

# Navigating the Language Labyrinth: Evaluating the Impact of Communication Strategies in Anti-Gender Pay Gap Campaigns

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## ABSTRACT

This study delves into the paradox of gender pay gap awareness campaigns run by the advertising and media industry, while the industry itself grapples with significant gender-based wage disparities. These disparities prevail despite the recognized societal and economic detriments of discrimination, particularly in the workforce. This research critically examines the design, content, and language of anti-gender pay gap campaigns, focusing on a specific case of the JWT campaign in the UK. Employing a methodological approach that analyzes both, the campaign's content and the social media reactions to the campaign, our investigation reveals inherent biases that may compromise the campaigns' effectiveness. Furthermore, we contend that the inclusion of content bordering on misogyny in campaigns aimed at anti-gender discrimination awareness raises ethical concerns. This study contributes valuable insights to the discourse on media studies by highlighting the intricacies and potential pitfalls within campaigns addressing gender-based wage disparities.

**KEYWORDS:** gender, pay gap, JWT campaign, discrimination in media

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are numerous studies across disciplines showing that paid work has a definite gender perspective. Every aspect of employment opportunity, upward movement and wage generation is affected by the gender of workers. The existence and perpetuation of gender wage gap against women is an agreed upon proposition and it is now no more disputed in the academic community that all economies including the developed ones are plagued with the problem of Gender Wage Gap and that women are the sufferers. Interestingly however, there exists evidence of Gender Wage Gap being disconnected from feminism in the social arena.

We witness efforts both in rhetoric as well as substantial, where intention of the society, state and corporation, as expressed, is to minimize the Gender Wage Gap but the efforts fail to yield fruitful results. For instance, rhetorically, the UK has expressed a commitment to addressing the Gender Wage Gap through legislative measures and corporate initiatives. For instance, the Equality Act 2010 and subsequent regulations mandate companies with 250 or more employees to report their gender pay gap. Other rhetorical examples highlighting the UK's commitment to addressing the Gender Wage Gap can be found in the public statements emphasizing the importance of gender equality and reducing the wage gap made by the politicians and policy makers, in various campaigns and awareness initiatives, both by government bodies and non-profit organizations, that aim to highlight the issue of the Gender Wage Gap. In the concerns for gender equality and the reduction of the Gender Wage Gap in their CSR messaging of companies While this reflects a commitment in rhetoric, the challenge lies in translating these statements into concrete, measurable actions within the organizations. As also in efforts to break down gender stereotypes in education aim to influence future workforce dynamics and reduce occupational segregation.

Media often covers issues related to the Gender Wage Gap, providing a platform for discussions and debates. This rhetorical emphasis helps keep the topic in public consciousness, pressuring both the government and private sector to address the issue. While these rhetorical expressions demonstrate a societal commitment to gender equality, the effectiveness of these statements relies on translating them into tangible actions and policies that lead to substantive change in the workplace. To this end substantial efforts have also been made to address the Gender Wage Gap, like The UK introduced regulations requiring companies with 250 or more employees to report their gender pay gap. This policy aims to enhance transparency and encourage organizations to actively address and rectify wage disparities.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) plays a crucial role in enforcing gender equality laws. They provide guidance to companies, investigate complaints, and advocate for policies that promote fair pay practices, contributing substantively to gender pay equality efforts.

Many UK companies have implemented diversity and inclusion programs to address gender imbalances, including mentoring programs, leadership development initiatives, and unconscious bias training. Some companies have introduced flexible working arrangements to support work-life balance, recognizing that traditional structures may disproportionately affect women. Flexible schedules and remote work options can contribute to narrowing the gender pay gap by accommodating diverse career paths. The UK government has launched initiatives like the Women's Business Council and the Gender Equality Roadmap, aiming to bring together stakeholders and drive systemic change. These efforts signal a substantive commitment to addressing the root causes of the gender pay gap. Despite these efforts, achieving meaningful progress remains a challenge. Persistent gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and the need for cultural shifts highlight that addressing the Gender Wage Gap requires sustained and multifaceted strategies from both the public and private sectors.

