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Research in context (ADAD5003/C)

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When will advertising embrace diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world? Critically discuss and respond.

As little as fifteen years ago the UK decided to release the 2010 Equality Act. This act strictly prohibited advertisers to use race, gender and even age in a discriminatory manner with its main purpose to protect the audiences consuming such media.

Although this act is a big step forward it does not encourage advertisers to be more inclusive with their adverts, advertisers do not have to meet an inclusivity threshold and therefore many do not make the effort. This attitude is a global issue and with media reaching much wider audiences due to the influence of social media this is simply not good enough. In this essay I will highlight the importance of inclusivity within advertising as well as explore why companies are so reluctant to embrace it.

Although diversity and inclusivity has always been important with the rise of social media allowing people across the world to connect, it's become more important than ever. 'Nearly half of teens say they are online almost constantly, up from 24% a decade ago.' With an outstanding '96% – report using the internet daily.' (Faverio. M., Sidoti. O. 2024) Exposing younger generations to inclusivity and diversity is pivotal to paving the path for a more tolerant society in the future. However, tolerance in the future is not the only reason why younger generations should be exposed to inclusivity. Social media connects people from all different cultures and walks of life in the now, 'Among teens, a larger share of those who are Black (79%) or Hispanic (74%) than White (54%) say they use TikTok.' As well as this, 'Black and Hispanic teens also stand out compared with White teens in their use of Instagram and X.' (Faverio. M., Sidoti. O. 2024) These percentages express why Inclusivity within media is pivotal, why only market to white teens if they don't make up the majority of the users? Minorities exist, we need to stop pretending that they don't.

As well as race and ethnicity, sexuality is also very important in today's society. More and more people are coming out as LGBTQ+ 'In 2024, nearly one in ten (9.3 percent) Americans identify as LGBTQ.' (Cox, D.A. Grace. J. Shields. A. 2025) This is due to higher acceptance rates and safer conditions to be openly queer in today's society '67 percent of US adults said that homosexuality should be accepted by society, up from 50 percent in 2007'. (Cox, D.A. Grace. J. Shields. A. 2025) Although these statistics are looking very hopeful for the queer community society still has a long way to go when it comes to the acceptance of Transgender people. Hate crimes against trans people have risen by '11% in a year, and by 186% in the last five years' (Fundraising Regulator:

Stonewall 2023) This is due to the UK government's lack of support for trans people within recent years which has only been pushed with the change of the definition of what a woman is in the UK completely denying the existence of transgender women. People don't want diversity and inclusivity within today's society simply to push the 'woke' agenda but instead create a safer and healthier society for those who are 'different' from it. 'LGBTQIA+ people are 1½ times more likely to develop depression and anxiety disorder compared to the rest of the population.' as well as being 'more risk of suicidal behaviour and self-harm than non-LGBTQIA+ people.' ( London: Mental Health UK 2025) and these issues are not just isolated within the LGBTQ+ community but are unfortunately very prevalent within all minority groups. The want for Diversity and Inclusivity is not some woke cult wanting to brainwash your children. It saves lives.

Diversity and inclusivity is highly important to consumers with '65% of consumers say that it's important that the companies they buy from actively promote diversity and inclusion in their own business or society as a whole.' (Poole. D. 2021) Even though this percentage is more than half of the consumers, companies are still very hesitant to embrace diversity and inclusivity because of the financial strain it can cause a company if not received well. A good example of this can be seen in many controversies that have swept the internet in the past years with one of them being the 2023 Little Mermaid film starring actress Halle Bailey.



(Fig 1. Halle Bailey. 2023. The Little Mermaid live action.)

