Gender in Advertising 2023 Report

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Media does not represent women...

In 2022, advertisements continued to lack unbiased representation.

Studies show not only a growing demand for inclusive content but also a connection between diversity and business outcomes.[1] Advertising is no exception. At a time when consumers feel less represented than ever, there is an imperative for brands to make and promote more inclusive ads.[2] Improving representation within advertising necessitates understanding the current state of play.

... and it matters

This report includes data from over 10,000 ads, backed by $110+ million in ad spend, from brands across the Healthcare, CPG, Food & Bev, and Alcohol industries in 2021-2022.

The following data suggests that despite a more balanced presence among genders in advertising, equitable portrayals and ad spend against diverse content remain low, particularly for intersectional identities.
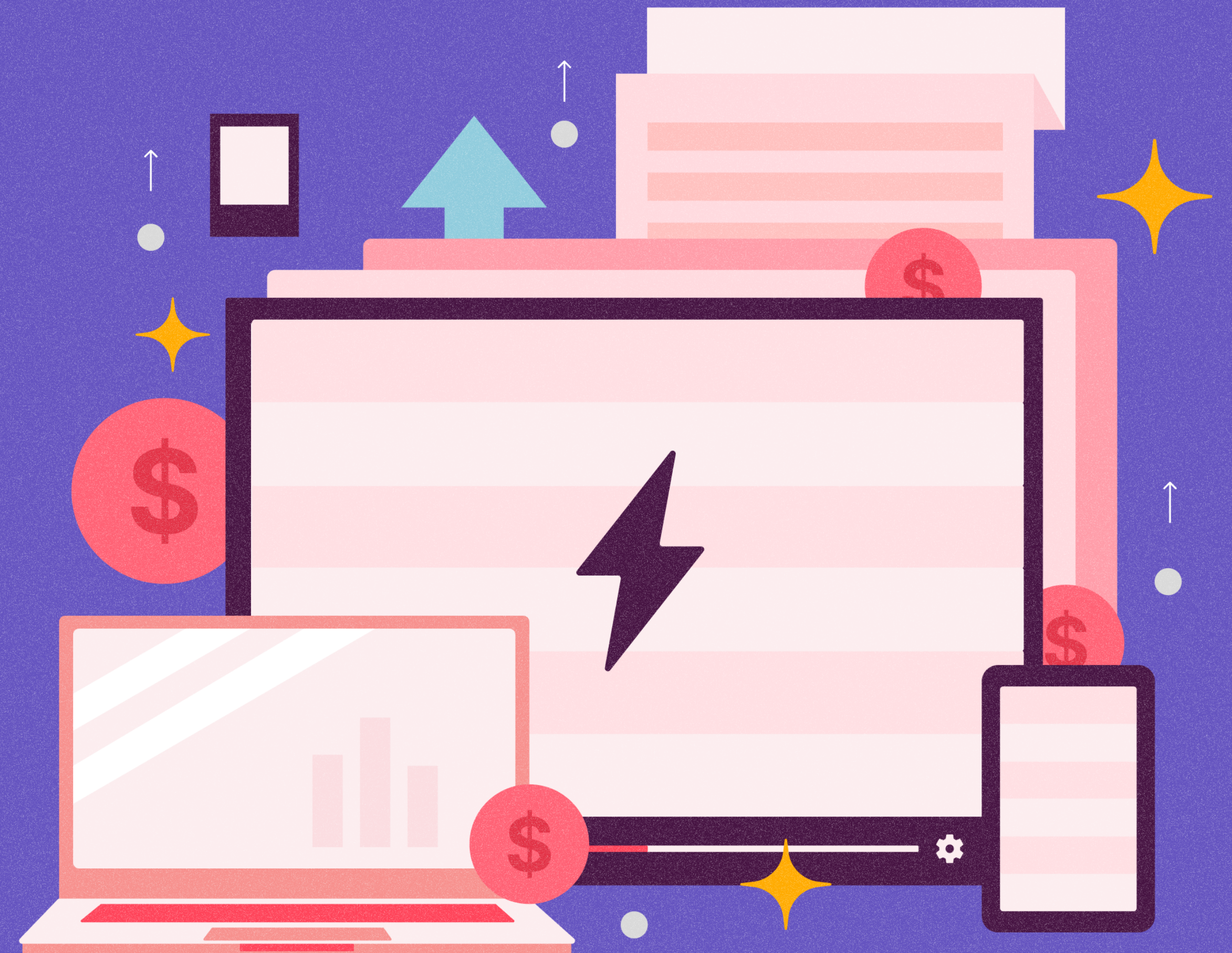
Women are under-represented and stereotyped...

and it's even worse for women with intersectional identities.

Darker-skinned women and women aged 60+ were largely unseen in ads, even though women featured more than men.

Women were portrayed increasingly in domestic and familial roles YoY.

Inclusive advertisements still receive proportionally less advertising spend.

Women with intersectional identities (race, age) suffered most in terms of visibility, stereotypical portrayals, and were least supported by ad spend.

Table of Contents

Note: The following data may be presented in either of the following formats:

- YoY comparisons between 2021-2022
- Aggregate analysis between both years

Women appear more frequently in ads than men...

Of all the unique individuals found in ads from 2021-2022, 57.3% were women versus 42.7% men (*Figure 1*). YoY, Women were also 2% more present in ads.

This bucks trends from other studies where men dominate in visibility.[3] This may be related to the industries covered within this dataset, including CPG and Healthcare, that have historically shown proportionally more women.[4]