This paper elucidates the existence of gender wage gap through literature and acknowledges the significant role of media in reducing it. Further, it believes that the importance of language used in media campaigns addressing gender pay gaps cannot be overstated. Using inclusive and equitable language helps challenge traditional stereotypes and promotes a more accurate representation of diverse experiences. It acknowledges the varied impacts of pay disparities on individuals, regardless of gender. Gender-sensitive language not only fosters inclusivity but also contributes to breaking down systemic biases ingrained in society. By carefully choosing words that avoid reinforcing gender norms, media campaigns can effectively engage a broader audience, encouraging collective awareness and action toward closing the gender pay gap. Such linguistic precision is instrumental in creating an environment that respects and values the contributions of all genders in the pursuit of workplace equality.

On the other hand, if the language in media campaigns is not gender-sensitive, it can perpetuate and reinforce existing stereotypes, contributing to the marginalization and discrimination of certain gender groups. Non-sensitive language may inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles and biases, deepening societal norms that contribute to the gender pay gap. It can alienate and disengage individuals who feel excluded or misrepresented, hindering the effectiveness of campaigns in raising awareness and fostering change. Moreover, insensitive language may unintentionally downplay the severity of gender pay disparities by overlooking the diverse experiences and challenges faced by individuals of different genders. Overall, the absence of gender-sensitive language can impede progress toward creating a more inclusive and equitable society. This paper tries to investigate the JWT media campaign against Gender wage pay gap in UK to identify the intention and genuineness of the campaign.

Given the regulations and reporting obligations it has become difficult for corporations to deny the existence of gender wage pay gap and therefore some efforts in bringing awareness on the matter are visible. Most of these efforts are made through awareness campaigns and publications, premise of such campaigns is that they reduce the incentive of continuing inequality of pay and gender segregation of workers<sup>1</sup> by making people aware of its existence and the ill effects thereof. We, however believe that these campaigns despite having well intentioned objectives carry the same value biases as the society at large and as a result may end up being counterproductive. This paper evaluates one such prominent campaign being run in UK, namely JWT campaign, to arrive at an understanding of the differences in intended and actual results of the campaign.

The paper is organised as follows, in the next section we present a review of literature to show that the theory acknowledges the gender wage gap and follow it up with the summary account of our focused campaign, including the issues addressed, the intentions and the outcomes of the said campaign. Review of literature is followed by a statement of objectives, the hypothesis tested and the contribution of this study. Methodology and analysis make the next section of the paper, which is followed by conclusions and a summary of the paper.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Blinder and Oaxaca (1973) pioneered the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, a quantitative measure widely employed to analyze wage discrimination by delineating the components of wage differentials among diverse worker groups. This approach has set the stage for numerous studies investigating the gender wage gap.

Notably, Machado and Mata (2005) utilized quantile regression to explore the impact of various variables on wage inequality, introducing the Machado Mata decomposition. This method dissects changing wage inequalities into components attributed to evolving characteristics and changing returns, with differences in returns indicating gender bias.

Drolet (2001) analyses the repercussions of women's labor force withdrawals, contending that shorter job tenures during these periods lead to diminished pay and a decline in human capital value. Career interruptions may influence women's choices to forgo participation in training programs or accept lower-wage jobs. Olsen and Walby (2004) suggest that labor market withdrawals often align with crucial periods of skill acquisition, job advancement, and wage growth for non-withdrawers.

Nirmala.V. et al. (1998) conducted a study on wage differentials among male and female agricultural labourers in Pondicherry, using non-log multiple OLS regression models. Their findings also revealed a wage gap, showing discrimination against female workers.

Kingdon.G.G. (1997) employed the Blinder-Oaxaca technique on 1995 household survey data to analyse returns to education and sex discrimination in India. The results indicated that girls experienced lower economic returns to education compared to boys.