On March 12th 2023 during the Academy Awards Disney released the first trailer for their new live action 'The little mermaid' starring actress Halle Bailey, this film had been highly anticipated however, outrage was sparked over Halle Bailey playing everyone's beloved Ariel due to her being a black woman. Many people argued that the original Ariel was white and therefore she should be played by a white actress with people trending #Notmyariel across social media. The hate got so out of control that YouTube themselves had to hide the dislike button on the official trailer as 'it was bombarded with racist comments and more than 1.5 million "dislikes."' (Willingham. A. 2022) Some people even went to extreme lengths and created an altered version of the trailer where they replaced Halle who they called a 'woke actress' with a white actress. Although many fans were outraged, others, especially black mothers of little girls found that Halle

being casted was disney magic for their young daughters. Many mothers uploaded videos of their young daughters reacting to the trailer, their little eyes lighting up with some even expressing with excitement “she looks like me!” This magical moment for many black girls presented how important representation is and how special it is to be able to see someone who looks like you in mainstream media as this was the first time many of these little girls had seen a black disney princess. Unfortunately even with these magical moments the racist mob seemed to scream the loudest and although the little mermaid did make a profit of ‘\$317.51 billion’ (Willingham. A. 2022) It came nowhere near to other movies which had a similar budget such as: The Lion King, Aladdin and Beauty of the Beast who stayed true to the race of their characters. Another example of an outrage that was sparked due to the involvement of an inclusive actress comes from the 2023 Bud light Boycott.



(Fig 2. Dylan Mulvaney. 2023. Bud light brand endorsement.)

On April 1st 2023 Trans influencer 'Dylan Mulvaney' posted a social media post reviewing a box of Bud light that the company had sent to her. As well as reviewing the beer Dylan also showcased a specialised can that had been made specifically for her which featured Dylan herself on the front of the can. Immediately after posting this brand deal both Dylan and Bud light came under fire from the right who claimed that Bud light had gone 'woke' simply for sending their product to Dylan. Some people such as 'Musician Kid Rock, NFL player Trae Waynes and model Bri Teresi have all shared videos of themselves shooting Bud Light cans.' (Mariko. O. 2023) In violent protest of this collaboration while other people took it upon themselves to actively not buy Bud light anymore while actively suggesting others to do the same. This act of protest did start to affect Bud light sales as 'In the four weeks to 3 June sales were down by almost a quarter, according to consulting firm Bump Williams.' (Mariko. O. 2023) and while Bud light sales crashed rival companies such as 'Modelo - sold in the US by a rival firm - had replaced Bud Light as the top-selling beer in the US,' and others rivals 'such as Coors Light and Miller Light were gaining fast.' (Mariko. O. 2023) In response to this outrage 'The chief executive Anheuser-Busch InBev, Michel Doukeris, said on a call with investors on 4 May: "We need to clarify the facts that this was one can, one influencer, one post and not a campaign."' (Mariko. O. 2023) Basically trying to get the message across to those offended that collabing with Dylan was not a political statement it was a brand deal with no ulterior motives and even went on to try and revitalise their brand by airing new adverts 'which featured iconic American imagery including the US flag and

horses galloping across open country.’ (Mariko. O. 2023) Symbolisms of what a proud American should believe in, trying to win back the favour of their right leaning customers. While this boycott was running rampant in the US, Bud light sales in other countries were seemingly unaffected showing the different reactions a company may face depending on where their audience's political opinions stand and with Trump's current America right ideologies are louder than ever.

