

Question 1: When will advertising embrace diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world? Critically discuss and respond.

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Many consider that in the last decade advertising has progressed exponentially when it comes to embracing diversity. If this is the case, then why when surveyed did an overwhelming 82% of LGBTQ+ people perceive the representation they receive in advertising is tokenistic? (Beardsworth, 2021) With a further of 1/5 disabled and 1/3 BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) participants in Channel 4's findings feel as though their identities too have been belittled into stereotypical caricatures. In an age where progressiveness in the media is massively celebrated, it is often seen as a social requirement for brands to manufacture advertisements that present themselves as progressive. However, today's audiences can easily decipher between a true attempt at capturing people's authentic lifestyles and culture and a company using marginalized people as props for profit. Advertising will only be able to embrace diversity, gender and race equality and start reflecting the real world once they shift their focus to inclusivity and not simply diversity alone.

As businesses are already aware, we are at a time in society where brands that are seen as socially-conscious are rewarded heavily by consumers and those alike. Whether this is seen in Pride Month when brands swap their typical social media presence for one plastered with rainbows or ensure to have at least *one* ethnically diverse cast member on their YouTube channel, it's rare to find a company that doesn't see the financial opportunity within this movement. Such as those who decided to progress forward with marketing materials highlighting diversification, receiving an average stock gain of 44% in a seven-quarter period at the end of 2020. (Gross, Wade and Khan, 2021) Not only are there serious financial incentives but HEAT surveys found a notable consumer bias of 84% towards brands with a high diversity score, particularly with LGBTQ+, African American and Hispanic respondents. (Gross, Wade and Khan, 2021) It comes to no surprise that inclusivity within advertising is a heavily discussed topic most consumers would take into consideration because it goes beyond profit margins and customer footfall when you consider the detrimental real-world impact the media has. Without doubt there is a direct and strong correlation between the success of a business in 2021 and its publicly perceived brand morals, leaving these companies with a demand they desperately turn to advertisers to try and fulfil. It has become increasingly apparent to these targeted audiences that often these attempts at social awareness are nothing more than calculated marketing strategies. Out of 2,000 consumers, 66% of the African American participants surveyed perceived their race as being presented stereotypically in advertising; joining the 53% of Hispanic/ Latino Americans who too share this discomfort. (Despite 25 Years Of Ad Growth, Diversity Remains A Challenge, 2021) When advertisers miss the mark and create offensive and tokenistic depictions of minorities it leads to devastating consequences for those communities. Leaving consumers within this bracket to feel demoralised and let down by corporations that possess the responsibility to help these communities feel as though they are reflected. During the month of June this is particularly present, as you can regularly find advertisers embracing Pride with major brands such as Cadbury, Starbucks and Marks & Spencer all making the effort to represent members of the LGBTQ+ community within their ads this year. (Network Rail – Top 10 Brand or Marketing Campaigns 2021 – British LGBT Awards, 2021) Yet the authenticity of such efforts must be called into question when you consider only 32% of marketers continue to engage with the LGBTQ+ community outside of Pride month. (MIRROR ON THE INDUSTRY: HOW DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE IS TV ADVERTISING IN 2019, 2021) This is certainly not an issue exclusive to the LGBTQ+ community either, with this survey going on to find despite only 3% of the UK population consisting of black people, 37% of the TV ads shown featured black cast members. With the leading issue being that only 33% of the black and ethnic people featured in these adverts were given starring roles. (MIRROR ON THE INDUSTRY: HOW DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE IS TV ADVERTISING IN 2019, 2021) To have such a notable difference between the inclusion of black people versus their character's significance within the advertisements emphasises the point that for many involving minorities into advertising is considered a second hand thought purely there to appease the quota opposed to a legitimate attempt at developing a deeper connection to minority audiences.