...but that's not the whole story.
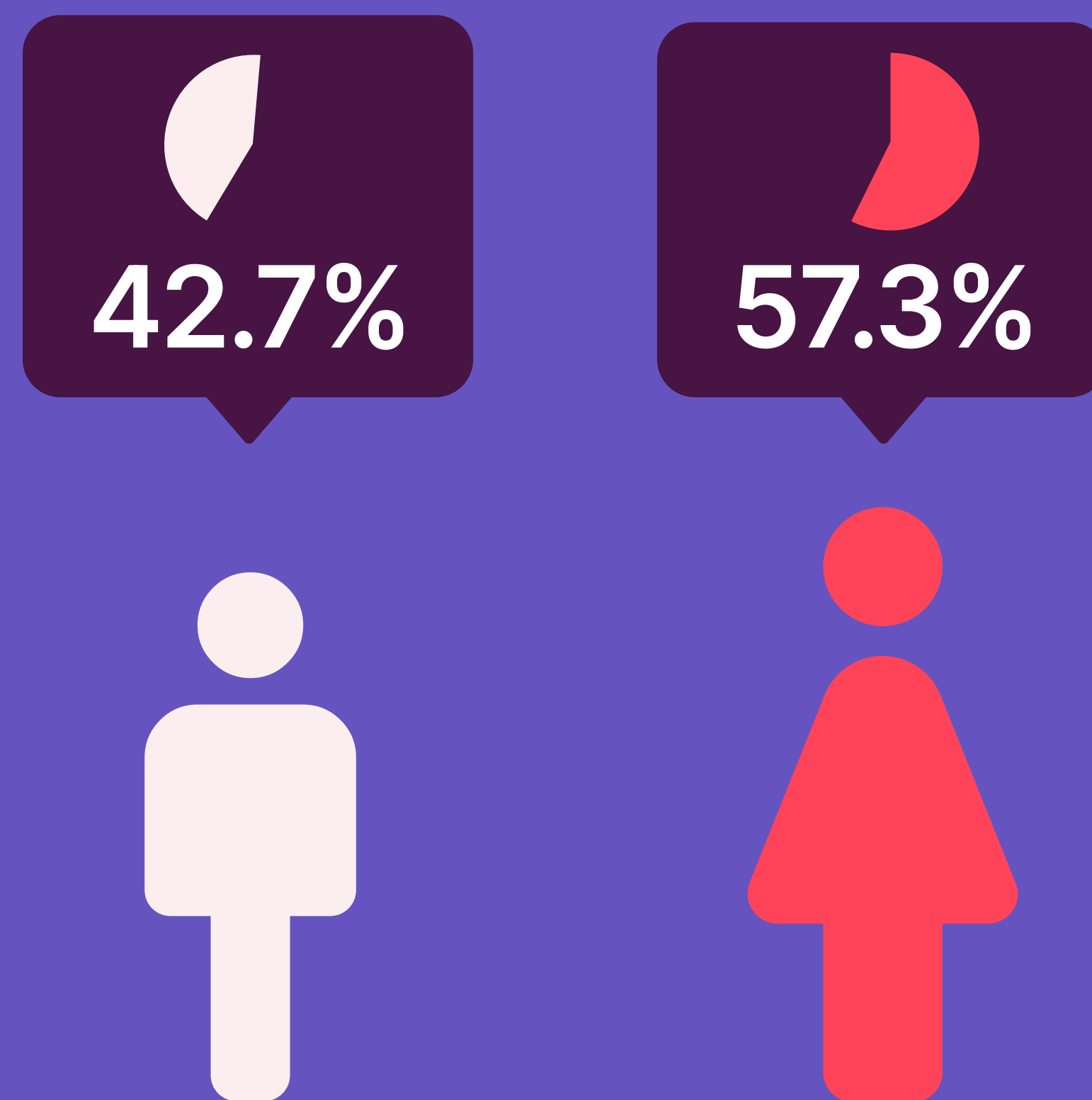

42.7%

57.3%

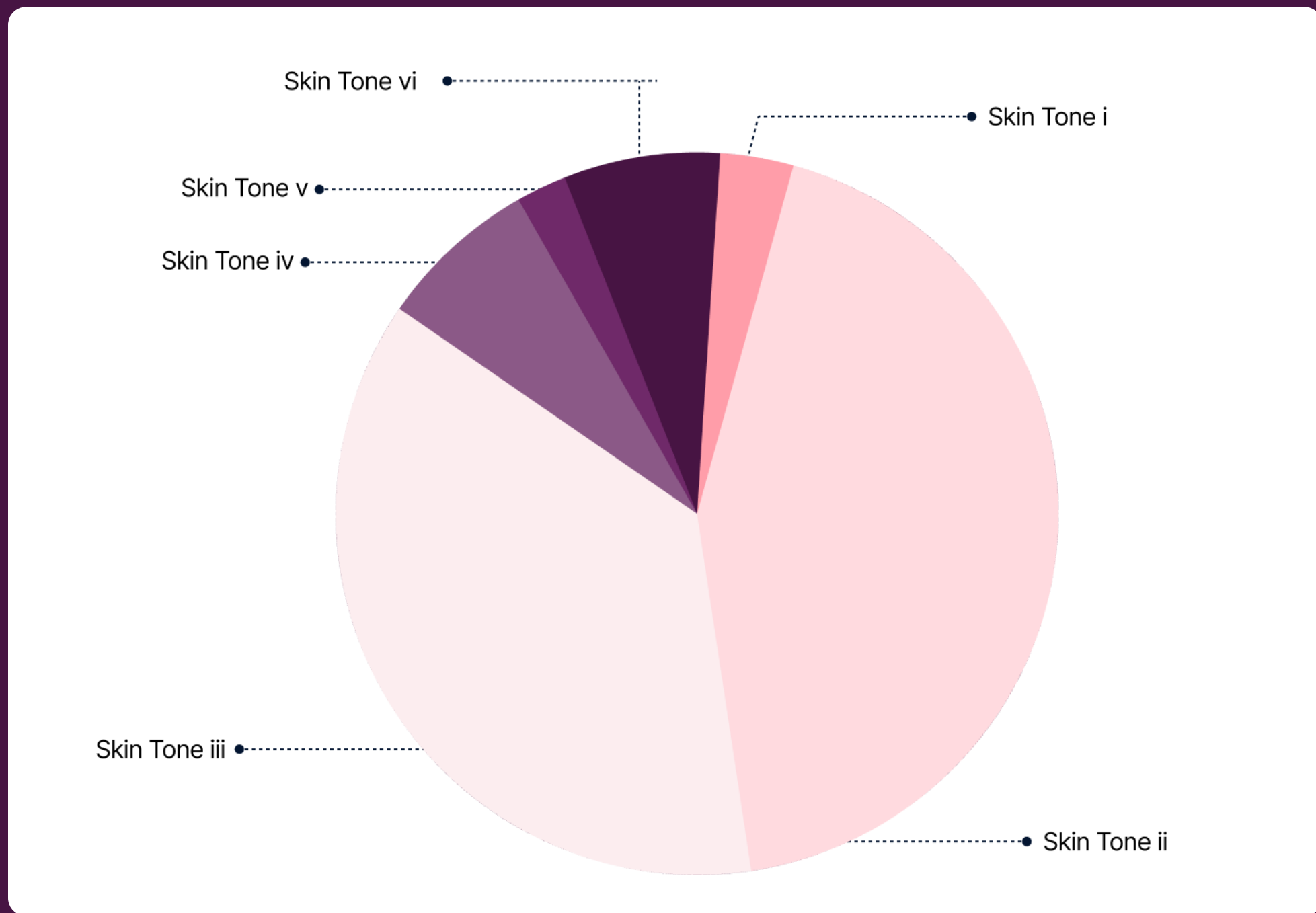Figure 1. Characters featured in all ads across 2021-2022.

Figure 2. Women with darker skin tones featured 80% less than women with the lightest skin tones.

