Research in Context

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Question 1: When will advertising embrace diversity, gender and race equality and start reflecting the real world? Critically discuss and respond (by Martin Bush)

Does the media reflect real world society perspectives? According to Works, the media exhibits what is apparently important to people, reporting on fads, current issues and what they think people want to hear. It is rare for people to seek out information for themselves and instead they rely on mass media such as radios, television, news channels and articles to find the information for them and conclude their opinions. (*B. Works, 1964*).

The issue for the consumer is that advertising can be led by an agenda, delivering media with the intention of influencing the viewer to relate to their brand and buy into their products.

"It is alleged that television, a mass medium which penetrates all sectors of society, projects a view of the world through repetitive and pervasive patterns". (*Enotes, n.d.*)

When a brand delivers an advertisement, they try to portray an idealist life that the consumer can relate to or wish for themselves. This means reaching out to a diverse audience, including those of different abilities, gender, race, and sexualities. Although discrimination is rejected in face-to-face society, it is still prominent over social media. The Nation-Wide Building Society's 2018 advertisement that ran on Channel 4 '#togetheragainsthate' demonstrated how racist abuse, bullying and harassment is almost common practice online, stating that "41% of young adults have seen racist abuse, bullying or harassment online" (*Nationwide Building Society, 2018*).

This essay will discuss whether advertising is doing enough to promote diversity, if advertising agencies will do more to embrace different abilities and race equality and how society perceives diversity in the real world.

Disability in Advertising

It can be argued that disability is underrepresented in advertising. Keegan identifies this by stating that, **"**much of the focus is on race and gender. Disability should also be included in that focus" (*Keegan, n.d.)*.

According to the Office of National Statistics, "In 2011, nearly 1 in 5 people (17.9%) in England and Wales reported a disability that limited their daily activities." (*Office for National Statistics, 2015*).

Mars launched their 'Look on the light side of disability' campaign in 2016, by AMV BBDO advertising agency after winning the 'Superhumans Wanted' competition run by the Paralympics. They used their win to sell their Maltesers chocolates, featuring three short advertisements that focused on different disabilities, including actresses Storme Toolis, Samantha Renke, and Genevieve Barr. This campaign was managed by Rosemary Frazer, 'Scope' disability equality charity champion, who stated that "There are around 12 millions disabled people in the UK, so that's roughly around 20% of the population and yet we're largely invisible on our television screens" (*Maltesers, 2016*).

Mars largely based these advertisements from the stories expressed in their focus groups, but as they were not portrayed exactly as it happened, some people have described the stories as "cringey stuff" (*Pepper, 2016*). It could be argued that although it was good to use actresses from the disability community and listen to focus group stories, changing the

stories can make them less believable.

Figure 1 Mars advertisement for Maltesers 'Look on the light side' campaign

Most responses from The Guardian concluded that the campaign had resulted in, "a begrudging sense of this being better than nothing. I know that until disabled creatives are allowed into the fold, all the way up to writing scripts for adverts, change will be slow." (*Pepper, 2016*).

However, the fact that Maltesers featured these actresses in main roles and not just as tokenism was considered a huge step for the community, with reports from the company that "consumers were 44% more likely to say that they thought Maltesers were changing the way the nation perceives disability." (*Marketing Society, n.d.*).

This demonstrates that by using diversity and with proper research into focus groups, advertising can help to build a brand and create an inclusive community. Renke even told reporters on reflection that "I have had a really great response from people. A lot of people

with my condition have also been sharing it across the world because they are happy with it." (*Lancashire Post, 2016*).

This illustrates that although the Channel 4 advert from Nationwide '#togetheragainsthate' demonstrating a negative side from social media, where Renke received abuse online with comments such as "Ew, she's disabled", "Disgusting, freakish and awful", "Normal humans walk on two legs" (*Nationwide Building Society, 2018*) and many other negative connotations, this seemed to be minority feedback.

Concluding based on Renke's overall response, it can be concluded that this advertisement was a success and can be considered a reflection of current real-world perspectives. With more advertisements like this where members of the disabled community are consulted by the marketing team, in focus groups, and taking on more lead roles in acting, then advertising will have a better reflection of disability diversity in the real world.

Paddy Power created an advertisement for their betting website to be featured in the Sun on Sunday. This advertisement was for betting against the Oscar Pistorius, South African Paralympian, who was accused of murdering his girlfriend in 2013. (*BBC, 2015*). The advertisement was featured in the Sun on Sunday, published by the News Group Newspapers, but only lasted a day before being taken down by the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA). (*Joseph, 2014*).

