

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

Research in Context ADAD5003

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This essay will be answering the question “When will advertising embrace diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world?” It will explore different examples of the positive and negative adverts that reflect a good insight on diversity as well as exploring the differences between people such as disability, gender, race etc. Furthermore, discussing the past, present and future will also be a key aspect of this essay to make my final judgement to answer the question.

Exploring the real meaning of diversity will be involved as it is important to have the right understanding to explore this question correctly. Additionally, different brands and companies will be explored including discussion on how they have improved their understanding of diversity, as well as the great response they have received. It will also look at any laws that have come into place over the past few years within the advertising industry, that will affect the lack of diversity.

Diversity is a range of differences between people which includes race, gender, sexuality, disabilities, age, religion, ethnicity, political beliefs and more. “The fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people” (Cambridge, 2022).

Diversity in advertising is about recognising the contrasts in the groups of people to target the right people. “In short, diversity marketing is a means of hyper-targeting a marketing campaign in a way that will connect with the widest variety of people within a target market” (Kovačević, 2019). It is important to be authentic and culture-aware when creating an advertisement that shows diversity, as otherwise the message will not be clear. This is where many companies have gone wrong and is why they have received negative feedback on adverts that they have created. Examples of this are

explored later in this essay. It is also important that advertisers have a good understanding of the group they are, so that they can create an accurate representation to avoid a negative response.



Figure 1: Kenwood advert 1960s

There are many examples of bad advertising from the past which have been sexist, racist, ageist and many more. A Kenwood advert from the 1960s (see figure 1) states that wives are for cooking. The quote reads 'The chef does everything but cook – that's what wives are for!' These adverts were normalised in the 60s as sexism was a huge issue. "Women were portrayed on television and in advertisements as happy homemakers, secretaries, teachers, and nurse" (Schulman, no date.)

