

KANTAR

CONNECTING WITH MEN

How brands can **decode modern masculinity**



WHY DOES MASCULINITY MATTER TO BRANDS?

Men today face their own identity challenges, as they navigate changing societal expectations and grapple with outdated stereotypes. There is a crisis of masculinity, especially among younger people. And men of all ages and sexual orientations are demanding more nuanced and authentic reflections of themselves.

Brands have traditionally gone down the easy route in how they portray men. And the reality is that in today's world, not all brands are keeping up with who men really are.

This report explores how by breaking stereotypes and portraying men positively, brands can make stronger connections, predispose more people, and promote social change.

The data in this study draws on insights from Kantar's Brand Inclusion Index, Kantar's ad testing database and a qualitative analysis of advertising in Brazil, Thailand, Türkiye and the US.



WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MEN?

Society and culture define masculinity, giving us direction about what behaviours and qualities men perform and hold. Ideals of masculinity shape men's roles at home, at work, and in public, and what is considered appropriately 'masculine' has always been defined in opposition to feminine qualities. Historically this depiction has often been monolithic – offering a very narrow range of attributes and behaviours that are expected of men. This is being challenged, negotiated, and disrupted more than ever. And in fact, masculinities should be talked about in the plural, because there is no one way to behave.

There's so much at play. Masculinities are changing due to evolving gender norms that recognise a spectrum of identities, greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships, and an intersectional approach that considers race, age, and class. Society is challenging that men need to be in a certain way. In fact, a quarter of Gen Z men in the US now identify as either equally masculine or feminine or very feminine. That's three times more than Boomers (Kantar US MONITOR). But what is expected of men today is often contradictory, making it difficult for men to know how to behave or which role models to follow.



EXTREME EXPECTATIONS OF MEN ARE IN CONFLICT WITH ONE ANOTHER

Not showing weakness



Permission to be vulnerable

Strength is physical



Now also strength of character

Confidence is overt in how you look, assert and express yourself



Now *also* more inherent – confidence at work, how you feel in yourself and how you show up as a partner, father or friend

Traditional gender roles



Pushing gender boundaries



HOW DO MEN FEEL?

Many men, especially younger ones, are struggling. According to UN Women's Gender Equality Attitudes study, men are more likely to hold stereotypical views of gender roles spanning all areas of life (home, work and public) while young women act as advocates for change and proponents of gender equality:

- **More than one in three young men (aged 16-19) still think that men should be paid more than women for the same job.**
- **Almost half of men aged 16-29 think men make better political leaders than women (Gender Equality Attitudes Study, UN Women).**
- **More than half of men aged 16-34 say women should work less and dedicate more time to caring for their families.**
- **Male employees in the US, especially younger ones, feel left behind by gender equality initiatives in the workplace (Kantar US MONITOR).**

THE TATE OF THE NATION

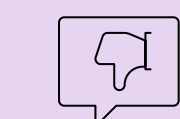
As society struggles with negotiating and affirming modern masculinity, toxic role models have risen to prominence on social media and gained broad appeal. Andrew Tate, former kickboxer and 'manosphere' commentator is a symptom and a symbol of the current crisis of masculinity. Although banned on most social media platforms, his content still circulates online via fan accounts.

In 2022, X (Twitter) reinstated his account, giving him a platform to share his (self-confessed) misogyny directly. Since then, Tate has gained over 10 million followers. However, while his output is prolific, engagement levels have fallen drastically. This could be a signal that his follower base has diversified to include those who follow him to track what he says, rather than those who agree with his views.

ANDREW TATE ON X

YOY change
(October 2023-24 vs October 2022-23)

 **-42% likes**

 **-27% reposts**

Source: Brandwatch (Andrew Tate's X profile)

HOW MEN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BRANDS IS CHANGING

Men have always been visible in advertising and the media, but the roles they portray have often failed to reflect the diversity of this group. According to the Unstereotype Alliance's State of the Industry 2023, 67% of men in ads are under the age of 40.

