

WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

The power of positive representation for a better society and a more successful brand

By Jill Urlage | August 2021



**IPSOS
VIEWS**

GAME CHANGERS



WOMEN IN ADVERTISING & THE MEDIA

“If you can see her, you can be her™.”

Media and advertising play an important role in our culture, reflecting the social norms of our society. Back in 2011, only 26% of leading roles in movies went to women and this number didn't change much until 2018 where we saw women represent 41% of the leading roles¹. For many years, this reality helped shape many young minds to believe that

it is normal for women to be secondary to men. Through television entertainment we have witnessed many female characters battle sexism and discrimination while men continued to be the hero of the story. Media and advertising have the power to change how people think about gender roles and, at the same time, help shape the way we view one another.

WOMEN IN ADVERTISING: A TIMELINE OF PERCEPTIONS

Think back to the ads of the 50s and 60s that showed women in the kitchen, managing a family and taking care of their husband. A meta-analysis of advertising globally² found that women are much more likely to be pictured as dependent and in the home than men.

In the 70s and 80s, women shifted towards being portrayed as a little more independent from men and were shown in more diverse roles. However, this wasn't necessarily for the better. Women were still too often portrayed as sex symbols or unattainable images of perfection.

This portrayal continued into the 90s and the 21st century. With the creation of social media platforms, a new way for communication and marketing developed. Social media plays a big role in how young girls view themselves with a recent survey showing that 92% of American teens access the internet on a daily basis³. Spending too much time on social media platforms has been associated with body image issues and eating disorders in teenage girls. Almost nine out of 10 (88%) girls say they compare themselves to images in the media and half claim they feel negatively affected⁴. With this much engagement on these platforms, we need to put an end to this unhealthy presentation of perfection and support content that will help girls feel good about themselves.





SHIFTING THE SOCIAL NORM

Women began to crack the glass ceiling as society saw an increase in the number of women who became leaders in government, key political figures, Fortune 500 CEO's, professional athletes, and military leaders. There was a shift in the film industry in 2019 as the number of women working in this industry hit a historic high. However, men still outnumbered women four to one in key roles⁵.

This helped start a shift in our social norms but 51% of US adults agree that advertisements and commercials often keep men and women in their traditional gender roles⁶. So, there is much more progress to be made. Three in four (76%) of people agree that advertising has the power to shape how people see each other⁷. With the importance people place on advertising, it is vital that brands and marketers take responsibility to represent women in a modern, positive manner to further shift our social norms as we strive for gender equality.

But beyond doing the right thing for society, is there a benefit from shifting the portrayal of women in advertising for brands in terms of creative effects? Can brands, while doing good for society, simultaneously improve their business outcomes? Do brands benefit from this idea? More specifically, do we see any short-term or long-term impact when ads positively portray women in advertising to further echo the importance of shifting our social norms to drive gender equality?

To help answer these questions, and be a vital part of the SeeHer movement to improve gender representation in advertising, Ipsos, with advice from The Female Quotient (The FQ), started to include Gender Equality Measure[®] (GEM[®]) questions in all creative assessment research projects when an ad includes a female.

“76% of people agree that advertising has the power to shape how people see each other.”

IPSOS INCLUSION OF GEM®

The Association of National Advertisers (ANA) launched the SeeHer movement in partnership with The FQ in 2016. SeeHer's mission is to accurately portray all women and girls in marketing, advertising, media and entertainment so they see themselves as they truly are and in all their potential. To quantify results, they spearheaded the development of GEM®, the first data-driven methodology to identify gender bias in media. This methodology is widely considered the gold standard for measuring gender equality in advertising and media. The global, open-source industry measurement has been used to address gender bias in 160,000+ ads, representing 87% of worldwide ad spend⁸.

The GEM® question measures four key characteristics of women in the advertisement:



PRESENTATION -

Opinion of how the female character(s) is/are being presented



RESPECTFUL -

If female character(s) is/are shown in a respectful manner



APPROPRIATE -

If female character(s) is/are presented in an appropriate manner



ROLE MODEL -

If female character(s) is/are viewed as a positive role model



“GEM® has always been a key component of the SeeHer movement, providing marketers with both the insights to identify and eliminate gender bias in ads and a measurement tool to track progress. This new global research study with Ipsos has proven, once again, through their strong data and category-specific learnings, that gender equality is a critical driver of business growth and consumer engagement.”