Across 2021-2022, just 9.2% of women featured in ads were of skin types v and vi — 46.2% were skin types i and ii).

Despite women being generally more present in ads, this visibility did not extend to women aged 60+ or women with darker skin tones as seen in *Figures 2, 3*.
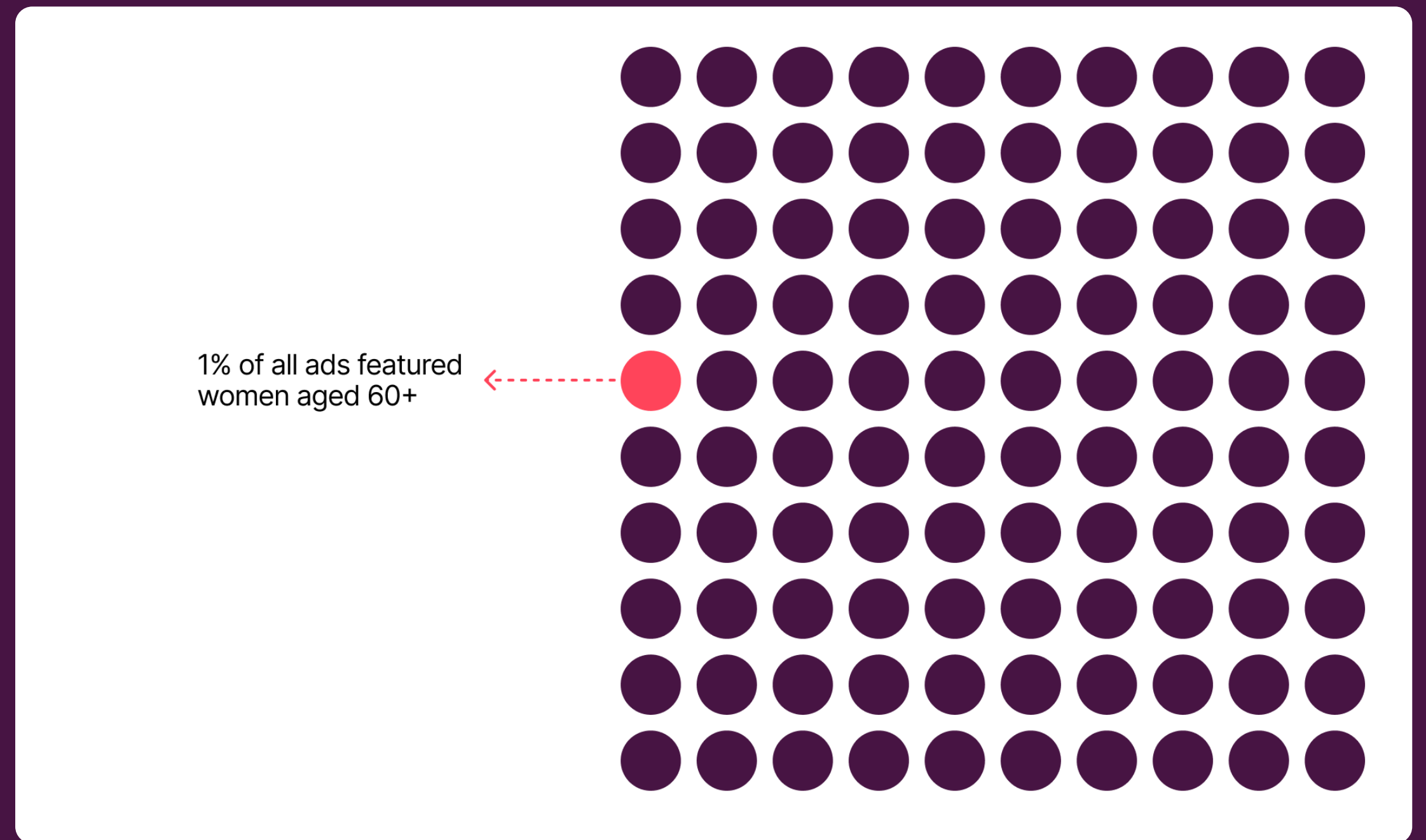

Figure 3. Women aged 60+ remained noticeably absent from ads in 2022.

In 2021, only 0.56% of ads feature women aged 60+. In 2022, this increased to 0.66% of ads. In comparison, men aged 60+ were featured 1.04% in 2021 and 0.74% in 2022.

Women are most often portrayed in stereotypical settings...

Measuring gender portrayal and analyzing the frequency with which different characters appear and in which setting reveals underlying trends in the representation of certain groups and some of the biases that underpin casting choices.

In 2021-22, both women and men were featured less in professional settings and appeared more frequently in domestic and family scenarios. This may be attributed to the global pandemic's impact, with over 80% of workers moving to hybrid or remote work.[5]

...and this trend is compounded YoY

Despite this parallel, in 2022, the proportionality of gender portrayals remained antiquated:

- Men were cast in Leadership roles 30% more often
- Men were cast Professional roles 73% more often
- Men were cast in Physical roles 126% more often
- Women were cast in Domestic roles 46% more often
- Women were cast in Family roles 3.6% more often

While the % difference appears high, Leadership portrayal for women grew from 1.4% to 2.5%, and is proportionally still the second lowest presentation of women in the ad space (after physical).