Today, men look for more nuanced and authentic reflections of themselves. Our 2024 Brand Inclusion Index revealed that 10% of men felt negatively about how they were represented in advertising in the past twelve months.

Diving deep into the data reveals the importance of intersectionality: young men and men identifying as LGBTQ+ feel less represented by advertising and report higher rates of negative feeling towards their portrayal.

So men are challenging advertisers to do better – improving inclusivity and diversifying the contexts and roles men are shown in. We asked them to tell us how:

As someone with indigenous heritage, I find it off-putting that the only advertisements with indigenous peoples in them are with full indigenous outfits and not normal clothes. Most of us wear normal clothes.

23-year-old man, indigenous, with disability

Use more local content and locals in creating your advert.

32-year-old man, Nigeria

Please do not discriminate against anyone. In any case, we are human and we should all be well.

35-year-old man, Mexico

Make Advertising that show More Dark Black people in better roles as opposed to the Fixation with light skinned people as images of success.

49-year old man with disability, Kenya

Most brands use Africans with a lighter skin complexion, they must use Africans with all kinds of complexion to prevent discrimination.

25-year-old man, Kenya

I think it would be better not to portray an overly formulaic family structure.

71-year-old man, low-income, Japan

Source: Kantar Brand Inclusion Index 2024

HOW DO MEN FEEL THEY ARE REPRESENTED BY ADVERTISING?

Negative feeling about representation in ad

16%

Gen Z (18-27)

16%

Millennials (28-43)

7%

Gen X (44 -59)

3%

Boomers (60-78)

1%

Post War (79+)

20%

LGBTQ+

8%

Non-LGBTQ+

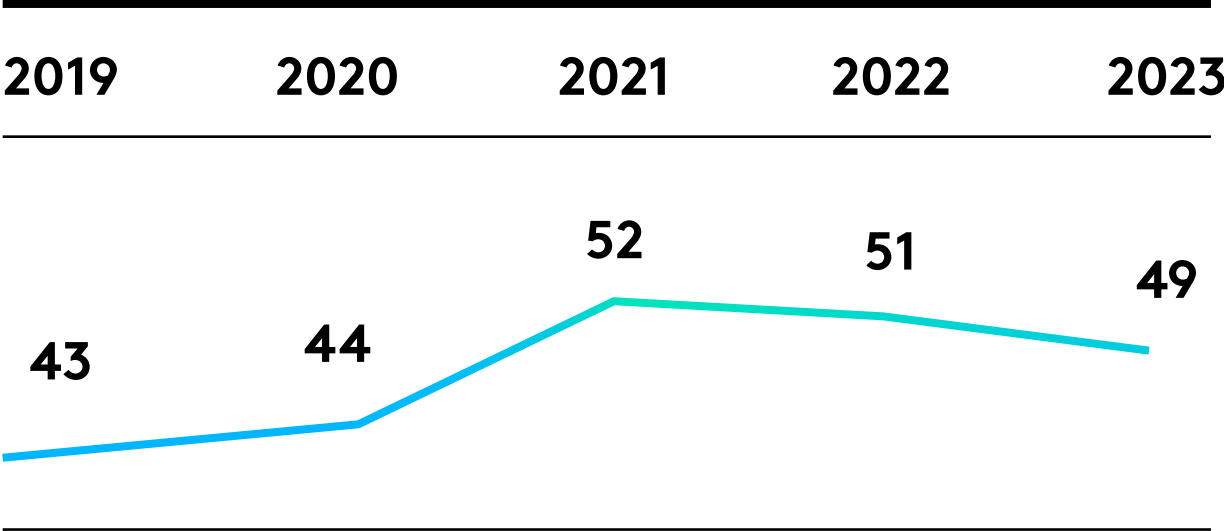
Source: Kantar Brand Inclusion Index 2024

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Representation by itself isn't sufficient. Brands and organisations must also be more intentional. The Unstereotype Alliance reported that in 2020, 72% of people globally believe the media represents men in conventional roles: providers, leaders, or businessmen. This was only 52% two years earlier. Although these portrayals might not seem overtly negative,

the use of stereotypes reduces relatability, imposes unrealistic ideals and ultimately hampers the formation of genuine connections with men. Specifically in advertising we see that positive portrayal of men has stalled in recent years.