Bob Liodice
CEO, Association of National Advertisers (ANA)



“We know that there is power in positive representation. Since its creation, GEM® testing has been instrumental in promoting the accurate portrayal of women and girls in advertising. We are confident that this research will inspire more advertisers across the industry to feature women and girls as they truly are.”

Shelley Zalis,
CEO, The Female Quotient
and Co-Founder, SeeHer



WHAT IPSOS DID IN THE RESEARCH

To generate the GEM® Index, each characteristic is benchmarked against the average score for that characteristic. Then each characteristic's score is indexed versus the average. The GEM® Index is the average of the four indexes giving equal weight to each input and an index of 100 signifies an average female gender score for an ad.

In this paper, Ipsos aims to better understand if brands will benefit when positive and modern female gender representation is evident in the advertising. The research does this by exploring how GEM® intersects with key performance metrics such as Brand Attention, Choice Intent and Long-Term Brand Relationship.

Ipsos' Brand Attention score measures the ad's ability to capture attention while correctly linking the brand back to the ad. Choice Intent helps us understand the impact the ad had on short-term behavior change or intention for choosing the brand at the point of purchase. Brand Relationship

measures the net effect of the ad on perception that the brand meets functional and emotional needs, suggesting it is a good long-term choice.

When a female was present in the ad, Ipsos collected data using the GEM® question across 1,994 ads in 10 countries (United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and Poland). This data set included a wide range of nine different categories: Baby Care; Beverages; Durable Goods; Grooming/Cosmetics; Healthcare/Pharma; Home Care; Food; Pet Care and Services, as well as various ad lengths and formats. The respondents in the data set are males and females ranging in age from 18 to 65. To evaluate the data set we split the GEM® Index scores into tertiles. By looking at the data set split among those that fall in the top third of the GEM® index (106 or higher) versus those that fall in the bottom third of the GEM® Index (95 or less) we identified several key themes and relationships to answer the question we posed.

WHAT WE LEARNED

THREE KEY FINDINGS:

1. When advertisements positively portray women, there is an increased likelihood to have a positive impact on long-term Brand Relationship as well as short-term behavior change.
2. The role and portrayal of women in advertising can influence attitudes towards the evaluation of an ad.
3. There are category-specific lessons to be learned about positive female portrayal in advertising.

The following section outlines these findings in more detail and identifies considerations for brands when portraying females in their advertising.

When advertisements positively portray women, there is an increased likelihood of a positive impact on long-term Brand Relationship as well as short-term behavior change.

Regardless of where the ad falls on GEM®, we do not observe a relationship for Brand Attention. Meaning, the way in which a female character is presented in the ad doesn't impact the likelihood the ad will be encoded in memory and correctly linked to the brand. We do, however, see the impact occurring more on the behavioral measures of Choice Intent and Brand Relationship. These are the metrics that help to get the brand chosen more often and make respondents feel better about the brand.

With women spending over \$31.8 trillion globally⁹, it is important to make sure advertisements are speaking to women and present them in a positive and respectful manner. *Ads with high GEM® are 20% more likely to score high on Choice Impact* having an effect with male and female consumers at the point of purchase. But since women often have greater responsibility than men for household purchases, this can have a big impact on business outcomes.

While it is important for advertisers to be focused on the short-term goal in creating desired changes with behavior, they also need to make sure they are cultivating long-term brand relationships. *Ads that score high on GEM® are 35% more likely to score high on the Brand Relationship index.* This is an opportunity for brands to improve how consumers feel towards their brand in the long-term. There is a positive effect for the brand when ads portray women in a positive manner as we see a strong relationship between GEM® and Brand Relationship. It's a win-win scenario: by doing what is right for society in their advertising, brands increase the chance to gain creative effects.