CHARACTER PORTRAYAL

% CHANGE YoY

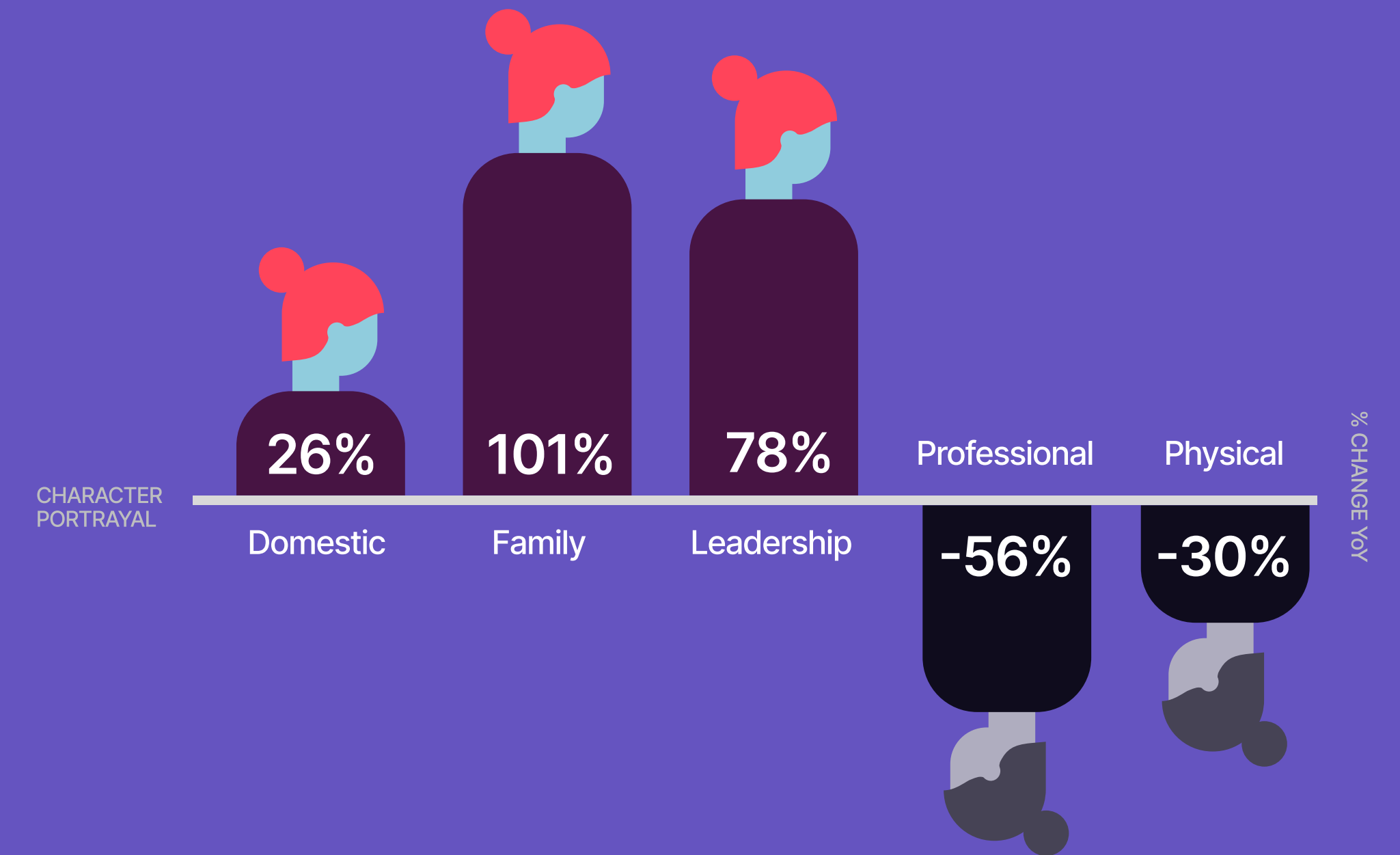| Domestic	Family	Leadership	Professional	Physical
26%	101%	78%	-56%	-30%

Figure 4. Women were both increasingly featured in domestic and family settings and also removed from professional and physical contexts.

In 2022, 54.5% of ads featuring women portrayed them in domestic or family settings. The % of women featured in professional settings decreased from 12.5 → 5% from 2021 → 2022, a 60% decrease.

Brands are spending less money on darker skinned women...

Marketers aspiring to create and promote diverse advertising should measure how their media budget is allocated by group, not just by creative. Media is unlikely to be seen without an adequate advertising budget. When inclusive ads fail to receive financial promotion, their success, especially in comparison to other content, is at risk.
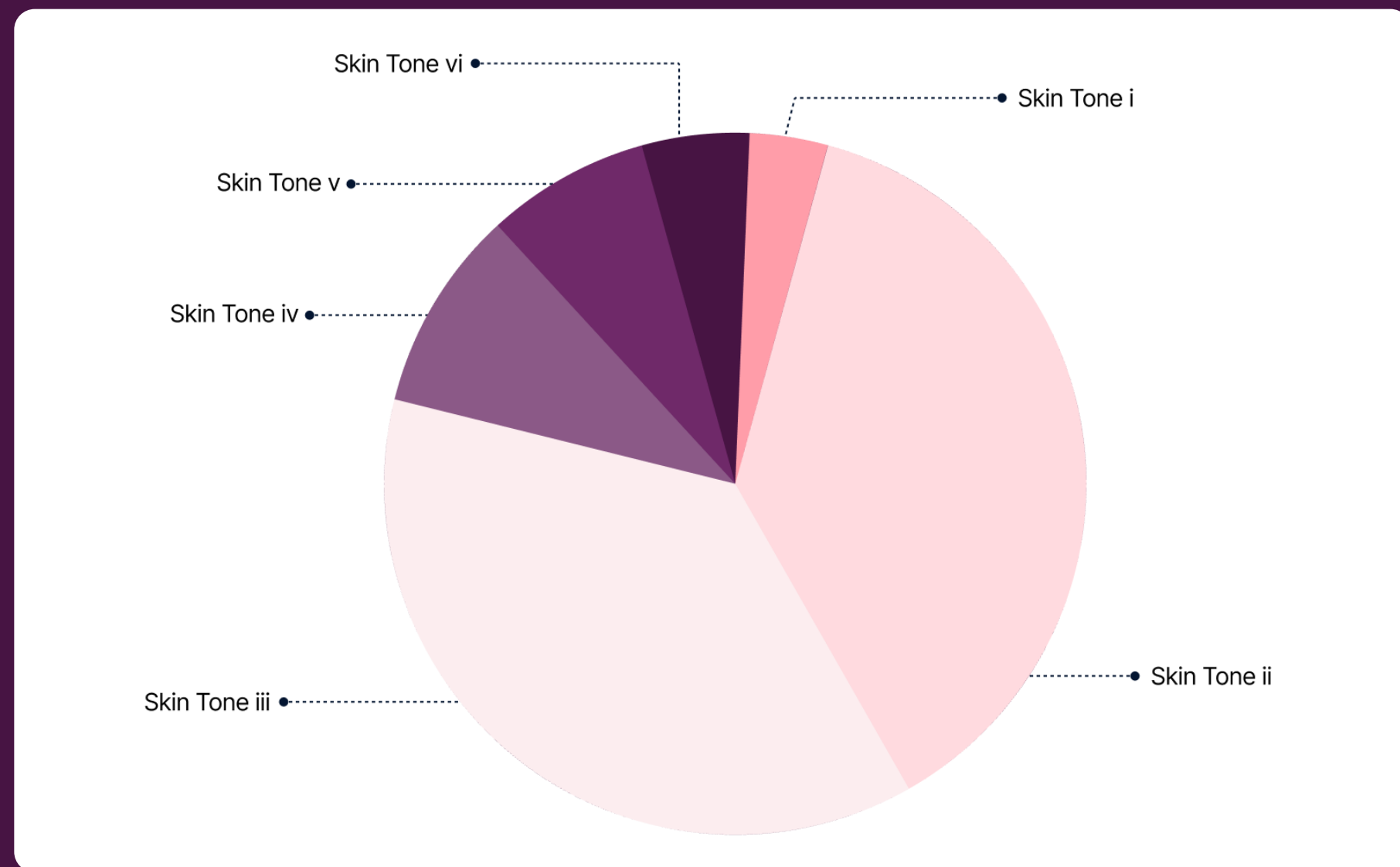

Figure 5. Women with lighter skin tones received 242% more ad spend than women with darker skin tones.

