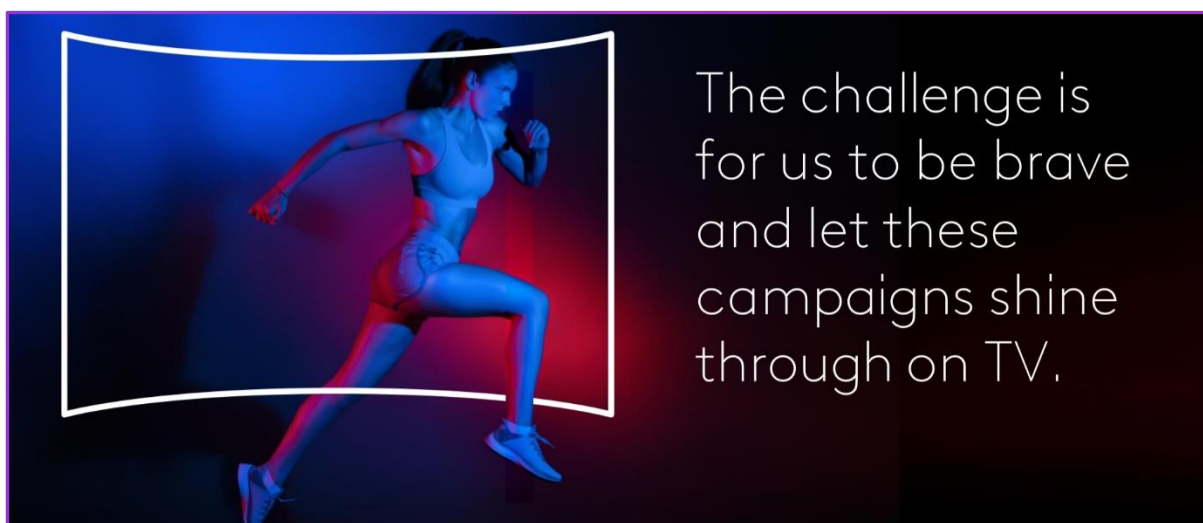


[Kantar's Best-Liked Ads of 2019](#), rated as the best liked by the South African audience whom we believe to be the most important critic – the person who ultimately chooses to buy your brand or not – serve this purpose. Analysis shows that a male-skew across most of the Top 20 as many of the ads followed Rugby World Cup themes. But swaying to its own creative beat is the Best-Liked Ad overall for 2019, Sasol's nostalgia-rich [‘This isn't just any fuel, #ThisIsGlugGlug’](#) by FCB Joburg.

This creative work shatters existing car and energy industry advertising stereotypes by focusing on a little girl making the world a better place, proving that you can definitely create stories with great impact without playing to harmful tropes.

Despite this success, and the fact that TV still has the biggest reach in South Africa, we're seeing more progressive advertising in digital and print than we are in TV.

It definitely takes courage to transform a brand identity and become a force for good in society but the distinguishing factor in creating this change is critical mass. Get involved in creating the world that we want to see. Let's all work together to tell better stories that provide inspiring role models for all.



[Stand together](#) with the Unstereotype Alliance as a member or ally, [register here](#) to download all decks shared in the #InsightsinAction series and [watch our eNCA interview](#) on the importance of progressive marketing.