Gender Unstereotype Metric - Male (average percentile)



Source: Kantar LINK database

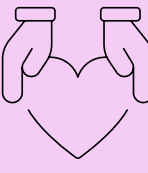
Masculinity matters to marketers because advertising is part of the cultural fabric, shaping what we think of as masculine. By portraying men positively and challenging stereotypes, brands can build stronger connections and promote positive social change. In turn, engaging more men in better ways help predispose

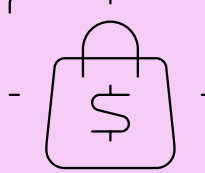
a brand to more people and subsequently drive growth.

It's simple business: ads which perform well on the Male Gender Unstereotype Metric, which captures whether portrayals of men set a good example for others, are predicted to deliver greater ROI in the short and long term.

PORTRAYING MEN POSITIVELY DELIVERS GREATER ROI

Difference in average percentile for ads in the top quartile and bottom quartile on the Male Gender Unstereotype Metric

 **Brand equity (Demand Power)**
+37

 **Short term sales likelihood (STSL)**
+21

Kantar uses two composite metrics to predict the effectiveness of creative in both the short term and the long term. The STSL is validated in driving sales and the Demand Power Score provides a validated prediction of an ad's potential to build equity in the longer term.

ARE YOU MISSING OUT ON THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE MALE AUDIENCES?

So what makes a connection with male audiences meaningful – and are you even engaging with them in the first place?

The reality is that the advertising industry still operates under the assumption that men and women play traditional, heteronormative roles at home and at work. Kantar’s LINK ad testing database reveals that in several traditionally gendered categories, the majority of creative testing only asks the opinion of women – hardly a route to success with the other 50% of the population.

AD TESTING TARGET SAMPLES BY GENDER

	Mixed gender	Women only	Men only
Financial services	98%	1%	1%
Pet care	95%	4%	1%
Automotive	88%	0%	11%
Drink	81%	14%	4%
Food	79%	20%	1%
Apparel	72%	24%	4%
Baby care and food	24%	76%	0%
Home care	15%	85%	0%
Personal care	12%	81%	8%

Source: Kantar LINK database

Stereotypes affect people in more than one way. They shape expectations and can become self-fulfilling prophecies – like parents telling children that ‘big boys don’t cry’. People feel pressured to fit the ‘ideal’ projected onto them – so when brands tell the world that only women make the buying decision in their category, it only alienates men further.

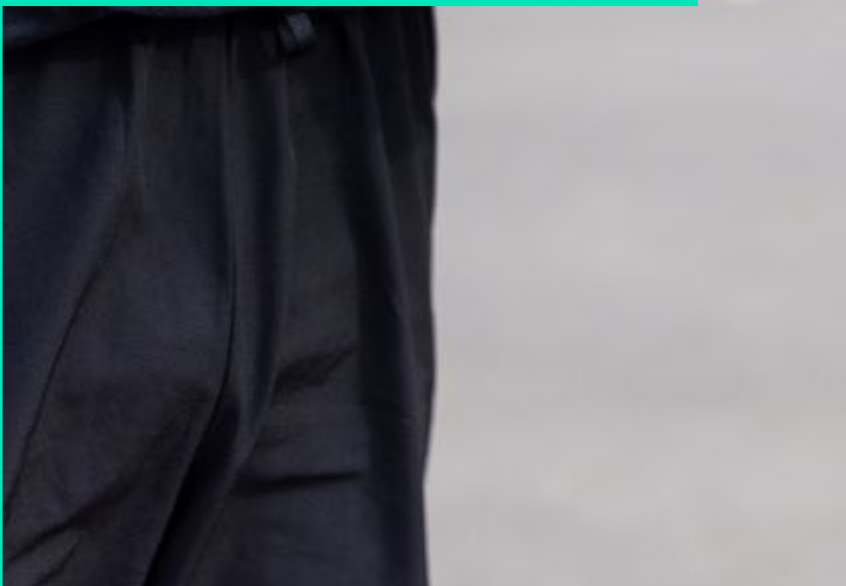
Tackling this doesn’t mean creating ‘gendered’ creative and media strategies that are only geared to men. In fact, positive portrayals of men increase a brand’s chances of creative success with women too.

