Inclusion Is the Gift in These Heartfelt Holiday Ads

Rebecca? Roberta?

Welcome to my everyday dialogue with baristas, receptionists, shopkeepers alike, when I have to apologetically announce my name five times and spell it out letter by letter until they get it right.

R-o-b-e-c-t-a.

I suppose I was never asked to question how normal this situation is for people with quirky names until I saw Etsy's latest holiday spot "Shiori." It is about a girl's journey to own her unique name via a necklace gifted by her mother. The authentic spot even ended with a sprinkle of conversational Japanese in the end. In short, I have never felt so seen through an ad.

[embedded content]

This holiday season is unlike any other we have experienced before. Gone are the usual presents or fantasy-filled holiday TV spots. For once, it seems like brands want to tell realistic, heartwarming and most importantly, inclusive stories for all.

For the first time, Disney U.K. created a Christmas ad about a Filipino immigrant family as the main protagonist, honoring heartfelt traditions (e.g., the star lantern scene was magical) and a priceless relationship between a grandmother, or *lola*, and her granddaughter. The spot had since been watched by many around the world, and were applauded for its originality and authentic depiction of Filipino immigrant

families.

Even in the much anticipated annual Christmas spot from John Lewis, the retail giant’s ad centers around the theme of paying it forward by featuring a diverse range of moving art formats, from animation and claymation, to CGI and cinematography.

In the end, there are a few commonalities:

A resonant festive narrative doesn’t have to be about escapism or extravagance

Hedonistic ways of spending the holidays are no longer applicable this year. Grounding stories in realistic, varied scenarios allows the audience to feel more human. Whether it’s portraying lola’s intimate bond with her granddaughter, a blond girl helping a brown boy get his ball or a group of hip street pigeons befriending a hedgehog, the anchored theme of inclusivity resounds consistently in all the stories told.

Gentler, kinder attitudes are core characteristics displayed in all spots

All the spots highlight how generosity and kindness can benefit everyone. Even Tesco, a U.K. grocery chain, is using humor to diffuse this year’s emotional weight.

Warmer tones, melodious vocals and childlike animations remind the audience the beauty of small things

From the background Japanese dialogue between a mother and a daughter, Griff’s soft voice as an anchor to adorable claymations, the sum of all these creative nuances shine light on loving narratives between family, friends and communities.

For many, this holiday season will not be one that is festive, but one burdened with complex emotions. These ads are a tender reminder to us all that even during the continuing Covid-19

crisis, nothing can take away the priceless pleasures in life: self-worth, empathy, kindness, laughter, connections with friends and family and many more.

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