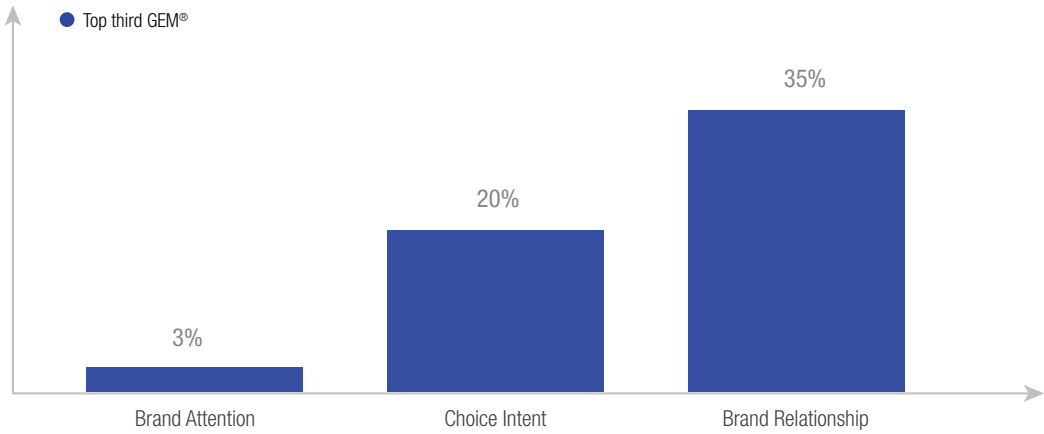
The role and portrayal of women in advertising can influence attitudes towards the evaluation of an ad.

When brands positively portray women in their ads, attitudes toward the ads begin to become more positive. Ads that score higher on GEM® most notably also score higher on these specific ad ratings: *for people like me, is informative, fits the way I feel about the brand and is believable.* While ads that are in the bottom third of GEM® score below the norm on these specific ratings. This shows us that the way women are represented in advertising has a relationship towards the perception of the creative, more specifically a more positive representation of women is linked to a more positive perception of the creative.

Other ad ratings such as *stirs my emotions, told me something new and makes me think this brand is different from other brands* show smaller differences between those ads in the top versus the bottom GEM®. However, higher GEM® scores are driving the other ad ratings at a greater rate than these.

Conversely, ad ratings such as *entertainment, unique and is an ad people will talk about* – aren't influenced by the way the women were represented in the advertisements. These ratings do not offer any point of differentiation or movement by the female portrayal in the advertisement. These ad ratings tend to help us understand what may be driving our attention measures which we know now is not influenced by GEM®.

Figure 1 Top third performing GEM® cases likelihood to place in top third of Ipsos database on key measures