It’s high time marketers and advertisers asked themselves: is my market really as gender-specific as I say it is, or am I missing out the chance to predispose more people and grow my brand?

POSITIVE PORTRAYAL OF MEN INCREASES CREATIVE POTENTIAL AMONG ALL AUDIENCES

Average percentile for ads that are in the top quartile on the Male Gender Unstereotype Metric

	Mixed samples	Men only samples	Women only samples
Brand equity (Demand Power)	84	82	86
Short term sales effect/ likelihood	76	77	78



SPOTLIGHT ON CATEGORIES

THE HOUSEHOLD MYTH

Globally, women spend more time than men on household chores. And they spend an average of 2.8 extra hours per week than men on unpaid care and domestic work, according to [UN Women](#). But there are also rising numbers of men living alone. Yet only 15% of research in the home care category, which includes household cleaners and laundry products, takes men's perspectives into account for creative optimisation. In some markets, like India, it's as low as 3%.

But this does not justify the absence of men in creative strategies for home care products - nor will a lack of representation help move the needle.

BABY PRODUCTS

"Caring for babies has nothing to do with dads." It sounds shocking, but Kantar's LINK ad testing database shows that more than three in four baby brands plan their creative strategy with this idea at heart.

The European Institution for Gender Equality states that fathers' involvement in childcare is improving. For example, the UK has seen a 34% increase in stay-at-home dads managing childcare and household duties since COVID-19. Men's prominent presence in ads and portrayals of caring personalities consistently lead to men being seen as positive role models, making the lack of male presence in this category a missed opportunity.

If you believe that brands have a responsibility to use their investment power for good, brands should also advocate for change. Home and baby care brands have a huge opportunity to contribute to positive change in the gender gap observed in domestic care. Many brands have an opportunity to predispose more people - but only if they speak directly to them.





