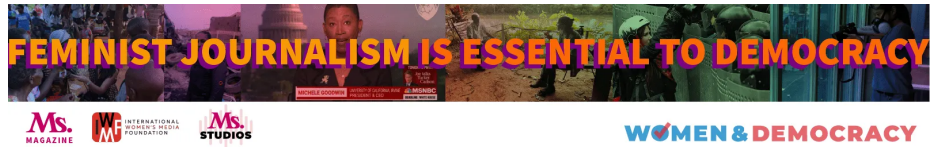


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Don't Scroll Past That Instagram Ad for Contraceptives!

10/2/2019 by **MARGOT RADDING**

Every day, approachable and attractive women on Instagram post videos describing the newest product they just tried; sponsors for everything from acne-fighting formulas to teeth-whitening technologies blend into the newsfeed. This new age of ['Insta-advertising'](#) for all kinds of products and services is inconspicuous—endorsements are elegantly nestled in between photos posted by those you follow, making it the perfect strategy to discuss more taboo topics or products.

Peer-to-peer marketing is nothing new, but Instagram has digitized, personalized and helped initiate conversations on a larger scale. It's also become an increasingly popular way for new, convenient ways of accessing birth control to gain awareness.



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Contraceptive products and start-ups like Nurx and [Pandia Health](#) promote their home-delivery birth control pills through online endorsements. One woman in a Nurx advertisement tells the viewer that she had been “using the wrong type of birth control” and now can get her pill pack easily delivered to her home, a girl-to-girl confession grounded in the shared experiences of sexually-active women.



<https://twitter.com/PandiaHealth/status/1178821866213068801>

The promotion of birth control via social media has reduced stigma by shifting contraception into a conversation like any other, something akin to acne or a whiter smile. Peer-to-peer promotion has long been a staple of the public health world, tackling taboos by keeping conversations between classmates and friends.

In rural parts of Eastern India, where Instagram advertisements are inherently less common and effective, DKT International has leveraged and scaled an in-person peer-to-peer system to improve contraceptive conversation and prevalence. Women who work for DKT’s network of Janani’s *Surya* Health Clinics, dubbed *Surya* Health Promoters, endorse the contraceptive and abortion services and products available through the clinics to women in their local communities. These women are not formally trained medical professionals, but are relatable women who’s training on contraception and *Surya* renders them trustworthy: Nearly 74 percent of clients at the 22 *Surya* Clinic locations arrive with a *Surya* Health Promoter. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, DKT’s Youth Ambassadors in the *Batela Lobi Na Yo* (Protect Your Future) program direct their young peers to pharmacies in Kinshasa that have been certified as youth-friendly outlets.

In comparison, many American adults may remember their sex education not as a conversation with other teens, but as a demonstration by a teacher. Using authority figures to demonize unprotected sexual activity—or sexual activity altogether—

imbues sex with shame. This model does not allow teens to speak freely, and ultimately prohibits the topic of pleasure. It also doesn't deter bad behavior.

The same folks who remember putting condoms on bananas may also recall DARE, the quintessential authoritarian health program during which police officers lectured on the dangers and detriments of drugs. Even the most novice babysitter knows telling a child *not* to do something only makes her want it more.

Instagram is helping us update these tired models. Asking adults to tell young people about the perks of oral contraceptive pills, and how condoms can protect from STIs, is old-school.

Contraceptive conversations need to take place between peer groups, and developing such a system requires sexual and reproductive health leaders to step aside and push young people to the front. We must commit to transforming our ideas of contraceptive access, digitizing dialogues and assigning agency to those already in the conversation.

Classrooms and information guides stand no chance against Instagram influencers and viral tweets. The new information ecosystem is being built online—and we must weave contraceptive knowledge into it.

TAGGED: BIRTH CONTROL AND CONTRACEPTION, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, TECHNOLOGY

ABOUT MARGOT RADDING

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