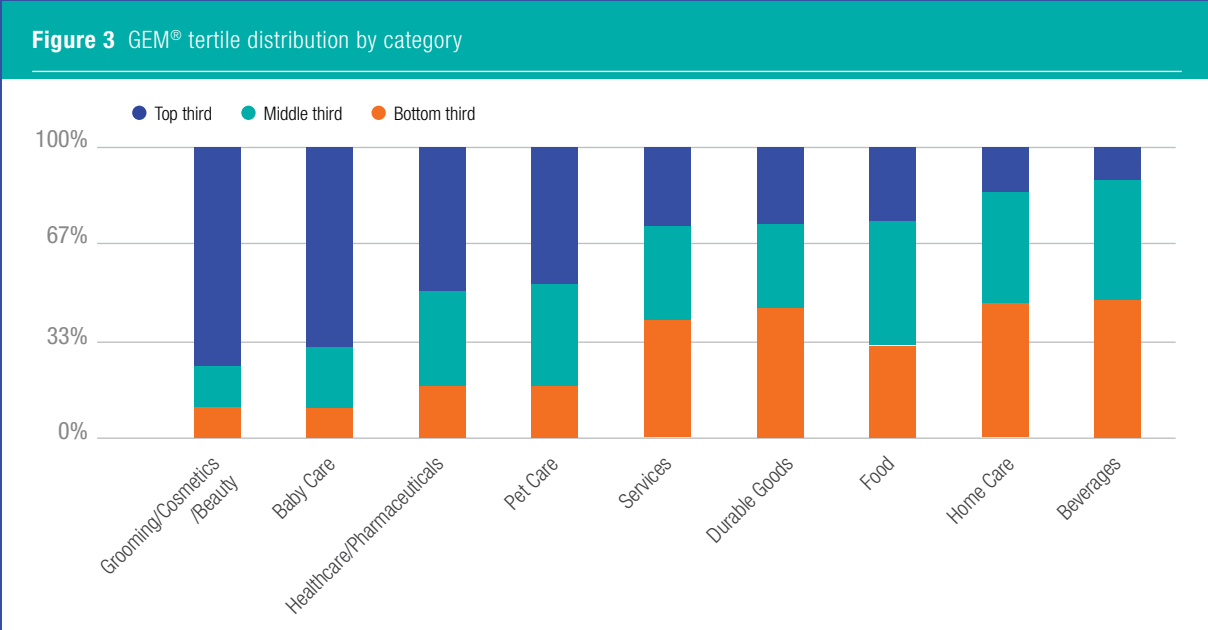
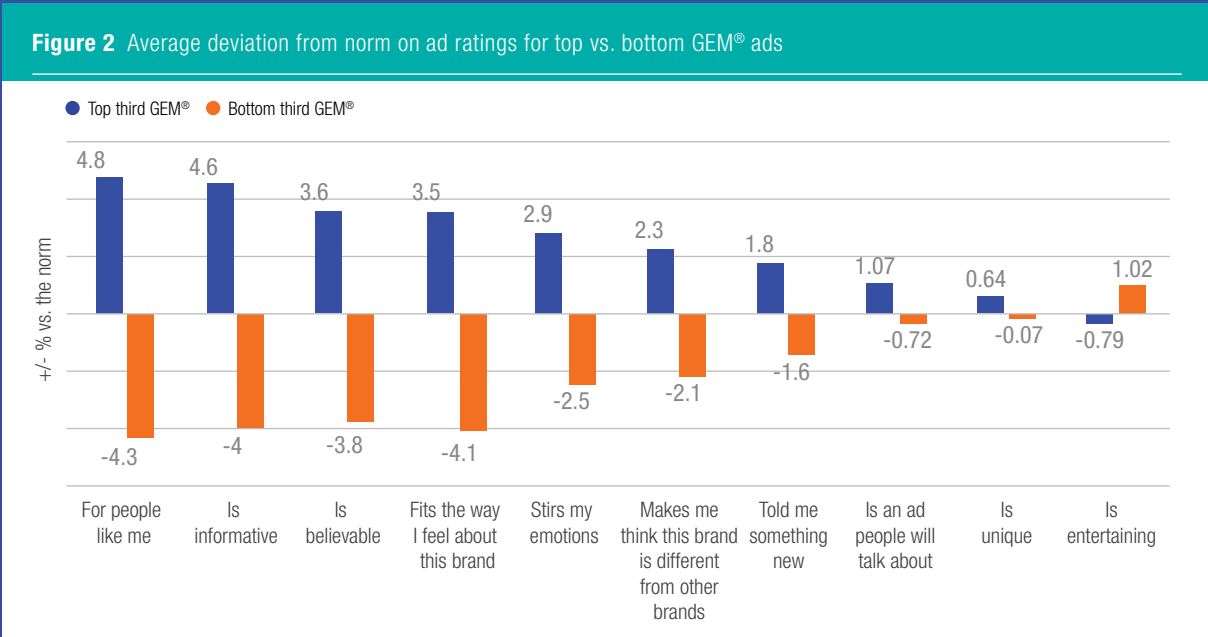
Source: Ipsos database of 1,994 ads in GEM® analysis

Ads with high GEM® are more likely to be considered as relevant, brand differentiating, and reflect the world around the people brands are looking to influence. Lack of uniqueness, controversy, and general entertainment of the creative experience does not influence GEM® (see Figure 2).

There are lessons to be learned in certain categories based on the depiction of women in advertising.

Women purchase over 50% of traditional male products including automobiles, home improvement products and

consumer electronics¹⁰. This fact made us wonder how categories that typically target towards females compare to categories that typically target towards males in terms of their portrayal of women in advertising. Our data set consists of nine categories: Baby Care; Beverages; Durable Goods; Grooming/Cosmetics; Healthcare/Pharma; Home Care; Food; Pet Care and Services. To better understand this, we looked at the distribution of GEM® among each tertile (see Figure 3) and the four characteristics (presentation, respect, appropriate and role model) that feed into GEM® (See Figure 4).

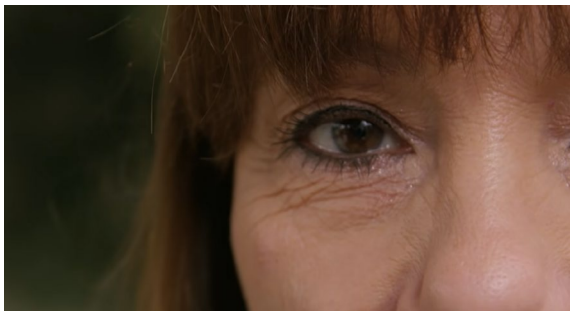


Source: Ipsos database of 1,994 ads in GEM® analysis

Traditional female targeted categories have the highest proportion of ads in the top third of GEM® scores. This could be due to the fact their products and advertisements are inherently targeted for women and, therefore, are more in touch with how women want to see themselves. Traditionally, male targeted categories are focused more on their gender needs and wants. Regardless, traditional male categories need to consider how they use and portray female consumers in advertising, given females often make the purchasing decisions.