Across 2021 and 2022, 23.6% of all ad spend tracked went behind ads featuring women with skin types i and ii, in contrast to just 6.8% being put behind ads featuring women with skin types v and vi.
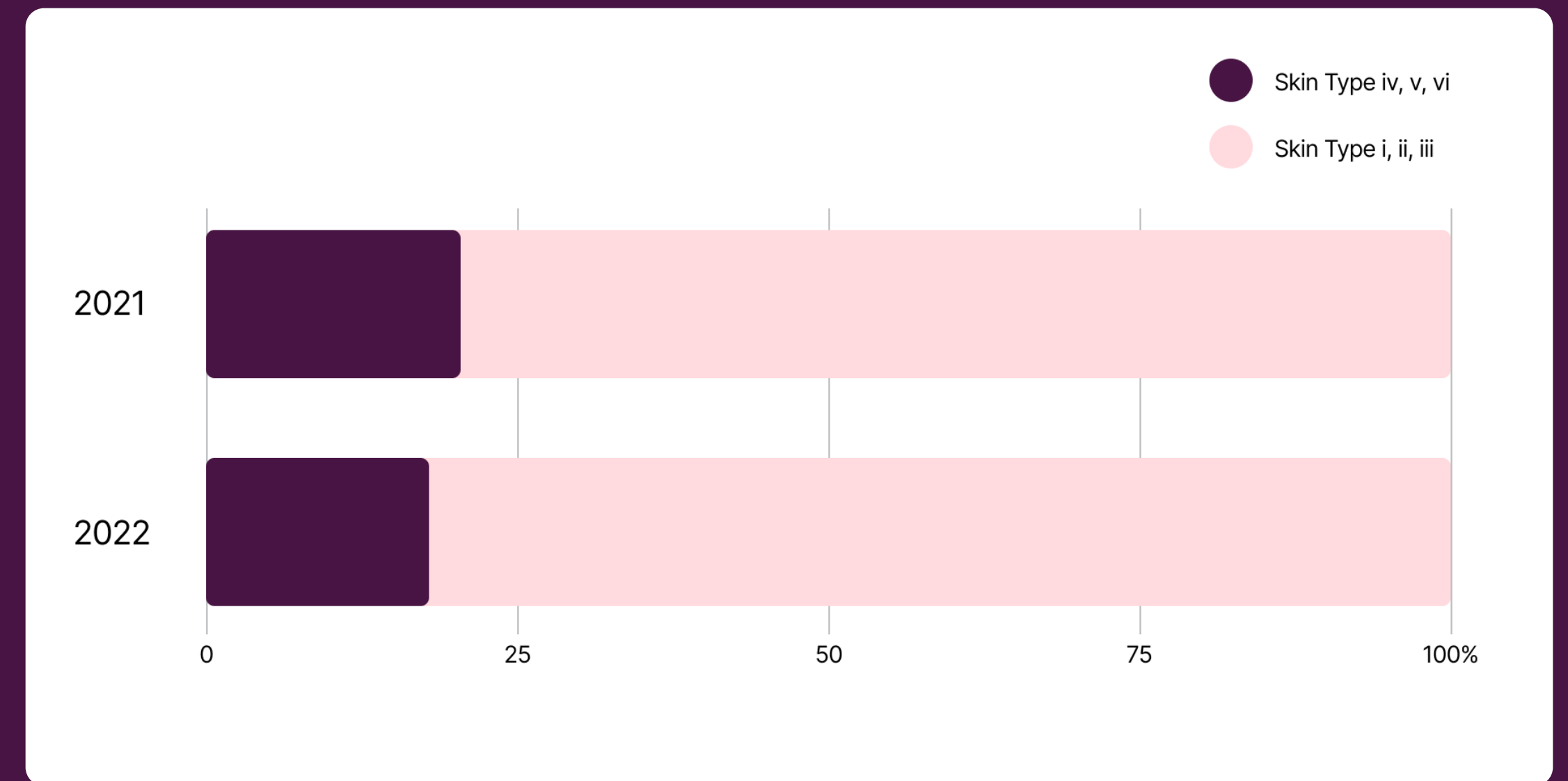

Figure 6. Ad spend behind ads that featured darker skinned women fell 20% in 2022.

The percentage of spend behind ads that featured women with darker skin tones fell from 7.9% of total spend in 2021 to 6.2% of total spend in 2022.
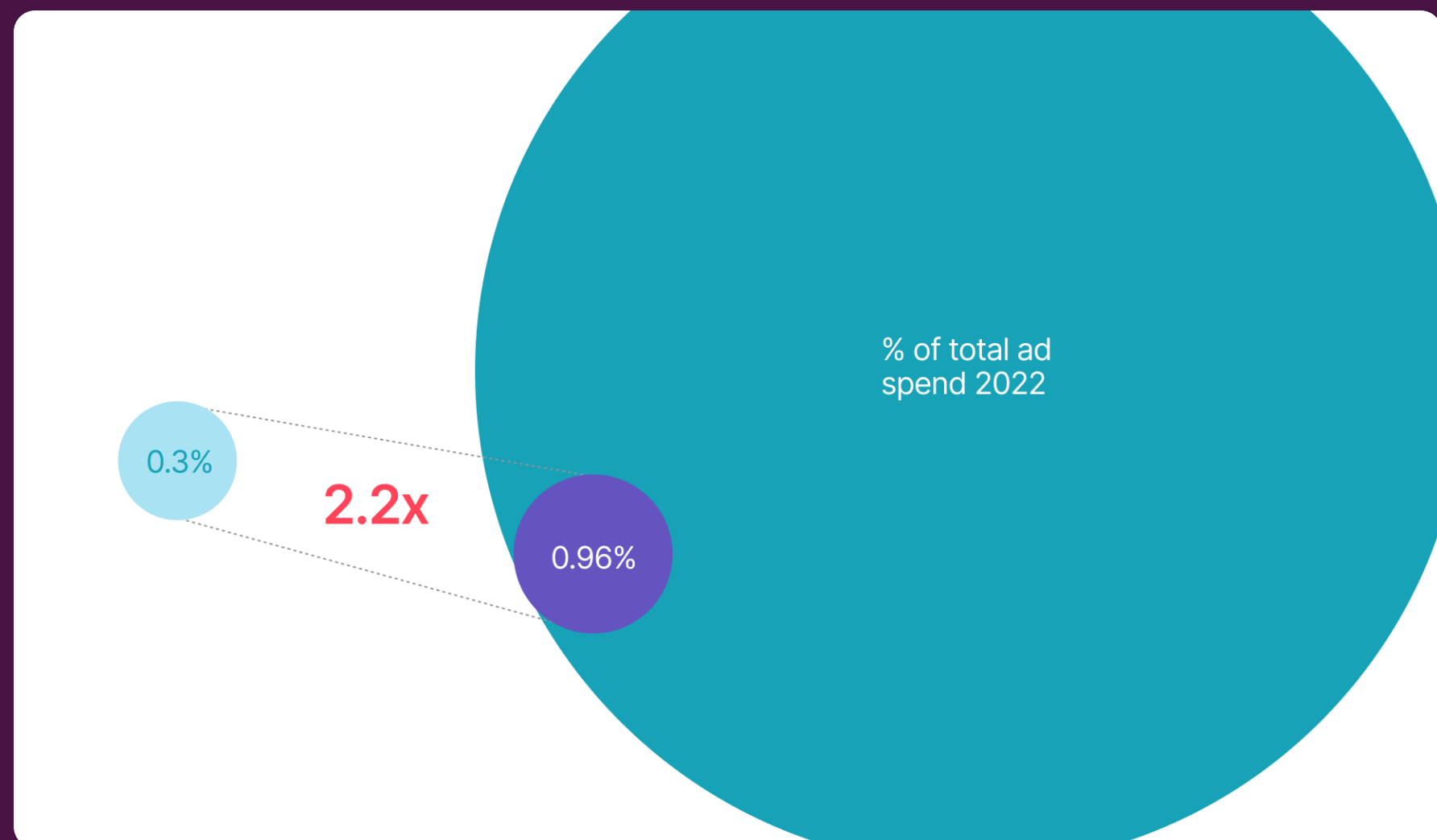
Figure 7. Ads that featured women aged 60+ received 2.2x more ad spend in 2022, but real term spend remains less than 1%.