Albrecht et al. (2003) introduced the concept of the glass ceiling in wages, defining it as an increasing gap in log wages between two groups, particularly noticeable in Sweden during the 1990s. Rica et al. (2005) explored a similar question in Spain, identifying a glass ceiling effect among more educated groups and a "glass floor" effect for the less educated.

Madheswaran & Khasnobis (2007) studied urban labor markets in India, finding that only a small fraction of the wage gap could be explained by income-generating characteristics, emphasising the existence of an unexplained wage gap.

Various studies, including Borland (1999), Cassells et al. (2008), Daly et al. (2006), Eastough and Miller (2004), Kee (2006), Preston (2000), and Wooden (1999), as summarised by Miller (2005), assert that only around one-fifth of the gender wage gap can be explained by productivity-related characteristics.

Kee (2006) further investigated the wage gap across the income distribution, revealing that the difference in return to gender characteristics, rather than endowments, was the primary determinant of the gender pay gap, especially pronounced at the highest income levels in the private sector.

Literature in economics, development studies, and gender studies consistently highlights the prevalence of the gender pay gap, extending into the field of media. Reports from ILO, UN Women, and the UK Gender Pay Gap Service, along with academic research, emphasises the role of media campaigns in addressing social issues, including gender parity.

Research by Yadin and Sharon (2019) explores the impact of state-led shaming through the public disclosure of corporate gender wage parity data to regulatory bodies. In disciplines like Media Studies, Advertising, and Gender Studies, the portrayal of women in media is scrutinised for its effectiveness and repercussions.

Heflick and Goldenberg (2014, 2011) argue that a sexualised perspective diminishes perceptions of understanding, warmth, and morality in women, affecting perceived workplace competence. Conversely, Fasoli et al. (2017) suggest that similarly objectified men face less competence perception reduction than women.

The literature establishes that the gender pay gap exists across the globe. Media plays a crucial role in addressing the gender pay gap by shaping public perception, fostering awareness, and influencing policy discussions. Through targeted campaigns, media can spotlight instances of pay inequality, amplifying the urgency of addressing this issue. It provides a platform for diverse voices, allowing individuals to share personal stories and experiences related to the gender pay gap, thereby humanising the problem. Additionally, media campaigns can highlight successful initiatives and policies aimed at narrowing the gap, encouraging the adoption of equitable practices in workplaces. By fostering a dialogue and challenging societal norms, the media contributes to a broader understanding of the complexities surrounding gender pay disparities, paving the way for informed discussions and policy changes.

Campaigns against gender discrimination are not novel but one noteworthy initiative is the UN Women's #stoptherobbery campaign, which successfully ignited a dialogue on the pay gap. The campaign, exemplified by a shoe shining booth scenario, effectively conveyed the 23-cent disparity, prompting reflection on unequal pay for identical or similar work. Despite efforts and the Equality Act of 2010, the gender wage gap, as indicated by the UK Gender Wage Gap Report (2017-2022), persists.

In contributing to the literature, our study employs a gender-sensitive lens to scrutinize advertisement campaigns, emphasizing the ramifications of gender insensitivity in slogans and language and its potential to deviate from intended outcomes.

### 3. OBJECTIVES

The primary aim is to assess the impact of gender sensitivity in campaigns addressing gender bias and to investigate the impact of this bias on the overall outcomes of such campaigns. For this study we take up the case of JWT campaign and investigate the impact of use of 'provocative' language to convey the message of gender equality.

#### Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant impact of gender sensitivity in advertising campaigns addressing gender bias on their outcomes as evident from the case study of JWT campaign.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Gender sensitivity in advertising campaigns addressing gender bias significantly influences their outcomes as evident from the case study of JWT campaign.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this paper involves conducting a secondary source content analysis study to scrutinize the JWT advertisement campaign. The theoretical framework guiding this analysis is rooted in media content review and examination, specifically emphasizing social campaigns. This approach facilitates a comprehensive investigation into the campaign's intent and effectiveness within the realm of media content associated with social initiatives.