For Grooming/Cosmetics (feminine products, hair color, lotion, makeup, toothpaste) and Baby Care (diapers, formula), two traditional female targeted categories, we discovered these categories have the most ads that fall in the top tertile for GEM®. On average, ads in these two categories score higher on role model and presentation in terms of the characteristics that make up GEM®.

Dove *Real Beauty* campaign



The Dove *Real Beauty* campaign, which presented “real women” in its advertising has proven to be a real game changer for the company and society. Dove increased its sales by 62% since the campaign launched in 2004¹¹. But more importantly the brand has been messaging to girls for years that true beauty comes from within and to love their body image as everyone is beautiful in their own way. This reinforces the notion that brands can both do right for society and improve sales.

Heineken Cheers to all



For traditional male targeted categories such as Durable Goods (cars, shavers, electronics, and home appliances), services (banks, financial, credit cards, retail) and Beverages (beer, soda, water and coffee,) most ads are falling into the bottom third of GEM® scores. In the Beverage category, of the four GEM® characteristics, role model scored lower than the other components in the overall index scores on average. This may be because in the Beverage category we tend to see the female characters play a secondary role. Recognizing this creates an opportunity for brands to find better ways to connect with female consumers by placing the women in leading roles. In return, this will help improve attitudes towards the evaluation of the ad and, therefore, the brand in the long-term. The Heineken ad “Cheers to all” is a great example of how the beer category can begin to make changes to break down outdated stereotypes about men and women’s alcoholic beverage of choice. This ad addresses a bias we have in our society that only men drink beer while women drink more “delicate” beverages. It offers the opportunity to change minds, perceptions and bias that are heavily engrained in our social norms.

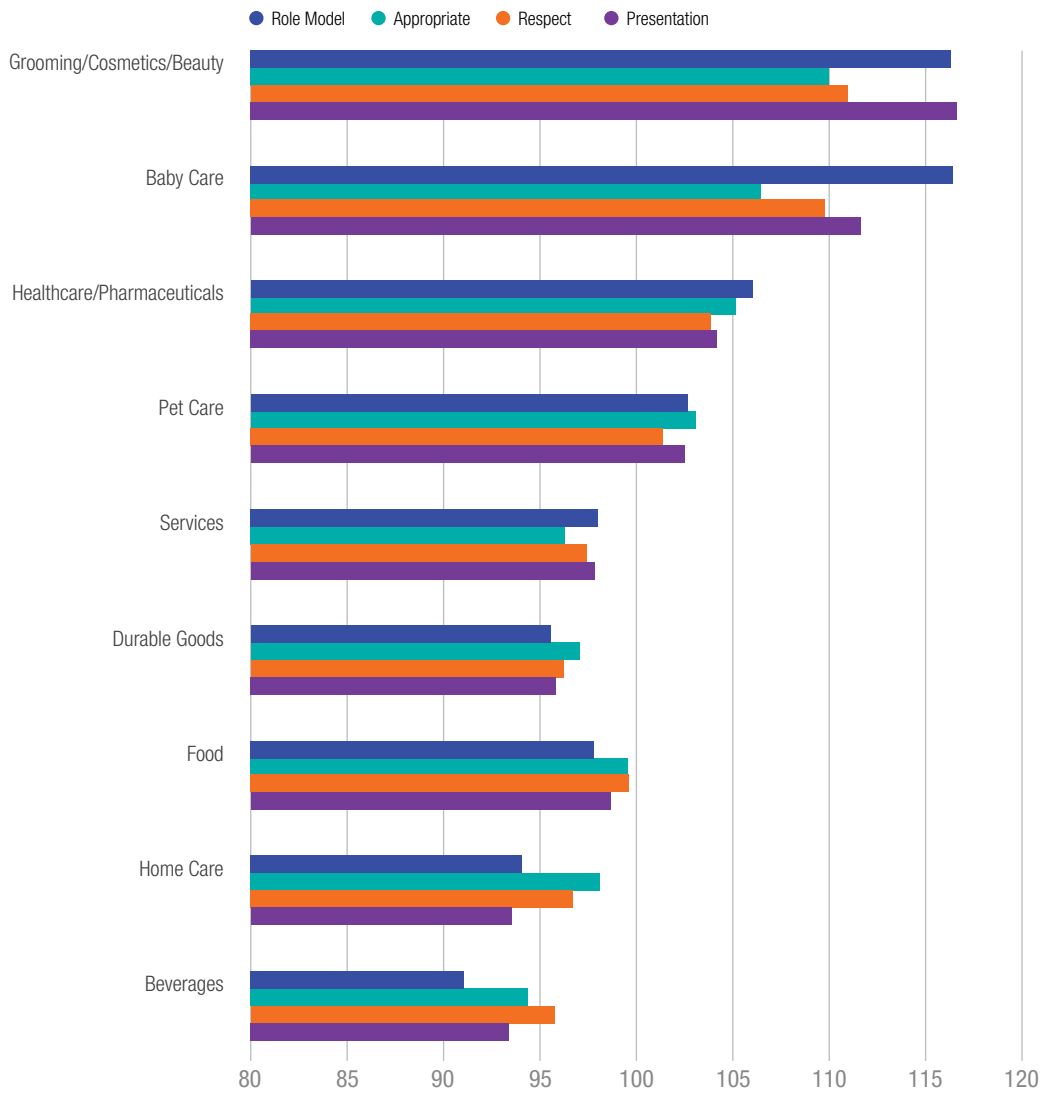
“This ad addresses a bias we have in our society that only men drink beer while women drink more “delicate” beverages.”