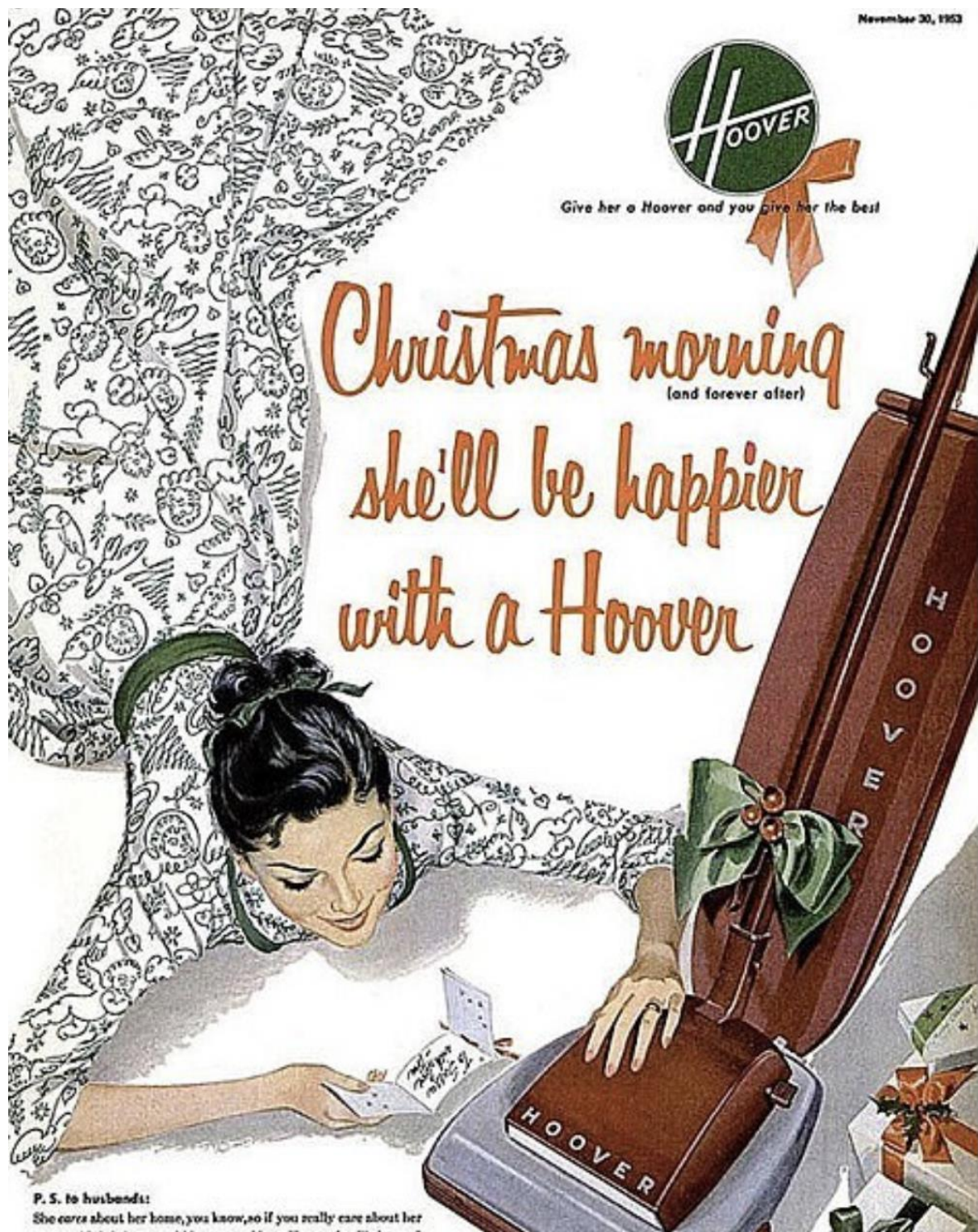


Figure 2 – Hoover advert

Another bad example of this is a hoover advert (see figure 2) which shows a woman on Christmas morning receiving a hoover as a Christmas present. This advert is saying that women would prefer

cleaning products rather than other presents. There are a quite a few adverts with the same concept of giving women cleaning products as presents, which I have gathered from my research.



Figure 3 – Dove advert 2017

Dove has made mistakes in advertising, where in 2017 they posted an advert showing a black woman turn into a white woman. In this advert they were insensitive with what they portrayed, which did not support Dove's mission of showing real beauty which they claim to be passionate about. Although Dove have made mistakes, later on in this essay I will discuss on the positive changes they have made with their advertising and how they are being more diverse.

Although diversity today has come far from the past, there definitely is room for improvement. For example, "just 4% of TV adverts in the UK feature disabled people (vs 3% in 2020) which is

considerably low compared to the 22% of the UK population who are disabled” (All 4, 2022). Later, this essay will discuss more about the lack of diversity in advertising for people part of the disabled community. On the other hand, some companies are trying to encourage advertisers to be more diverse. Channel 4 hosted a £1 million award for diversity in advertising this year, with Vanish (Havas London) being crowned the winner. “A powerful and moving idea, created in partnership with charity Ambitious about Autism, to help girls be seen as part of a broader public understanding of autism.” (All 4, 2022). This is a big step to diversity in advertising as it will encourage other brands to show more diversity and will receive good feedback from the public.

Another area that suffers from representation issues is gender and sexuality. More representation of the LGBT community needs to be shown in advertising, as many people feel that this is what advertising is lacking. “Individuals from the gay and lesbian community felt unrepresented and excluded” (UCL Institute of Education, 2018). Most adverts show heterosexual couples, making people part of the LGBT community feel unrepresented. Many would argue there needs to be more representation on this.

It also unacceptable in advertising that women tend to be sexualised, even when it is not relevant to the advertisement itself. “Two in three Londoners (68%) feel that women are often shown in revealing clothes” (UCL Institute of Education, 2018). This then has a negative affect by objectifying women and showing people that its ok, therefor it has been normalised. It also has shown that it damages women’s body image, as a lot of the time in advertising women’s bodies are altered and filtered. “Women’s bodies are digitally altered to remove blemishes, lengthen legs, reduce waist and hips, and increase bust size.” (Shequal, 2021). Later I will discuss the importance of this and how it affects woman, by having these advertisements portray the wrong image.



Figure 4 – Protein world advert

New regulations were put in place by the Committees of Advertising Practice in 2019 which banned gender stereotypes in adverts (Advertising Standards Authority, 2019). “The new rule says that “advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offense” (Tiffany, 2019). One of the examples for gender stereotypes is a Protein World advert (see figure 4) which shows a woman in a bikini tag lined “Are you beach body ready?” which was banned by the advertising watchdog after receiving a high number of complaints. With this law being put in place, it shows that people are starting to take diversity in advertising seriously and taking the actions to avoid any problems in the future.

Racism is still a huge factor in bad representation in advertising and there have been many incidents of racist adverts. It had even got to the point that people thought brands were purposefully creating racist adverts to get more ‘views.’ “Brands are "purposely putting out noticeably racist ads so they

can get more views" (Willson, 2018). Back in 2018 there had been many adverts that received a huge amount of backlash for their insensitivity for the black community. One of the main adverts was the H&M advert that featured a black child wearing a jumper that said, "coolest monkey in the jungle." This was not the only time H&M was accused of racism with their bad advertising. "The insinuation that white models conveyed more of "a positive image" added fuel to the fire" (West, 2021).