Despite many advertisers taking full advantage of this new trend of innovative advertising, it is understandable why some brands are hesitant to jump at this opportunity for a public relations nightmare: as we know a new wave of potential means a whole new plethora possible reasons for complaint. Although majority of us would not take active notice of the race or background of those that appear to us in advertising, there still is a significant proportion of audience that will penalise a business for attempting to represent the modern world. Often audiences want to see reflections of themselves within these campaigns, to allow them to relate and feel a personal connection to its overarching message. In fact, all the participants of a group study carried out by the University of Minnesota were found to have a sizeable preference towards ads featuring spokespeople of their race, notably White Caucasians were found to have a 400% preference increase compared to other participants in the study. (Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 2012) Unfortunately there are also those who go further than a preference towards a personal relation and possess an active dislike towards seeing other races represented. In November of 2020, Sainsburys released their yearly Christmas advert named 'Gravy Song' as all the other major supermarkets do; that year featuring a montage of retro home shot style footage of a family enjoying Christmas day, with audio of a telephone conversation between the father and daughter discussing Dad's famous gravy over top. A heart-warming depiction of an all too familiar British Christmas day for most audiences caused enough offense for the Advertising Standards Authority to receive multiple complaints regarding the ad in addition to social media backlash. As expected, ASA did not take the reports any further, but it begs the question what did these people find so insulting? The family depicted were black which caused a few UK viewers to feel as though they were 'not being represented because the family were not white' (Stafford, 2021) and one woman even went as far to protest "Another reason to boycott,". (Stafford, 2021) Sainsbury's rightfully defended their decisions and continued to release the further 2/3rds of the campaign, quoting 'Sainsbury's is for everyone, and it's important our advertising reflects this. The negative response of a vocal minority won't stop us from representing modern Britain,'. The negative publicity is an expected side effect for businesses, that some decide to circumvent altogether by avoiding inclusivity. It would be unfair to criticize a brand for avoiding upsetting possible paying customers, nonetheless it could be argued catering to consumers with such chauvinistic attitude is a morally and ethically wrong business practice. Especially when you consider on the opposing side that studies show 34% of the respondents to Adobe's 25th Anniversary campaign on diversity in advertising stated they would temporarily or even permanently boycott a brand that did not represent their identity in their advertising, with this growing to over half when surveying African American, LGBTQ+ and Gen Z participants. (Despite 25 Years Of Ad Growth, Diversity Remains A Challenge, 2021) With statistics such as these it wouldn't be difficult to argue that brands have a social responsibility to cater to the progressive clientele in order to reflect the real world and it's diverse range of habitants.

The undeniable surge of diversity within advertising in the last decade should theoretically be a cause for celebration. When you look beyond the statistics and deeper into the context of this inclusion it is apparent that some modern-day advertisers present a shallow, inauthentic or outright offensive depiction of the minorities they feature. In 94% of the advertisements studied that featured a woman in a lead role, more than half fell victim to stereotypical typecasting such as empathetic mom, devoted wife, or boy-focused girl. (Gross, Wade and Khan, 2021) In addition to the shocking findings that ethnic minorities are twice less likely to be shown as part of a family than white members. (Alcantara, 2019) This does not mean every attempt at likeness has failed catastrophically but each individual campaign that furthers the reinforcement negative stereotypes is a step further away from being able to embrace true representation in advertising. So, whilst the numbers may appear hopeful when you look beyond the surface at the story they are telling, it highlights the need for mass improvement and education. Miseducation and ignorance are two major causes of tokenistic characterisations amongst advertisers and today's culturally woke climate