Nike What are girls made of?



Another example of an ad trying to change perceptions comes from a Nike campaign in Russia “What are girls made of?” which added a modern twist to a well-known Russian children’s song. The traditional Russian song said girls were made of “flowers” and “gossip”, neither of which inspired girls to be confident, independent or strong. This campaign is a great example of taking outdated thoughts from the past and flipping the script completely to show women they are just as strong, tough, confident and determined as anyone else pushing for gender equality.

Figure 4 Index score for each GEM® characteristic by category



Source: Ipsos database of 1,994 ads in GEM® analysis

CONCLUSION

To help shift our social norms and drive gender equality, we need advertising and media to play a role now by positively reflecting women in advertisements, movies, streaming content and television entertainment. Not only will this improve our society for the better, but brands will also see positive business outcomes. With this analysis we have been able to understand how ads that represent females in a more positive way have a higher long-term and short-term impact for their brands. This indicates that the portrayal of women in advertising will influence attitudes towards the evaluation of the creative and the overall feelings towards the brand. While some categories are doing better than others, in terms of how women are being depicted in advertising, there is still progress to be made to ensure all women are

portrayed in a positive, appropriate and modern manner. Through advertising, brands have the power to shift how we see each other, provide positive role models for young girls and drive change in our society, and we see in the data that doing good for society is also linked to doing good for brand growth.

Ipsos intends to make a continued effort to help improve gender representation in advertising. Therefore, we collect the GEM® measure for every creative we assess where a female character is present. By doing this, our aim is to help our clients understand if their ads positively portray women and how they can further improve their efforts to achieve this.



“Brands have the power to drive change in our society, and we see in the data that doing good for society is also linked to doing good for brand growth.”

REFERENCES

- 1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/692465/distribution-lead-actors-gender>
- 2 ["Examination of Gender-role Portrayals in Television Advertising across Seven Countries"](#), Paek, Nelson & Viella, 2011
- 3 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250172/social-network-usage-of-us-teens-and-young-adults/>
- 4 <https://solsticeeast.com/blog/the-effect-of-social-media-on-body-image-in-teen-girls/>
- 5 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jan/02/women-film-industry-hollywood-2019>
- 6 Ipsos survey conducted August 29-30, 2019 among 1,005 U.S. adults
- 7 Ipsos for Unstereotype Alliance, 2021
- 8 ANA SeeHer | Advertising Benchmark Index, 2017-2021.
- 9 [Catalyst.org/research/buying power.2020](https://catalyst.org/research/buying-power-2020)
- 10 "Don't think Pink", Learned, Johnson, 2004
- 11 <https://medium.com/hustle-monk/doves-breakthrough-marketing-campaign-involved-empowerment-of-real-women-ad2734c0188a>

WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

The power of positive representation for a better society
and a more successful brand

JILL URLAGE

Vice President, Global Products and Innovation, Ipsos

The **Ipsos Views** white
papers are produced by the
Ipsos Knowledge Centre.

www.ipsos.com
[@Ipsos](https://twitter.com/Ipsos)

GAME CHANGERS

