

Empowering Women Through Innovations in Advertising

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For the past 45 years advertising has shifted from strictly selling a product to delivering messages that speak to broader societal issues. Many of today's ads tell stories designed to impact the way we think and/or feel beyond the product they are selling. Now armed with research about human behavior, more and more companies are picking up on trending cultural themes and linking lifestyles to their products. The media campaigns of today are designed to engage the consumer at very personal levels. In recent months, there have been several primetime media campaigns that have resonated with women. Some examples include

- ▲ Verizon's "Inspire Her Mind" showing how parents inadvertently discourage girls from practicing their love of science.
- ▲ Cover Girl's #GirlsCan encourages girls to break boundaries, to be who they want to be, regardless of what society tells them they cannot do.
- ▲ Patene's #Shine Strong campaign has two thought provoking ads. "Labels Against Women" brings awareness to gender bias and the labels that society puts upon women. Equally impactful is their "Not Sorry" ad showing how women over-apologize.
- ▲ Always #LikeAGirl points out how gender stereotyping affects women as they grow up.
- ▲ General Electric's Women@Work campaign shows the possibilities and innovative contributions women make.
- ▲ Dove's #Real Beauty ad shows how harshly women view themselves compared to how others see them.

On one hand, we can brush them off as a method of selling a product, but it is important to note that the way they sell products and talk to women is changing for the better.

Cover girl has made a five million dollar promise to the next generation of women who will “rock the world” through support of individuals and non-profit organizations that help to break the barriers women face.

Other advertising campaigns such as Verizon’s “Inspire Her Mind” are targeting societal changes. This ad makes parents think about the message they send their daughters and highlights some startling statistics on gender inequality in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. It’s something those of us in the STEM fields face every day.

The “Inspire Her Mind” campaign highlights the disparity in the messages advertisers may use to target girls, from what choices to make when playing dress-up, to what will fuel their interest in a future in STEM. Via their #InspireHerMind campaign, the startling statistic that there are currently 3 million unfilled STEM jobs in the United States is shared and highlights that women are needed to fill these positions. Verizon has also joined with Makers, a digital platform that showcases “compelling stories - both known and unknown - from trailblazing women of today and tomorrow” to educate and inspire.

Focusing on what it means to be a girl, Always’s #LikeAGirl campaign wants to remove the negative connotation that we associate with the phrase “Like a Girl”. Always, Girl Scouts, and LeanIn, a nonprofit organization founded by Facebook’s COO Sheryl Sandberg, have chosen to tackle the stigma of the “Bossy” woman leader. Through the #banbossy initiative this partnership highlights that branding a girl as “bossy,” sends the message that she shouldn’t speak up or engage for fear of this label. They also highlight that the tendency for girls to hold back out of fear can lead to confidence gaps and a lack of academic engagement. Global initiatives through the partnership between Always and The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization have established educational initiatives for women.

General Electric (GE) has also taken a global stance to empower women around the world through their GE Citizenship. With a number of initiatives including ‘Women @ Work’, GE is focusing on women and their

roles across every “tenet of modern day society.” GE recognizes that economic integration and empowerment is a global issue and has established initiatives to empower women in the Middle East.

The Good and The Bad: How some companies want to build us up, while others want to knock us down.

Advertisements targeted at women can focus on the psychological, sociological, economic, philosophical, political, and human rights issues facing women. These can be through direct advertisement or through indirect publicity, which leads consumers to exercise their buying power through choice on which companies they will and will not do business with. But even the campaigns that are focused on empowering women do not come without criticism. For example, some critics argue that regardless of the message presented, these ads ultimately are trying to get us to buy something through reinforcement of a brand image. This “something” may be a product that will ultimately make us “better” or change the state we are currently in, be it our level of fitness, color of our hair, or the size of our _____ (insert body part here).

Several organizations are working to understand how media affects females and campaign for change. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has a mission to further research on how women and girls are portrayed in media. Their “If She Can See It, She Can Be It” sends a powerful message about what girls are presented with and how that can alter her perception of her potential. This empowering message serves to motivate people to act and support change in female representation in media.

The organization Pinkstinks confronts the damaging messages that bombard girls through toys, clothes and media. “Pinkstinks’ run targeted campaigns aimed at creating positive changes in the products, messages, labeling, categorization, and representations of girls.”

As consumers we have the power to support organizations and companies that choose to take a stand on what messages are conveyed to our future leaders of the STEM workforce. We can use our roles to inspire the next generation, share our stories and experiences, and continue the work to improve the messages that our future leaders grow up with. ■