The ASA reported that they received 5,525 complaints about this advertisement, including reference of the advertisement being "too insensitive by trivialising the issues surrounding a murder trial, the death of a woman and also disability, challenged whether the ad was likely to cause serious or widespread offence". (*ASA, 2014*)

Figure 2 Paddy Power advertisement for Oscar Pistorius court case bet

The ASA also reported that Paddy Power believed that the advertisement would not cause offence as they did not refer directly to any deaths, the court case was taking place overseas and that their use of '*If he walks*' had double meaning, referring to popular court case slang and a subtle comment towards his disability. (*ASA, 2014*). There are specific rules under The Committee of Advertising Practice Code (CAP Code) that advertisements must abide by when they are published. The ASA deemed that the advertisement broke three rules; 4.1, stating that advertisements may not contain anything that can cause widespread offence, and 4.3, stating that "references to anyone dead must be handled with particular care" and finally rule 1.5, "No marketing communication should bring advertising into disrepute". (*ASA, 2014*).

This Paddy Power advertisement is a clear example of when referring to disability insensitively can lead to widespread offence and lead to the advertisement being removed by the ASA. In comparison to the Maltesers advertisement, Paddy Power was deemed to

have caused offence due to not taking care with their reference to Pistorius' disability. In contrast, the Maltesers campaign appeared to make light of the situations that the disabled characters had found themselves in. The Maltesers' characters were based on real case studies from focus groups, whereas Paddy Power aimed to make a direct subtle joke targeted at an individual.

However, this is not the only time Paddy Power has had a backlash from their offensive advertisements. They were featured on the BBC News website for their Twitter advertisement on the 2017 Mayweather fight (*BBC, 2017*). Their use of the comment '*Always bet on black*', raised an issue with a total of 9 complaints to the ASA. This phrase could have the connotation of two meanings, bet on black when gambling in roulette or always bet on the '*black person*' as the person Paddy Power is referring to is of colour. This advertisement was banned on the same grounds as the previously discussed Pistorius advertisement, on breaking the CAP code 4.1 (*ASA, 2017*).

Figure 3 Paddy Power advertisement for the Mayweather boxing match bet

In contrast to their previous advertisement, Paddy Power sought approval from Mayweather before they posted this advertisement. Mayweather had even told the Paddy Power that he "found the line funny, rather than offensive" (*ASA, 2017*). Though this did not have a large impact like their Pistorius advertisement as they had spoken to Mayweather, this demonstrates the importance of having researched the community being represented within an advertisement before assuming it is published.

This could lead to question who Paddy Power is targeting their advertisements at and whether shocking headlines is what they think will attract them. The brand's target market is sports fans aged over eighteen and therefore, Paddy Power uses mischievousness to relate to them. They appear to want their target audience to feel that the brand is a part of the sporting experience. Paddy Power even stated they wanted to become a "customer-centric entertainment company" (*Marketingsociety, n.d*.).

It can be debated as whether this advertising technique was used as entertainment, or to appear relatable and humorous to their target audience, which would reflect their target audiences' perspectives. According to Paddy Power chief executive Patrick Kennedy, "Brand lifecycles are shorter today than ever before because everything happens more quickly. Always-on communication means that brands mature more swiftly, and therefore die more quickly. We are consumed with trying to ensure that our brand is relevant to 18- to 25-year-olds, as they are tomorrow's consumers." (*The Irish Times, 2010*). This implies that the use of shocking headlines is there to attract a younger audience, in comparison to Mars who aim to sell to a wide range of ages and appear to be more family friendly.

Race equality in advertising

Reflecting real world perspectives can be understood by observing responses to big events are going on in the world. The Black Lives Matter Movement Global Network Foundation (BLM) was founded in 2013, and is based in the US, UK and Canada. (*Blacklivesmatter, n.d.*) During 2020, there was numerous protests held by the Black Lives Matter movement, including peaceful protests for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. (*BBC, 2020*) (*BlackLivesMatter, 2020*). In the Black Lives Matter 2020 impact report, they stated that "The single most active day was June 2, 2020, with 1.9 million visitors. This is an almost 5,000% increase compared to our most trafficked day in March 2020". (*BlackLivesMatter, 2020*). This demonstrates that there was a lot of discussion around the movement during this time.

Many brands use a technique called 'real time marketing' (RTM) to use current events as an opportunity to advertise their brand. According to the International Journal of Advertising, "RTM is believed to be an effective strategy to boost word of mouth" (Lottie et.all, 2018). LINGsCARS used this technique when republishing the sale of their Audi deal. They used the copy 'Black Cars Matter' in response to the increased discussion around the movement. They added a black and white print of a fist, which is the arbitrary sign for BLM, for anchorage. LINGsCARS also used the phrases 'Once you go black, you never go back' and 'Big gearknob'. They did not believe this would be offensive, and that the image of the fist would represent a positive symbol. The ASA received three complaints about this advertisement and concluded that LINGsCARS breached two of the CAP Code rules; 1.3, "Advertisements must comply with the law and broadcasters must make that a condition of acceptance." and 4.1 "Advertisements must contain nothing that could cause physical, mental, moral or social harm to persons under the age of 18". It was deemed that reference

of the BLM movement trivialised the movement, and the comments were objectifying to black men (ASA, 2020).