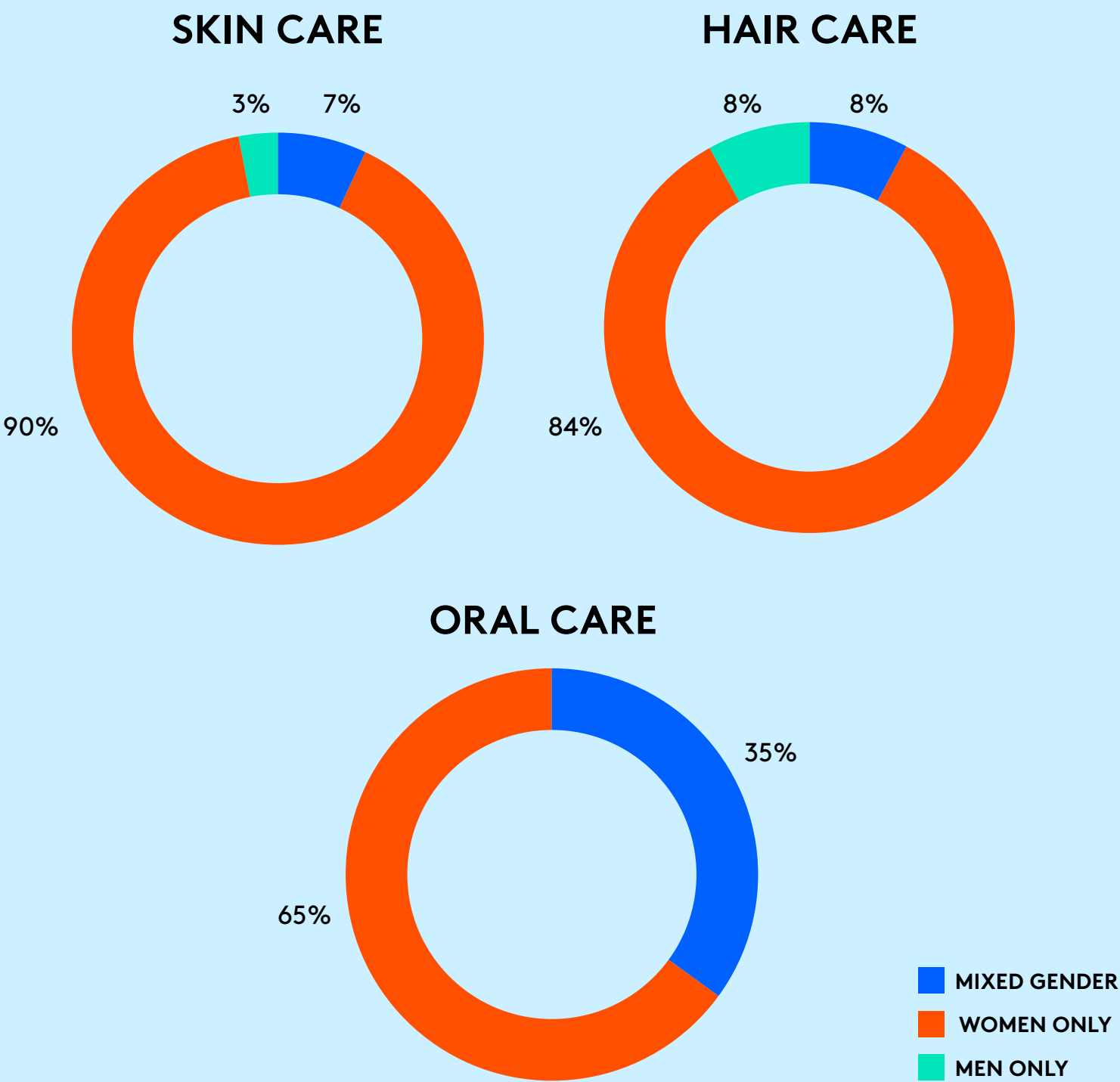
PERSONAL CARE

Traditionally perceived as gender-specific, personal care products have most often been targeted at women. And when the majority of ad testing is conducted with women, most ads end up featuring women.

And men have hair, take showers, blow their nose. Many men, especially those under 35, are spending increasing amounts of time on personal care (Kantar Worldpanel). Yet instead of expanding their targeting to a male audience, brands have channelled their time and energy into formulating male versions of genderless products – from tissues to moisturisers. This introduces limitations in the variety of personal care products marketed to men – reinforcing the notion that this isn’t a category for them and shutting down opportunities for brands to grow within that demographic.

The exclusion of men from creative and media strategies is more evident in product categories that are overtly gender-labelled, such as skincare. This is also found in products not exclusively aimed at women, like oral care.

AD TESTING TARGET SAMPLES BY GENDER



Source: Kantar LINK database



WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

To uncover ways for brands to build more meaningful connections with male audiences, we looked at ads where men are seen as positively portrayed.

To deepen our understanding of which images of men contribute to positive perceptions of masculinity, our qualitative experts analysed the top quartile of ads

in the Gender Unstereotype Metric in Brazil, Thailand, Türkiye, and the US – four countries with very different cultural norms around masculinity.

Using what we know from LINK+ and our qualitative research, we identified three ways that men can be portrayed positively, as inspiration.