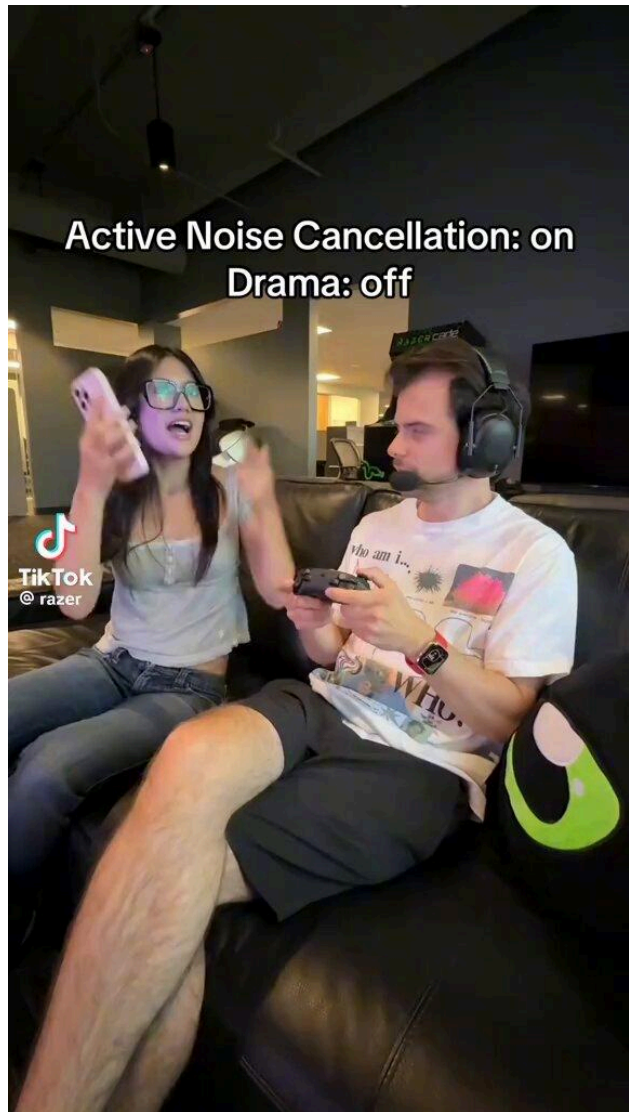
These two examples of outrage caused by companies featuring a more inclusive ideology showcases why companies may be hesitant to embrace diversity as with many big companies reputation is everything and some believe that risking that is not worth it. This way of business has been seen across many companies in the past year due to the election of Donald Trump with 2025 Pride being the quietest companies have ever been. During pride month it used to be very common for companies to change their logo to a rainbow variant to show their support for the LGBTQ+ community with some even selling some rainbow variants of their products However, in 2025 there was a noticeable shift as big brands like ‘Target, Mastercard, Anheuser-Busch, and Deloitte have reduced their public involvement or exited entirely. Organizers say it’s the most dramatic shift in corporate Pride engagement in over a decade.’ (Waldrop. M. 2025) This put strain on the budget for many pride organisations with major cities such as New York city ‘reported a \$750,000 drop in sponsorships after major brands including Mastercard, Citi, and PepsiCo opted out.’ (Waldrop. M. 2025) and ‘In St. Louis, longtime partner Anheuser-Busch abruptly exited its PrideFest relationship. “For them to walk away from the table in negotiations, simply to note that, ‘we just don’t see the value in it anymore,’ it’s like a bad breakup,” said Marty Zuniga, president of Pride St. Louis.’ This year's

pride very clearly showed that brands don't truly value inclusivity and diversity unless it's relevant and benefits them which is very disappointing yet not surprising to see especially when it comes to large billionaire corporations. These corporations are crucial in paving a new diverse world within advertising however, with the backlash they all fear of receiving with Bud light being a pivotal example of why they should steer clear as well as their actual lack of care for diversity and inclusion due to it simply not affecting them as on average 'White Americans make up 76.5% of the total workforce in the U.S. In contrast, African Americans represent 12.8%, Asians account for 6.9%, and Latino workers 18.8%. This highlights a significant underrepresentation of these minority groups in the workforce.' (Pappas. C. 2025) and these statistics would only be lower for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Even though companies are hesitant to embrace diversity due to the backlash they may face, embracing these ideals does have its positives if implemented properly and it's important that companies are made aware of this to encourage them to consider embracing diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world specifically within their advertisements. Although those who don't accept diversity seem to be the loudest crowd, it's actually been proven that '61% of audiences deem diversity in advertising significant.' with '71% of LGBTQ+ consumers are inclined to engage with ads reflecting their sexual orientation authentically.' and '69% of Black consumers exhibit a preference for brands positively representing their race/ethnicity.' (Linked.in: EDS FZCO. 2024) This goes to show that inclusivity does matter and those who are getting mad at it aren't part of the audience that inclusivity and diversity is trying to

pander to, their remarks simply come from hatred and an unwillingness to progress with society. Brands can be and many brands are successful without these toxic consumers.