The percentage of total ad spend on ads that featured women aged 60+ in ads increased from 2021-2022 by 221%, however, this amounts to a change from 0.29% to only 0.93%. Thus, in 2022, this still amounts to less than 1% of total ad spend.

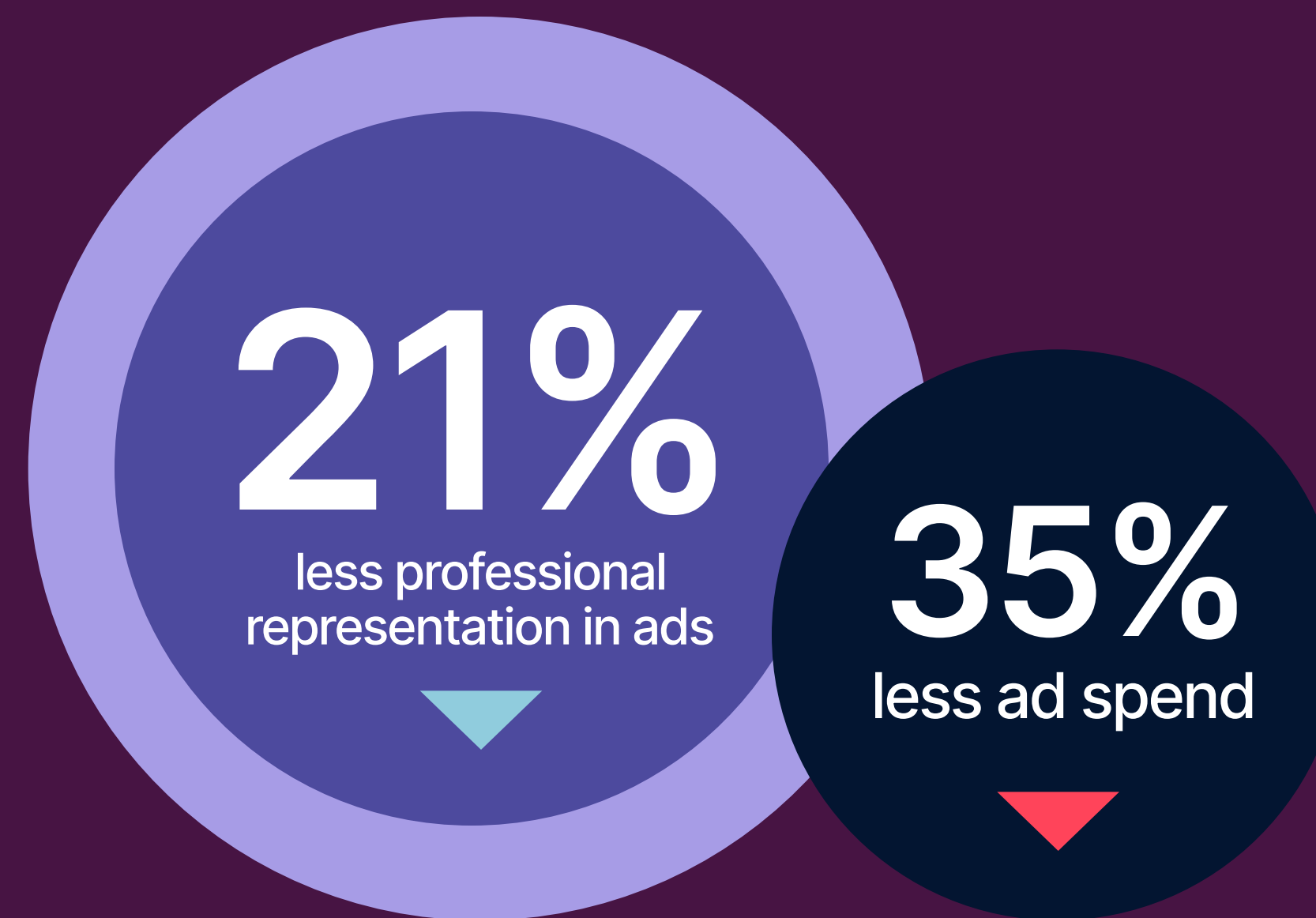# … and women aged 60+ face similar challenges

Figure 8. In 2022, ads featured women 21% less in professional settings and received 35% less ad spend in 2022.

In 2021, 61% of the characters in ads that were shown in professional settings were women and 39% were men. The ad spend behind these was mostly proportional, of the total spend behind ads with characters in professional settings, those with women received 60% and those with men received 40%.

In 2022, this portrayal proportion flips, 48% of characters shown in professional settings are women and 52% are men. Additionally, the spend is no longer proportional to portrayal, ads featuring women in professional settings received 39% spend whilst ads featuring men in the same settings received 60% of spend.

Women with intersectional identities are the least supported...