underlines examples of that. Only as far back as 2015, Bic released a social media post in honour of international women's day to promote their pens. With the phrase, 'Look like a girl. Act like a lady. Think like a man. Work like a boss.' It is not difficult to understand why the blatantly sexist undertones of this ad were widely received negatively by audiences. Implying the attributes encouraged for women are to keep up their appearance and act proper, 'like a lady', whilst intelligence is supposedly a masculine asset. Bic later releasing an apology statement reading "Let's start out by saying we're incredibly sorry for offending everybody - that was never our intention, but we completely understand where we've gone wrong. This post should never have gone out." (Dray, 2019) Bic recognized the distress caused by their insensitivity and pulled the ad but holding these businesses accountable for their misdirected attempts at social progressiveness becomes detrimental if there is any hope for advertising to practice inclusivity effectively. Some companies actively decide to be more strategic with their placement of diversity within their public image to avoid such complications. The context of *how* minorities are portrayed is as important as *if* they are portrayed at all, and to minimize the consequences of this failing many studies have shown that some businesses will intentionally trivialise the involvement of marginalized groups within the advert. Channel 4's diversity research initiative identified that only 1% of the adverts studied cast person from a minority group as the lead role (MIRROR ON THE INDUSTRY: HOW DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE IS TV ADVERTISING IN 2019?, 2021) It is unfair to commemorate the advertising field on its movement within modern day equality when it is as common for the 'average adult to see an ad with a disabled person, LGBTQ+ person, East Asian or other ethnic minority as a lead character only every 2 and a half days.' (MIRROR ON THE INDUSTRY: HOW DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE IS TV ADVERTISING IN 2019?, 2021) Considering the sheer amount of advertising we are exposed to, statistics as low as these can only reflect an industry with an uncomfortable and shameful bias. Ultimately these findings support that the inclusion of these diverse representations comes down exclusively to brands trying to appease audience demand enough so that these minorities are shown but not in a light that helps to start reflecting the real world.

How can the field of advertising be expected to provide an accurate insight into the lives of minority groups when less than half of the people included on these projects are minorities themselves? There is an ongoing lack of diversity amongst designers in creative fields that directly contributes to the poor quality of these 'progressive' adverts. The ANA (Association for National Advertisers) produced findings that state 70% of the employers working for participating ANA board and AIMM member companies are in fact White, with other employees falling under the '10 percent Asian, 8 percent Hispanic/Latino, 7 percent African-American/Black, 2 percent Multiracial, and 4 percent Other/Not Listed.' Members. (A Diversity Report for the Advertising/ Marketing Industry, 2019) The advertising industry remains white and male dominated even into the 21st century despite the active efforts employers must now make to ensure diversity within the workplace. Diversity and inclusion roles increased by a whopping 113% between 2015 to 2020 as a testament to these claims of improvement. (Rittenhouse, 2021) What we see often with these businesses that do meet this quota however, is employees whom identify with a minority group being kept low within the company's hierarchy. Uncovering this it is not surprising to further find that in the 2020 ANA report less than 5% of the chief marketing officers were Asian, Black or Hispanic. (Rittenhouse, 2021) Similar statistics are found when considering the gender bias too, with only 39% of women holding positions at C suite level when compared to the 60% of men. (Jefferson, 2021) People have an unconscious bias towards those they see themselves in, it's human nature; with management and recruitment teams consisting of Caucasian males already these biases become an apparent and ongoing barrier on the path to achieving an industry that can truly understand diversification. Businesses must recognise that to achieve not simply diversity alone but complete inclusivity, going directly to those who have a first-hand knowledge and comprehension of the issues is the only real way to do this. Advertising will fail to attain true real world understanding if it continues to rely on those in the majority to convey the lives of minority.

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Authentic marketing is central to any brand with the desire to attract forward thinking progressive audiences their way. Featuring a diverse cast is no longer adequate in subduing consumers who feel as though the minorities within their communities have had their struggles exploited at a company's benefit for decades too long. BAME, Disabled and LGBTQ+ groups are amongst those being cast in out of date archetypes that weaponize the newfound surge in multicultural advertising through distributing harmful messages in an attempt at appearing woke. However, being in an age where a brand's entire representation is endangered by its perceived stance on societal issues, the need for diversification goes past being solely a moral ambition and becomes a non-negotiable company asset. An advertiser's success has of course consistently had a direct correlation with public perception, but today's audiences delve past the surface level face of a company into its internal workings and procedures to ensure verifiable genuineness. It is a advertiser's responsibility to reflect on its own internal biases within its infrastructure that limit it from going beyond achieving base line diversity alone. Ultimately, without inclusivity the hope that the advertising field will ever be capable of capturing a legitimately raw portrayal of the world is unfeasible, because the sole outcome of diversity without inclusivity is exclusion.

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