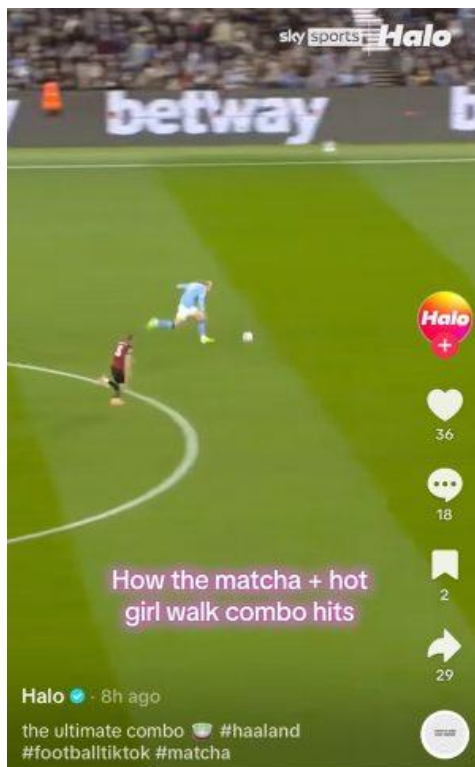
A Brand that came under fire recently for a casual misogynistic advert was Razer.



(Fig 3. 2025. Razer Headset advertisement.)

This year Razer released an advertisement which showcased a man gaming while his girlfriend sat besides him and talked with the caption “Active Noise Cancellation: on, Drama: off” This advert casually reinforced the misogynistic stereotype that women just can’t stop talking which caused major upset within the female gaming community who

'make up 48% of all gamers' with one user stating "welp guess I'm done with razer after 15 years," and another expressing "I just put my razer headphones in the bin," (Cogswell. J. 2025) This advertisement showcased that it's not just companies who try to embrace inclusion but those who actively go against it are also susceptible to backlash in just as large of a scale and that people who show loyalty to brands will drop them within a moments notice if that brand promotes an ideal that they don't agree with. The critiques on this advert wasn't just isolated in its comment section but users actively commented on other videos targeted towards a wider female audience such as Razer's Kurmoi headset stating "razer's sexist btw." (Cogswell. J. 2025) showing the deep effect Razer's sexist ad had on their loyal female audience and how non-inclusive ideologies can instill harmful views and stereotypes that can actively harm a community. An example of a company who tried to be inclusive but was clearly far too uneducated to do so was sky sports with their release of 'Halo Sky sports'



(Fig 4. Halo Sky Sports. 2025. "How the matcha + hot girl walk combo hits)

Halo Sky sports was an active attempt to get more young women into sports however, it felt like a mockery. Adding pink captions stating "How the matcha + hot girl walk combo hits." felt demeaning and patronising with X user Charley Louise stating it felt as if they were 'dumbing down sports content "for females". Pushing the sexist narrative that Women just don't understand sport and although Sports direct meant no harm their incompetence to educate themselves caused them inevitable backlash.

In conclusion I feel we still unfortunately have a long way to go until advertising will effectively embrace diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world even though I believe it should be implemented now. Even though the real world is full of many different cultures and people there are still so many who refuse to accept or even see that, with that carrying over into media and advertising. It is far too convenient for many companies to not bother with inclusion and with many being swayed by the current political environment, diversity, gender and race equality will not be effectively or accurately represented within mainstream advertising in the years to come. Even within companies who are actively trying to be more inclusive some have proven uneducated in the subject and their attempts have backfired against them as Sky Sports showcased. For companies to truly embrace diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world within their advertisements they must be willing to learn and evolve as well as being willing to leave their toxic consumers behind because at the end of the day there will always be one person who has something

negative to say no matter what you do. Diversity, gender and race equality stands for a safer and healthier future for those within our society. And sometimes you have to upset some ignorant people to achieve that harmony.