TOP 5 DRIVERS OF ADVERTISING THAT DRIVES “A POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE MALE CHARACTER THAT SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS”

2023	2022	2021	2020
Male on screen 50% or more	Male - Caring	Male - Caring	Male - Caring
Most prominent - equal	Most prominent - equal	Most prominent - equal	Most prominent - equal
Male - Caring	Male on screen 50% or more	Male - Aspirational	Male - Aspirational
VO gender - male	Male - Aspirational	Male on screen 50% or more	Ethnic Origin & Skin Colour diversity
Male - Aspirational	Male in non traditional role	Male - Confident	Male in non traditional role

Source: Kantar LINK database

BRAZIL

Brazilian consumers like seeing men involved in household activities with elements of playfulness and creativity, as opposed to sacrifice or laborious effort.

TÜRKİYE

Turkish consumers want to see men actively participating in family activities, whether at home or outdoors, representing a modern, caring, and involved image.

US

In the US, audiences lean towards ads which portray both genders positively. This aligns with the local inclination towards family-oriented advertising.

THAILAND

In Thailand, people value seeing both men and women represented equally in the kitchen, with men appearing as caring and supportive figures.



SHOW EMOTIONAL PRESENCE

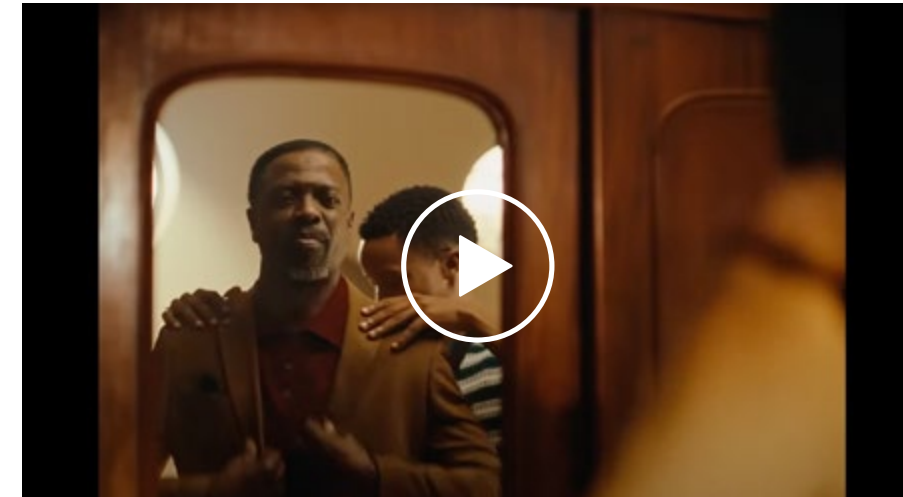
In the last four years, one of the most influential characteristics when it comes to positive portrayals of men has been 'caring', according to Kantar LINK database. And a common image observed across our four markets was men shown as present and engaged in a family context.

Audiences appreciate seeing men express their emotions in different contexts. While family settings are often used to depict this, brands have numerous other opportunities to connect with men through genuine and emotionally engaged representations.



Mitre 10 - New Zealand
'With You All The Way'

Participative brotherhood' is a form of how men can show up as emotionally present, beyond just family context. Kantar's Creative Effectiveness Award TV winner, Mitre 10 in New Zealand, shows a bonding moment, through men embracing and appreciating help.



Cadbury Dairy Milk - South Africa
'First Date - for your date'

Cadbury Dairy Milk won Kantar Creative Effectiveness Awards for two distinct ads in separate markets. Although each featured a unique storyline, they shared a common theme: caring, warm, and engaged male figures.



Cadbury Dairy Milk - Canada
'Garage 30s Digital'



Bosch - Spain
'Live sustainable #LikeABosch'

Emotional presence doesn't have to be limited to a social context. For example, Bosch's Creative Effectiveness Award-winning TV advert 'Live sustainable #LikeABosch' shows men enjoying themselves as they care for their homes, but not in the 'helper' role we are used to seeing in similar scenarios.