It is well documented that individuals at the intersection of multiple historically marginalized identities, such as gender and race, face compounded disadvantages. This is true, too, within representation in advertising.

Previous sections' data illustrate how race and age exacerbated a lack of appearance, stereotypical portrayals, and lower proportional ad spend between women.

Here, the data is analyzed with an intersectional lens between women and men, and the results followed similar trends of heightened disproportionality.

...especially compared to men

Ads featuring men with lighter skin tones in professional or leadership roles received as much as 4X more in ad spend compared to darker skinned women in these same roles.

58%
less professional
representation in ads

30%
less ad spend
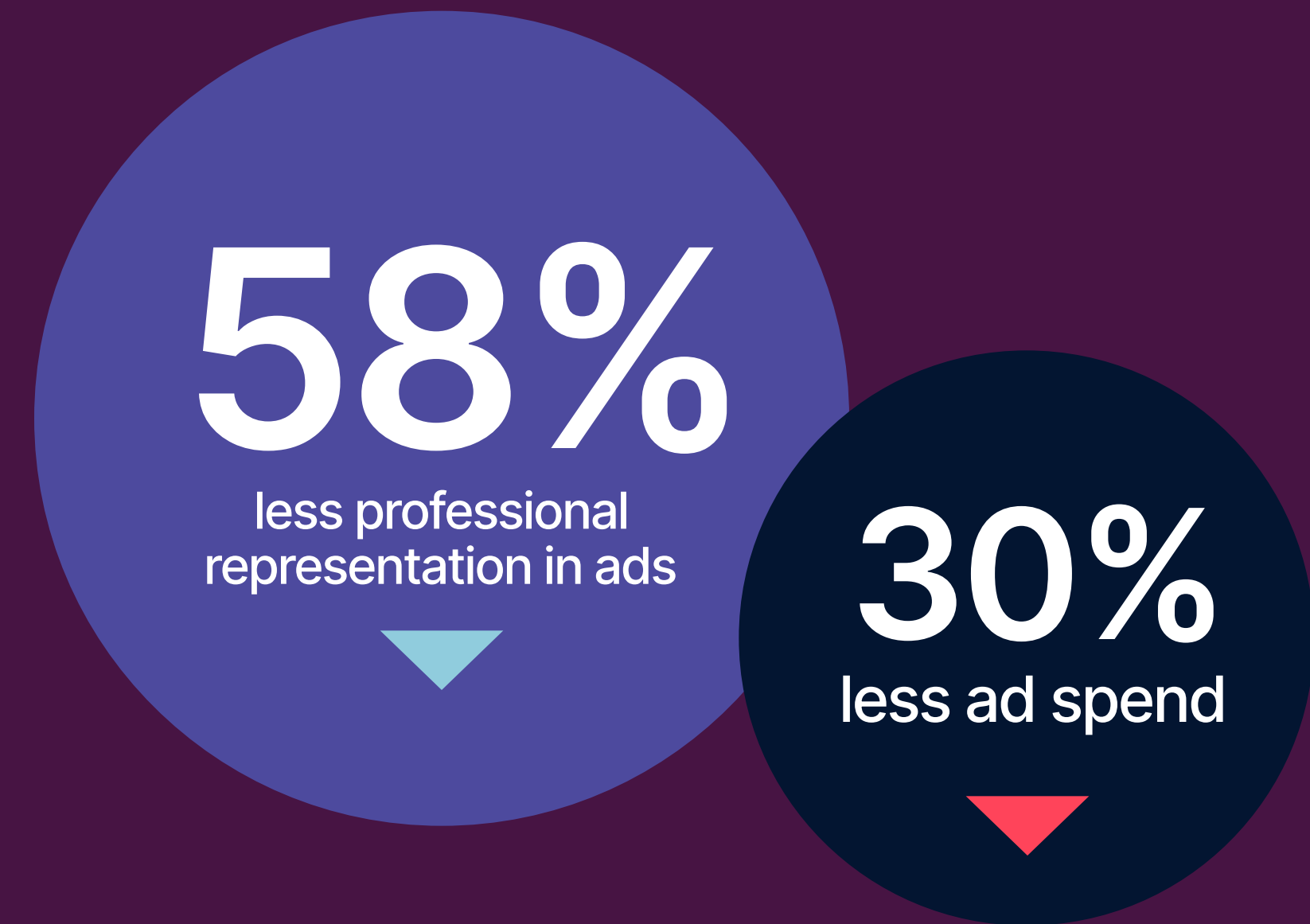
Figure 9. Ads featured darker skinned women 58% less in professional settings and ads featuring these portrayals received 30% less ad spend in 2022.

In 2022, of ads that featured characters in professional and leadership roles, 51% were men and 49% were women, the ad spend split was 57% and 43% respectively.

- Men with type i and ii skin tone received 31% of ad spend
- Men with type v and vi skin tone received 5% of ad spend
- Women with type i and ii skin tone received 18% of ad spend
- Women with type v and vi skin tone received 7% of ad spend

Our research finds:

Representation in advertising is still fundamentally inequitable

Inequality is especially evident when the data is analyzed with an intersectional lens

Ad spend for representative ads is disproportionately low and requires continued scrutiny

The implications of this inequity stretch beyond negative societal impacts. Failing to accurately represent their audiences has implications for the success of campaigns, and ultimately for the brand's bottom lines.

A Geena Davis Institute study of 2.7 million YouTube ads found that women-led and gender-balanced videos yielded 30% more views,[6] Ipsos similarly demonstrated that ads positively portraying women positively impacted long-term brand relationships and short-term purchasing behavior.[7]

More data is needed to better understand not only the existing state of representation in advertising and its benefits, but also possible diagnoses that lead to solutions. Research from She Runs It, for example, shows that between 2021-2022 there was a 24% decrease of women working in the industry (down to 35% from 46%).[8] This knowledge combined with our report may suggest that making representative content begins with representative hiring.

Data can help drive systemic change by illuminating & quantifying the industry's biases to drive change. Research from Unilever and Kantar demonstrates the potential for advertising to drive positive impact, with 66% of consumers stating that ads could change the world.[9] Translating this belief into reality represents a powerful opportunity and an urgent call-to-action for this industry and beyond.