Figure 4 LINGsCARS social media advertisement for their AUDI car deals

It was deemed by the ASA that this advertisement needed to be removed. LINGsCars posted to their Facebook page their comments and feelings about the situation but did not remove the advertisement. (Dickinson, 2020). According to LINGsCARs only remaining post

on Facebook regarding the instance, the post was eventually taken down after the ASA contacted Facebook to remove the posts.

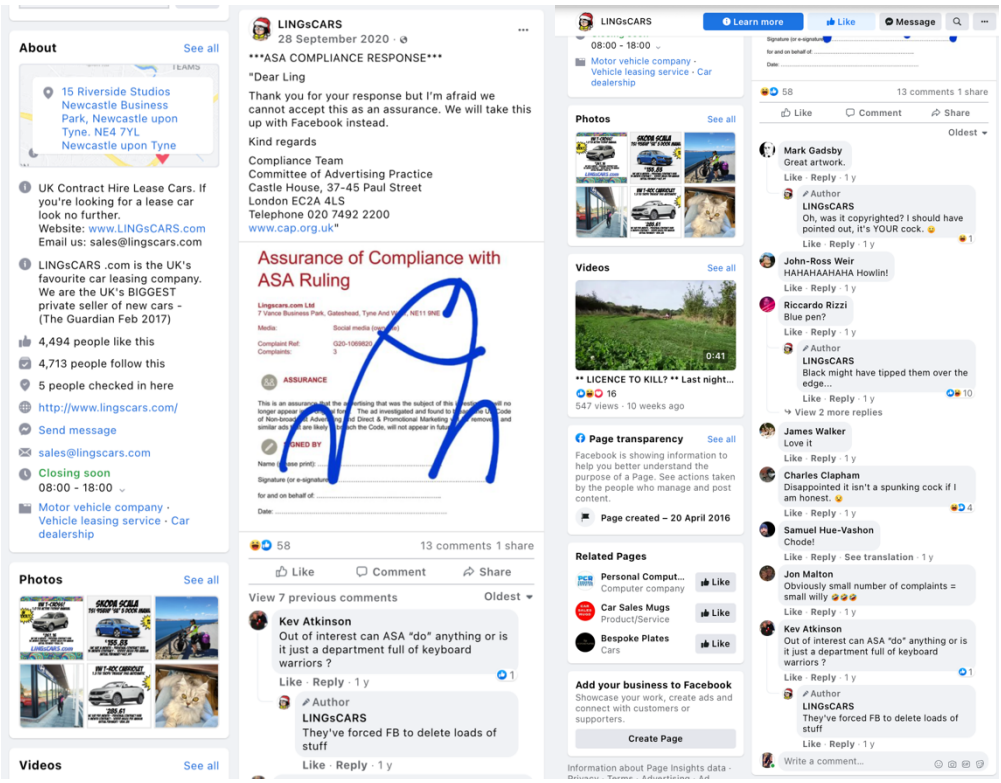

Figure 5 Screenshots of LINGsCARS social media posts after they had been reported to the ASA for breaching the CAP code

Analysing the comment section of their last Facebook post, their customers are angry for the care retailer, making jokes about the drawing the company had drawn over the ASA response email. This gives the impression that although the advertisement was removed, their cliental appeared to be unaffected. LINGsCARS use the same advertising strategy as Paddy Power; using comedy and a mischievous personality to seem relatable to their customers. If this is the strategy they are using, then they would indeed be 'reflecting the real world'.

During 2020, Sainsburys released their Christmas advertisements which featured three different families receiving phone calls reminiscing in past Christmas memories in their own ways. They filmed them in the style of a home video and based the stories on real

stories from focus groups. The Head of Broadcast commented that “this year has been different for everyone, so we wanted to take a different approach with our Christmas campaign by simply reminding people that Christmas dishes are gestures of love and care, served by up by those who matter most” (Sainsburys, 2020).