MEN, AUTHENTICALLY THEMSELVES

'Aspirational' is another trait driving positive portrayals, according to LINK+. But what is an aspirational man? It's not just the corny closing of a business deal. It's about men who embrace their true selves, expressing freely without being confined to societal stereotypes. They're not just aspirational, they're inspiring.

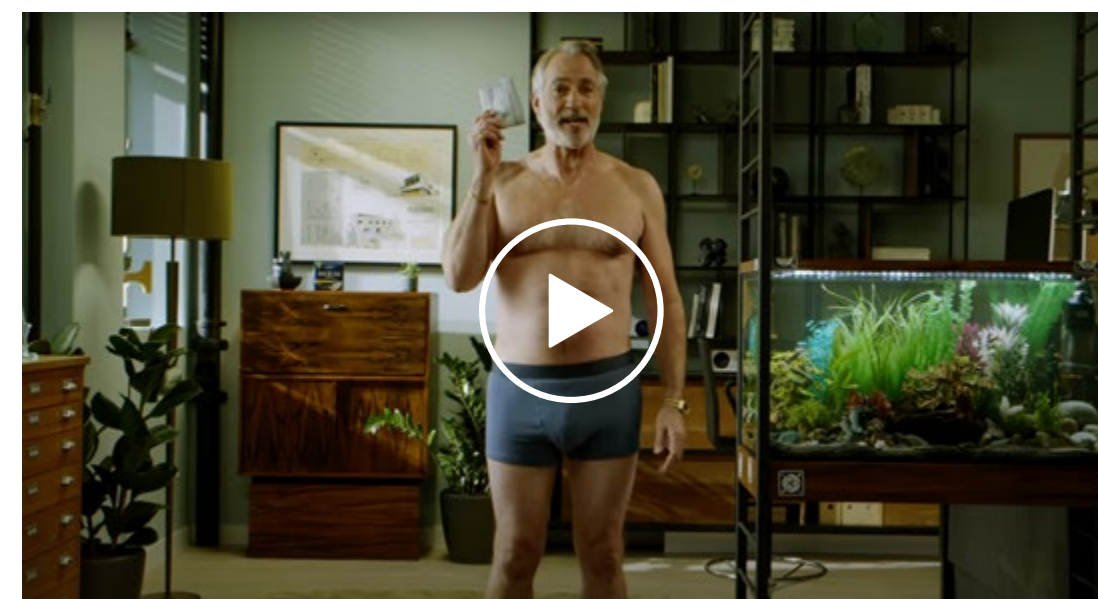


SodaStream - Poland **'SodaStream Uwolnij Swój Potencjał'**

Kantar Creative Effectiveness Awards digital/social winner
SodaStream features a male character freely expressing himself, without fitting into the traditional boundaries of masculinity.

TENA Men - UK **'TENA Men Legend 30s'**

Humour can be a great way to portray authenticity and confidence. The Kantar Creative Effectiveness Awards winning digital/social ad by TENA Men uses humour to address the sensitive issue of male incontinence through the personality of the male protagonist.



BRAZIL

In Brazil people appreciate seeing men taking care of their health and appearance as well as narratives of 'being a better man', personal growth, effort and dedication.

TÜRKIYE

Men in Türkiye face societal pressure to be strong, successful, and capable providers. Brands have an opportunity to support them through empathetic modern and cooperative portrayals of men overcoming hardships with the help of other people.

THAILAND

Thai audiences are open to portrayals of men who are more feminine (partially thanks to the influence of K-drama actors, similar to other markets in the region). There, audiences are accepting of men in less conventionally masculine clothing, as fashion is seen as genderless.



MEN, SHOWING UP FOR THEMSELVES

Sometimes it's as simple as creative ads which depict men practicing self-care; pampering themselves, tending to their emotional or physical wellbeing, or simply doing things they enjoy.