#### Analysis

JWT London, in an attempt to address gender, pay gap, launched a provocative ad campaign on the International Women's Day, 2017. The intent was to make people aware of the 25% gender wage gap globally. They tried to use word play to show how offensive it is to take away 25% from something. Notably, JWT's corporate performance in reporting statutory obligations under the Equality Act is lacking, with its gender wage gap being among the highest in its group (Degun, 2019).

Our analysis revealed that the JWT campaign aimed to draw attention to the gender wage gap issue prevalent in the UK via shock value associated with the use of language. However, the explicit language used, while initially grabbing attention, led to unintended consequences. Unlike the UN Women's "Stop the Robbery" campaign, which engaged the audience with a tangible focus on a shoe-shining kiosk, the JWT campaign primarily relied on digital posters. Despite claiming to initiate discussions on various platforms, our search on Google and various social media platforms indicated that the campaign garnered more attention from advertising professionals than the general public. Unfortunately, there was limited evidence suggesting that the gender wage gap became a central topic of discussion on social media, with conversations often veering toward objectification and sexuality of women workers.

In scrutinizing the JWT campaign, we see that the reaction to the said campaign on social media is not necessarily very gender friendly, we find that people fail to understand the key intention of this campaign. The campaign served as a notable case study, revealing that despite clear objectives, campaigns may face challenges in resonating with the audience due to inappropriate language use. This is despite the fact that the campaign itself was designed with intentions of making people aware of the existence of gender wage gap. Theoretically speaking, it is important to understand that social campaigns are meant to communicate social messages in a particular social setting, so, the intention of the sender is at least as important as the setting itself because setting creates both noise and parallel channels that may intervene or interfere with the original communication channel thereby disrupting the original message.

The JWT campaign which is the focus of our paper was launched in 2017 by JWT of UK. This campaign carried the same message as other anti-gender discrimination campaigns did albeit in a different manner. In case of UK, the gender wage gap stood at 25% in 2017 so like stop the robbery campaign, this campaign too focuses on the missing 25%, but dramatically, the text this campaign carries has definite sexual overtone. To begin with, the campaign itself is termed as #FTHEPAYGAP. F word is hardly a taboo in the UK advertisement world but its use with respect to gender social campaign certainly raises the issue of intention. Other texts used are; SHOW YOUR B\*\*\*S<sup>2</sup>, F\*\*\* YOUR PU\*S\*<sup>3</sup>, GIRLS WANT HARD C\*\*\*<sup>4</sup>, FU\*\* GIRLS<sup>5</sup> with translucent images showing the real text. It is not new for the advertising industry to use a sexist tone in messages but here the tone being used is such that attention gets drawn to the exact opposite of the intentions.

Apparently such messages intend to shock the recipients and grab the attention of the reader and then direct them to the accompanied fine prints that require an extra effort to be understood and carries the intended message of the campaign.

The JWT campaign, however, fell short in aligning with feminist ideals, as it inadvertently marginalized the feminist perspective on gender discrimination. By sexualizing the gender wage gap and overlooking the long-standing efforts by feminists to differentiate between sex and gender, the campaign risked justifying disparities based on competence and perpetuating harmful stereotypes. An understanding of feminism suggests that popular culture and feminism are ever evolving and dynamic in nature, the concept of feminism needs to change with changes in the socio-economic setup of any given society, and media being central to mass communication is expected to ensure that concerns of women reach the public. Irrespective of the role that media is expected to play, we see that efforts of marginalization of feminism in media have been largely successful. Ironically, we see issues of equity and gender parity including a call for pay equality that are often referred to as being a feminist idea are not taken up seriously.