Equitable media representation is good for business and society, and understanding our current reality helps map a path for improvement moving forward.
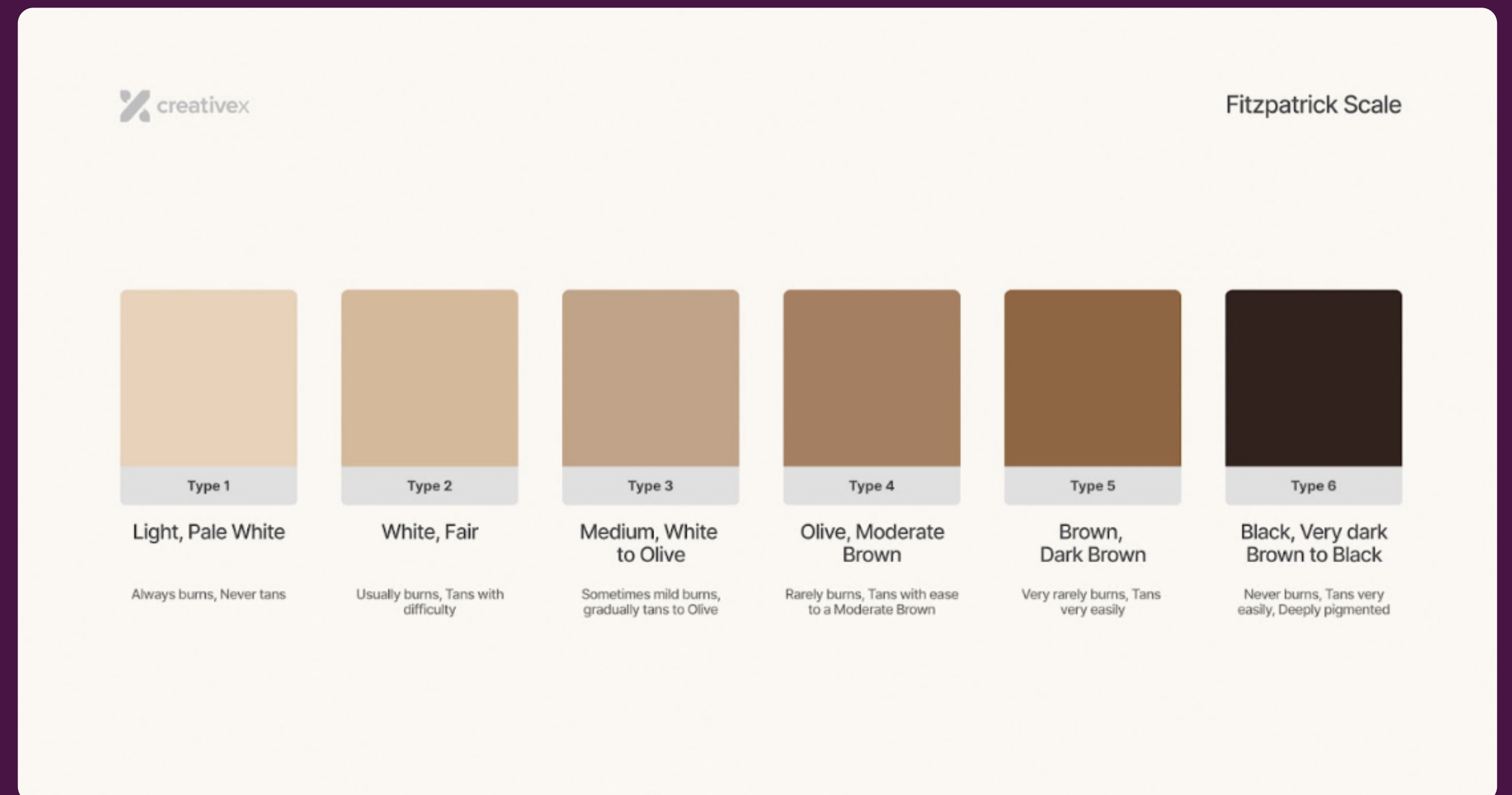
Methodology

CreativeX's AI technology was used to analyze 10,885 ads featuring over 20,000 people from leading CPG, Food and Beverage, Healthcare, and Alcohol brands, supported by over $110 million in ad spend over 2021 and 2022.

CreativeX uses AI/ML technologies to extract creative data - built up from 1000s of creative attributes including elements such as character gender, age, skin tone, and situation, tagged within each individual asset.

Creative data can build a picture of the current state of play, and provide a starting point for wholesale change within the industry. When measuring skin tone, CreativeX technology employs the Fitzpatrick scale.

creativex

Fitzpatrick Scale

Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6
Light, Pale White	White, Fair	Medium, White to Olive	Olive, Moderate Brown	Brown, Dark Brown	Black, Very dark Brown to Black
Always burns, Never tans	Usually burns, Tans with difficulty	Sometimes mild burns, gradually tans to Olive	Rarely burns, Tans with ease to a Moderate Brown	Very rarely burns, Tans very easily	Never burns, Tans very easily, Deeply pigmented

Notes

This report is not exhaustive, there are limitations to the data and its findings, as outlined below. Where currently limited, it is meant as a starting point for future work, for us and others.

Limitations in measuring representation: Identity is a broad spectrum, defined by experiences and expressions that may not be visible. This data relies on visual cues, which limits the range of identity markers that can be measured with this method. The data in this report also does not measure all markers of identity that are visual. The measurement in this report is limited to gender, age, skin-tone, portrayal, and advertising spend. Making truly inclusive, representative media will require much more work, including alternate ways to measure and analyze other markers of identity and existence.

Limitations in the Fitzpatrick scale: This method of classification originated as a dermatological tool and has become the standard in tech. This is not a perfect method. Skin-tones are not limited to only six variations, and skin-tones are not proxies for aspects of identity such as race.

Terminology: This report's use of woman, women, man, and men signify woman-presented and man-presented characters within advertisements. It does not account for the gender identities of the cast member. This work does not yet encapsulate the full breadth of gender expressions or suggest that gender is binary.

Portrayals & settings: Six common environments in which characters are displayed were tracked for each analyzed advertisement (domestic, family, leadership, professional, physical, and other). These were developed in partnership with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media for the CreativeX Representation Tool.

'Other' Removed from Graphs: In measuring gender, age, or portrayal, there is an "other" bucket within the dataset that was removed from figures for ease of reading:

- Fig. 1 - 0.62%
- Fig. 4 - 0.62%
- Fig. 5 - 0.62%

Citations

1. "The Diversity Imperative in Retail," McKinsey, January 13, 2021.
2. "#Unstereotyping our ads: Why it's important and where we are," Unilever, June 16, 2017.
3. "Do Ads Represent Female Characters?" CreativeX, March 8, 2022.
4. "Gender Bias in Advertising," Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media & J. Walter Thompson Intelligence Group, 2017.
5. "The 2022 Status of Remote Work and Top Future Predictions," Luciana Paulise, Forbes, December 2022.
6. "What 2.7 million YouTube ads reveal about gender in marketing", Geena Davis, January 2020.
7. "Women in Advertising," Ipsos, August 26, 2021.
8. "#Inclusive100 Report," She Runs It, February 2023.
9. "Could the advertising industry be the next victim of cancel culture?" Unilever + Kantar, June 2021.

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