



# Susan Wojcicki on the Effectiveness of Empowering Ads on YouTube

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**Published**

April 2016

**Topics**

Video

Advertising

Ads that empower women don't just generate impressions, they leave them. They are more likely to be seen, shared and remembered. Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube, explains why this is a such a tremendous opportunity for savvy brands and enlightened creative agencies.

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The girl says to the doll, “I’ll make believe that I am you.” With those seven words, Mattel introduced the world to Barbie, America’s first fashion doll. The original commercial, which aired in 1959 (and of course is up on YouTube), shows Barbie in various outfits, from ball gowns to bathing suits. But then, as the music crescendos, we hear those seven words against a lasting image: Barbie in a wedding dress.

That’s the kind of advertising both my mother and I grew up with. Women in commercials were portrayed as either mothers or models, wives or waitresses, with few depictions of the diverse lives we could lead outside of our relationships to men or children. If we weren’t arm candy, we were eye candy, as scantily clad women promoted everything from beer to cheeseburgers to gym memberships.

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But recently, we’ve seen some brave advertisers portray women and girls in a new light, one focused on breaking down stereotypes, rather than reinforcing them. From Always’ #LikeAGirl to Nike’s #BetterForIt, women are being encouraged, celebrated, held up not for how they look but for what they can accomplish. And while the latest research from the American Psychological Association shows that sex doesn’t actually sell, it’s clear on YouTube that empowerment engages.

In the past year, the number of empowering advertisements that appeared on our Ads Leaderboard – our monthly tracker of the most watched ads on YouTube – more than doubled.<sup>1</sup> A big reason for that trend is that people are choosing to watch them; the top 10 empowering ads were two-and-a-half times less likely to be skipped than their peers.<sup>2</sup> To highlight this movement, we’ve collected those top 10 ads into a special Empowering Ads Leaderboard, featuring those that performed best on YouTube.



These ads don't just generate impressions, they leave impressions. Women aged 18-34 are twice as likely to think highly of a brand that made an empowering ad and nearly 80% more likely to like, share, comment and subscribe after watching one.<sup>3</sup> We also ran ad recall studies on eight of the campaigns on the Empowering Ads Leaderboard, and all performed in the top 25% of their categories, with most in the top 10%.<sup>4</sup>

So if empowering ads are so effective, why are we only seeing them now? Partly because women are being called upon to advertise to women. Despite the disappointing fact that only 11% of creative directors are women,<sup>5</sup> half of the creatives responsible for the empowering ads on our Leaderboard were women.<sup>6</sup> With women expected to control two thirds of consumer spending in the US over the next decade,<sup>7</sup> creative agencies would be wise to empower women not just in their ads but in their own ranks.

But I believe another big reason for the rise of these ads isn't just the artist, it's the canvas. With YouTube, brands can break free of the 30- or 60-second spot to tell rich, nuanced stories. They can take advantage of the creative freedom our platform allows to tackle complex issues like glass ceilings or gender violence. Dove's Real Beauty Sketches, a video many consider the start of this trend, was a three-minute meditation on women's self-image, something you simply couldn't imagine airing on TV during a commercial break.

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Dove Real Beauty  
Sketches | You're more  
beautiful than you think



And perhaps most importantly, social media gives women viewers a voice and opportunity to talk back. We've seen sexist or regressive ads draw an increased number of critical comments and dislikes from both men and women on our platform, while hashtags like #WomenNotObjects and #NotBuyingIt have led thousands to critique ads and boycott brands.

I'm incredibly proud of the role YouTube has played in bringing more textured, inspiring stories to life and I'm prouder still that a community of engaged fans is consistently watching and engaging with them. It goes to show that people are hungry for creative that empowers, rather than objectifies. Savvy brands and enlightened creative agencies have a tremendous amount to gain by satisfying those appetites.

As for Barbie, she's got a new look and a new ad. In the campaign, called "Imagine the Possibilities", we see young girls giving a college lecture to a room full of surprised students, treating a sick animal, making a business call at the airport and coaching a men's football team. At the end of the ad, we realise the girls are imagining their own future as they play with their Barbie dolls. The message is still "I'll make believe that I am you", but this time Barbie's wearing a lab coat, not a wedding dress. It's been watched more than 20 million times.

This op-ed originally appeared in the April 2016 Adweek Women's Issue.

## Sources

- <sup>1</sup>YouTube data, US, 2014-2015.
- <sup>2</sup>Compared to their peers in similar categories. YouTube Data, US, 2013-2015.
- <sup>3</sup>Google Consumer Survey, US, February 2016. (n=1,500 women, ages 18-34)
- <sup>4</sup>There were ad recall studies featuring eight of the empowering ads from 2015 considered for our Leaderboard. All of the empowering ads were best-in-class and drove significant lift in ad recall, with all performing in the top 25% of their peer set and the majority in the top 10% of their peer set.
- <sup>5</sup><http://www.3percentconf.com/blog/progress-women-now-11-cds-319-increase#.VubvDJMrJE4>
- <sup>6</sup>YouTube Data, US, 2013-2015.
- <sup>7</sup><http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2013/u-s-women-control-the-purse-strings.html>