Campaigns like JWT UK on gender wage gap also fall in this category while issues of gender discrimination are taken up, they are taken up in a manner that the campaign ends up bad lighting the larger issue of looking at discrimination from the feminist perspective and evolving ecologically resulting in making it a complete failure in relating it with other issues of equal importance like that of social reproduction of labour and the heavily gendered household work which can not only be seamlessly integrated with the issues of gender pay gap but also aimed to be solved together. Furthermore we fear that an ill choice of words or expressions can lead to a shift in focus away from the core issue and may lead to trivialising the core issue. Our primary observation on JWT campaign is with respect to sexualizing the gender wage gap and intentionally overlooking the longtime effort by feminists to differentiate between sex and gender. Problem with sexuality emphasized messages with suggestive albeit hiding sexual lexicons is that rather than underlining the wage gap and its being unjust it ends up relating it to the lesser competence, sexuality laced and objectified and hence somewhat justified. As we witnessed in other studies sexuality read with women action usually translates in perception to women being less competent Fasoli et al. (2017). As a matter of fact, even in far less sexualized portrays as in UN Women's campaign visual of heavy chairs resulted in many commentators on social media to read the sexuality in terms of body in justifying the lower wage for women.

In the case of the JWT UK campaign, which addresses the 25% gender wage gap in the UK, the communication approach involved explicit sexual overtones, marked by hashtags like #FTHEPAYGAP and provocative text, raising questions about the campaign's intention.

Our primary observation centers on the JWT campaign's reliance on sexualized messages, which, instead of highlighting the unjust wage gap, could potentially contribute to perceptions of women being less competent. This aligns with previous studies indicating that the portrayal of women in sexualized contexts often results in perceptions of reduced competence. Notably, even less explicit portrayals, such as UN Women's visual of heavy chairs, elicited social media commentary that inadvertently linked women's competence to sexuality. In conclusion, our examination of the JWT campaign emphasizes the critical importance of communication intention in anti-gender pay gap campaigns. An ill-advised choice of words and expressions not only risks shifting the focus away from the core issue but also has the potential to trivialize the broader feminist perspective on gender discrimination. This analysis provides insights into the complexities surrounding communication strategies in campaigns addressing gender wage disparities.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that the JWT campaign, through its inadequate choice of language, failed to achieve the desired impact in the media and, subsequently, failed to influence policy makers. The rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) in favor of the alternative hypothesis (H1) emphasizes that gender sensitivity in advertising campaigns addressing gender bias does indeed impact their outcomes. We posit that a more thoughtful selection of words could have significantly enhanced the campaign's resonance with the targeted audience. This conclusion underscores the pivotal role of language in shaping the effectiveness of campaigns within the realm of media studies.

### Summary

This study endeavors to scrutinize media campaigns addressing the gender wage pay gap in the UK, with a specific focus on the JWT UK campaign, aiming to discern their intentions and genuineness. Our analysis reveals that, despite having clear-cut objectives, campaigns can become counterproductive if language use lacks appropriateness and gender sensitivity. Our conclusion posits that the understanding of feminism should evolve in tandem with changes in economic development and the socio-economic fabric of society, with media playing a central role in this transformation. Campaigns like JWT UK's on the gender wage gap face challenges of ineffectiveness and unacceptability due to an approach that, despite addressing gender discrimination, inadvertently trivializes the larger issue, leading to a shift in focus.

We propose that a more thoughtful choice of words is imperative for enhancing the impact on the targeted audience and improving campaign outcomes. Additionally, strategies involving inclusive language, collaboration with diverse voices, and continuous audience feedback can contribute to more effective and genuine campaigns against gender wage pay gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Rubery and Aristeia Koukiadaki, CLOSING THE GENDER PAY GAP: A REVIEW OF THE ISSUES, POLICY MECHANISMS AND INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE, ILO, Geneva 2016.

<sup>2</sup>[Show us your B - Diverge \(divergenow.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup>[Fill your P - Diverge \(divergenow.com\)](#)

<sup>4</sup>[Girls Want Hard C - Diverge \(divergenow.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup>[FU girls - Diverge \(divergenow.com\)](#)

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