

ADVERTISING

SK-II empowers women with message of independence, strength

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SK-II promotional image

By JEN KING

Beauty marketer SK-II is helping single Chinese women overcome the stigma of being labeled a Sheng Nu, or leftover woman, in an emotional documentary-styled advert.

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A Sheng Nu, meaning an unmarried female over the age of 27, is considered incomplete by Chinese society. SK-II's "Marriage Market Takeover" film, which has gone viral since its debut earlier this month, brings to light the difficulties these women face since being cast as Sheng Nu.

"Brands have the power to spur social brands especially when it is on message with the products that consumers use," said Kimmie Smith, co-founder/creative director of [Accessory2](#) and co-founder/style director of [Athleisure Mag](#).

"SK-II's campaign focusing on beauty and how everyone woman embodies that in their unique way is applicable to the need for women in China to be okay with the fact that they are unmarried whether it's finding the right one or preferring to be single," she said.

"It's a rally cry that they can appreciate while driving awareness to changing older mindsets that need to be reminded of how societal 'norms' affect those that do not want to be identified in this manner."

Ms. Smith is not affiliated with SK-II, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

P&G-owned [SK-II](#) did not respond by press deadline.

Leftover empowerment

Part of SK-II's larger [#ChangeDestiny](#) movement, where the brand looks to defy age- and gender-related stereotypes, the Marriage Market Takeover film works to empower Sheng Nu to change their own destinies and challenge society's views on being unmarried.

Shared across its social media channels, SK-II's film explains that Chinese women face immense pressure to marry before the age of 27. As the name of the film suggests, many Chinese cities host marriage markets where parents go to post personal ads for their children in hopes of finding a potential suitor.

The film features a marriage market in Shanghai's People's Park where hundreds of women, many labeled as Sheng Nu, took over the space with personal messages of independence and the wish to control their own destiny.



SK-II Marriage Market Takeover video still

SK-II's film begins with a number of Sheng Nu speaking alone and with their parents about the societal pressures of being unmarried after 27-years-old. The women speak of not wanting to disappoint their parents, as not getting married is often considered a sign of disrespect.

The women featured all express a desire to live life on their own terms, but say they often feel like outcasts. SK-II's film also include testimonies from the parents of Sheng Nu women explaining their concerns and disappointment with their daughters being unmarried.

One mother, in front of her daughter who fights back tears, says, "We always thought our daughter had a great personality. But she's just average-looking, not too pretty. That's why she's leftover." In another clip, a father says that his daughter being unmarried will cause him to get heart disease and another says that his daughter's single status is "cruel to [him]."



SK-II Marriage Market Takeover video still

Ending on a positive note, SK-II brings the Sheng Nu parents to view the statements placed by their daughters in the Marriage Market. Seeing their daughters' expressions of independence and strength brings understanding to the families and ends with a message of support.

One poster reads, "I don't want to get married just for the sake of marriage. I won't be happy that way." Another reads, "I am opposed to the term leftover woman," with her mother chiming in to say, "The leftover men' need to try harder."

SK-II: Marriage Market Takeover

Since its debut on YouTube, SK-II's documentary has gone viral with 1.4 million views as of press time. Likewise, the film has been shared more than 20,000 times on SK-II's official Sina Weibo account, spurring conversation about Sheng Nu and societal pressures.

While SK-II's products are not featured in the film, supporting content leverages the #ChangeDestiny concept by promoting its skincare's ability to "change your skin's destiny now and for the next 10, 20, 30 years."



SK-II Marriage Market Takeover video still

"SK-II is a prestigious and global luxury brand," Ms. Smith said. "Lending a platform to highlight this issue as a means to make both sides aware of how permeating this issue is allows consumers to understand that brands want more than just counter space but being in the midst of the conversation.

"Being able to target multiple demographics with an issue that effects so many is a dynamic way to position themselves within the market," she said. "In addition, it also allows for understanding from a global perspective for cultures that may not have this issue to contend with.

"Driving awareness and standing up for those that may not have been able to do so allows people to see the brand as one who is not afraid to question what has taken place in the past with efforts for future change."

Girl power

Women's empowerment efforts are common, as female consumers are the primary purchasers of luxury goods. Indeed, causes that affect women of all demographics, whether the issue be body image, the glass ceiling or domestic violence, are often explored by brand initiatives to show solidarity.

For example, Hearst women's magazine Marie Claire raised its belief in female empowerment through an invite-only in-flight networking event.

The Power Trip will kicked off March 21 with a JetBlue flight from New York to San Francisco, where the women disembarked and attended a pop-up conference at the W Hotel with speakers from the tech, fashion and media worlds. Upending the traditional conference is in line with the forward-thinking magazine's voice.

Power Trip participants attended a series of talks with influential women, who each covered how every woman has the potential to disrupt ([see story](#)).

Also, French luxury conglomerate Kering Group commemorated International Women's Day on March 8 through its "We Are Women" campaign and by lending support to the United Nations.

The campaign support is part of Kering's three-year partnership with the UN Women French National Committee, in which the conglomerate provides financial support and actively participates in the organization of its global efforts. Throughout the year Kering vocally promotes women's issues with the help of its stable of brands, and it is this ongoing dedication to these causes that reads as authentic among consumers ([see story](#)).

"Brands who want to be embraced by the market needs to understand the issues that each one has as we don't all live within the same lifestyle," Ms. Smith said.

"By looking at things on a molecular level, it showcases the interest and need to be relevant and not just a sterile brand that is only concerned with scaling their company for profit," she said.

"If this or any brand dedicates their efforts globally to issues that are specific to men and women that they market to - it reflects more of a genuine need to be in the community in an active way."