Figure 6 Screenshot of Sainsburys Christmas advertisement 'Gravy Song'

Sainsburys used relatable, heart-warming, nostalgic stories, relating further with the family’s connection through phone calls, which had a link to the current events of COVID 19 lockdowns. They did not make jokes about anyone like in the Paddy Power advertisement, nor did they break the CAP code 4.1 of providing communications that may cause widespread offense to any protected characteristics. However, they still received negative feedback for their ‘Gravy Song’ advertisement on their social media platforms. This even got to the extent that they had to disable the comments section on their YouTube video. Above is a sample of some of the comments that Sainsburys received on their Twitter Page. There was a variety of racist comments, complaints that the advertisement was not relatable to their race, complaints that they alienated customers and threats to boycott the franchise due to the lack of inclusion. Sainsburys responded to these comments, “… throughout all our advertising we aim to represent a modern Britain, which has a diverse range of

communities…”. This response politely explained the importance of promoting diversity, even if they did continue to receive hateful comments afterwards.

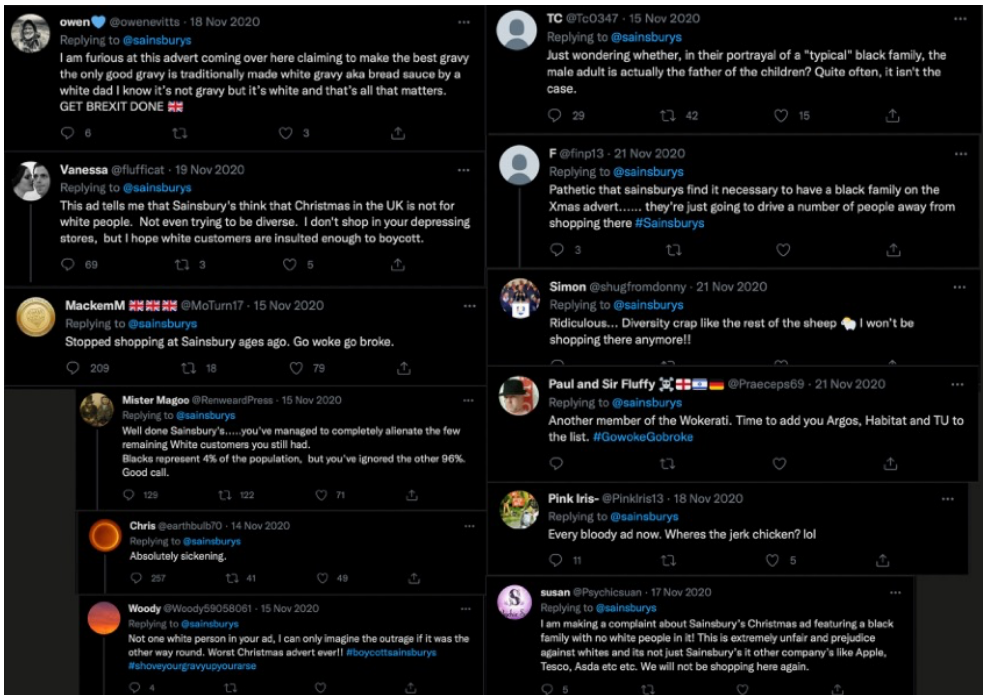

Figure 8 Screenshot of the comments on the Sainsburys Christmas Advertisement on their Twitter page

In comparison to LINGsCARS, both brands used current events to relate to their audiences. However, LINGsCARS caused widespread offence by appropriating a movement. Paddy Power cause offense by emphasising Mayweather’s skin colour for a comedic tagline. Sainsburys caused offense by using representation of a family of colour within their three-part advertisement series, although this did not impact the CAP code, and thus the advertisement stayed up. Sainsburys did remove the comment section of their YouTube video to remove the negative feedback. Both Sainsburys and Mars showed advertisements that would show representation of diversity in their brand, in a non-offensive way that abided by the CAP code for advertising yet were still met with negative feedback and discriminatory slurs from their audiences.

To conclude, this essay has discussed the importance embracing different abilities and race equality within advertising, whilst taking particular care to avoid offence when discussing these protected characteristics. This can be achieved through research, focus groups, and inclusion of a diverse marketing team. Failure to do so can result in the APA removing the advertisement. Many brands try to reflect their target audience's personalities to feel relatable and create quick humour, which can result in causing offence to the wider audience that the brand has not thought about. Both Sainsburys and Mars tried to create more diversity within their advertising and were met with a strong amount of negative feedback on their social media. This could show that advertising already shows '*real world perspectives*', which includes little diversity and idealistic scenarios as they believe this is what their customers want to see. However, if more advertisers used Mars' strategy of deeply researching people with these protected characteristics with interviews and focus groups, then they would not risk causing offence and diversity would be seen as the norm and it would not be looked at as new and scary. If more advertisers did this, then we would see advertising embrace more diversity, gender, and race equality.

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Figures

1. Maltesers Advertisement 'Look on the light side' campaign, Image screenshot from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW8U75t7JGQ
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