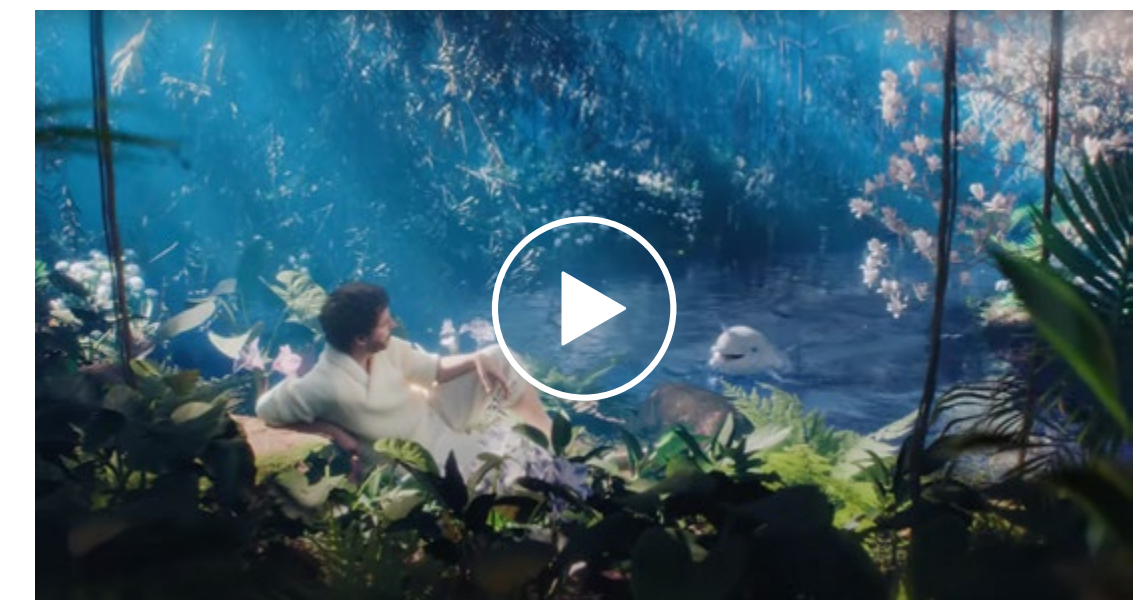


Viennetta - China **'Y2022 Viennetta Golden Stick'**

Kantar Creative Effectiveness Awards digital winner Viennetta took a different approach in China, showing an example of masculinity that might traditionally be considered more feminine in Western societies, to strongly promotes physical self-care and indulgence.

CeraVe - US **'Michael CeraVe'**

'Michael CeraVe for CeraVe' was awarded nine Lions this year at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity. Choosing a male celebrity not usually linked to ideas of self-care was an innovative choice for a personal care brand. Michael Cera's genuine and witty presentation as he narrates the product's benefits deviates from conventional masculinity and was well received by the US audience.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR BRANDS?

Brands need to be keenly aware of the evolution of masculinities and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly. By acknowledging their existing and potential audiences beyond stereotypes, and via intentional portrayals of men in a positive, inclusive light, brands can predispose more people and forge meaningful connections, while driving positive societal change.

Creative and media strategies that break stereotypes don't just lead to better resonance among men. They can enhance overall marketing effectiveness and elevate brand value.

- Remember: masculinity is not a monolith. There is no 'one man' to represent them all.
- Keep in my mind that avoiding gender stereotyping is both a social and commercial imperative.
- Build better connections with men through inclusive strategies without exclusive-to-men communications.
- Test your creative without gender bias baked in.
- Avoid gender stereotypes, or you will limit your opportunities to predispose more people to your brand.

GET IN TOUCH

We'd love to talk to you about how we can help you apply these and other best practices to your own advertising, so that you create campaigns that are progressive, inclusive and better for your business. Visit [Kantar.com](https://www.kantar.com) to find out more and get in touch.

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