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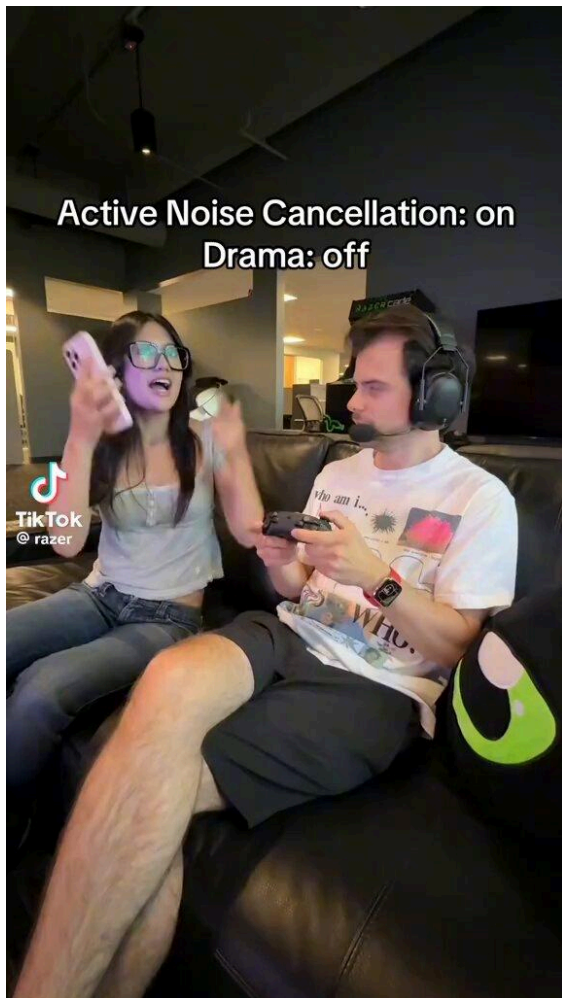
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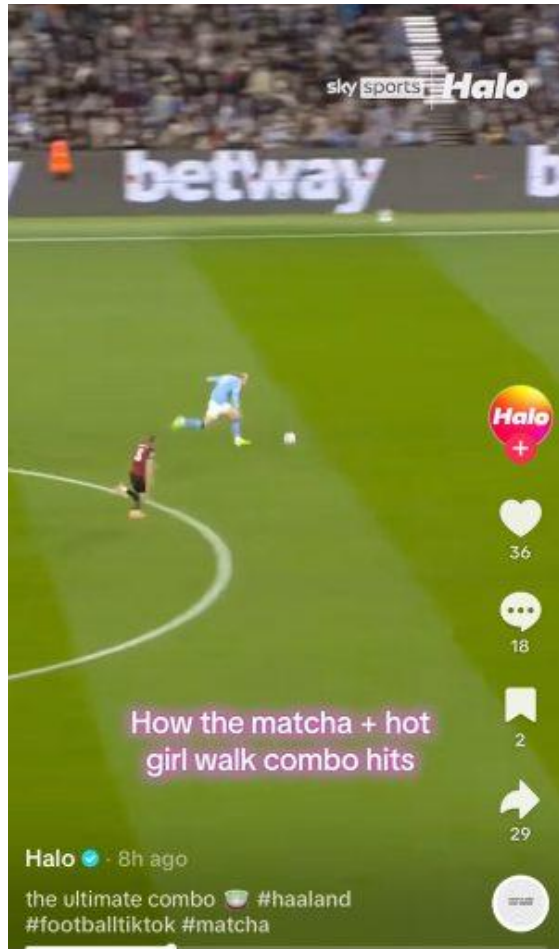
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