Focusing on a more positive advert is the Adidas *Calling all Creators* advert which features multiple creators, different genders, race, etc. (Arica, 2020). This advert shows no matter what race you are, gender and more, that you are all creators and can come together as one. "Together with these intensely talented people from different spaces, they come together to push innovation and creativity forward" (Arica, 2020). This advert also had a good response, making people feel like a community.



Figure 5 – Kate Grant Benefit ambassador

Disability lacks representation in advertising and media, as most conversations are about race and gender. More work needs to be done on representing disabilities as “22% of the total UK population & 19% of working-age adults have a disability” (Viles, 2022). A makeup brand called Benefit in 2019 introduced Kate Grant who is model with down syndrome as a brand ambassador, sharing images of her using the products on social media platforms to show diversity (See figure 5). It may seem a small change nonetheless it did make an impact. “The 20-year-old supermodel was already a sensation and inspired other women with similar disabilities to pursue their dreams” (Kashyap, 2020).

Another brand that recognises the struggles of disabilities is Marks and Spencer’s, who created the first high streets adaptive clothing range, made for kids. “Marks and Spencers has been praised by thousands online after launching a clothing range specifically designed for children with disabilities”

(Young, 2018). This range has helped the parents dress their kids without feeling that they are causing them any more harm. Not only are they easy to put on, but they have also focused on making them fun and appealing to kids with their designs which is also important. Claire Askew, parent of a child with disability, comments: “I can easily get Edward ready to go out when he’s in his wheelchair. I haven’t seen anything else like this before” (Marks & Spencers, 2022).



Figure 6 – Dove self-esteem project

Self-image is another problem today, where women are often mis-represented in the media, for example by presenting an unrealistic beauty standard. As a result, many women feel the need to live

up to this high beauty standard. There have been many adverts that have represented unrealistic features of women due to editing and Photoshop, this then sets an unachievable beauty standard that women think they need to fit into. Advertising does affect people's body image. "By age 13, 80% of girls distort the way they look online" (Dove, 2021). Dove have started a campaign called *The Self-Esteem Project* which aims to ensure young people grow up with a positive view on how they look. "By 2030, we're aiming to have helped ¼ billion young people build positive body image and learn how to improve self-esteem" (Dove, 2021). As this is something Dove feel so strongly about, they are constantly trying to get their message across with their advertising, especially by showing what is realistic and what is not. They released an emotional advert called "*Reverse selfie*" which is about editing apps that girls use to add filters and retouch their pictures. "Dove's Self-Esteem research project found that 85% of girls were using retouching apps and image 'filters' by the age of 13" (Jenkins, 2021). This advert was created to encourage parents to talk to their kids about self-esteem, and to recognise the negative impacts of having social media especially from a young age. Dove needs to carry on being this inclusive as it is getting a positive response and is a big step to diversity in advertising. Hopefully they learn from previous mistakes (as previously spoken about) and continue with their wide range of diversity and more.



Figure 7 – Barbie diversity dolls

Barbie is known for also setting a bad example for the beauty standards especially in the past, with their skinny dolls. “Mattel has often received criticism for its lack of diversity in its long-running line of Barbie dolls.” (Piersall, 2020). Despite that, in the last 5 years they have been trying to show more diversity in their dolls by having more representation with having 176 dolls, with 9 body types and 35 skin tones (see figure 7). In June 2022, dolls were released, including a doll with a hearing aid and a doll with a prosthetic leg. Barbie is working on being more diverse with their products and talk about their reasonings and plans on their website on how they are going to support the black community. They have even created ‘vlogger’ style videos with an episode on racism that shows how black people are treated differently due to the colour of their skin to help promote their new diversity range. “Many people not only see colour but they also use it as a way to judge or determine someone’s character” (Grant,2022).

Another topic Barbie is showing diversity in is underrepresented careers for women, by having dolls in work uniforms such as a fire fighter, president, a pilot and more. They believe certain jobs are traditionally held by men and want to represent that any gender can have any job. "Implicitly designating a job as "female" can automatically diminish its authority" (Hedreen, 2022). Barbie have started to address their previous lack of diversity and take steps to be more diverse with their products. Creating these diverse dolls then gives them the opportunity to advertise them. This shows that diversity in advertising has already started to and will likely continue to grow as others learn from what Barbie have done.

To conclude, this research shows that diversity in advertising has already started to embrace, gender and race and equality to reflect the real world. From this research it has shown many brands and companies have reflected on their lack of diversity and have made a change to embrace the differences today. Looking at the past and comparing it to today, shows that we have come a long way. However, there is a lot more to be done and many companies should take some inspiration from others to make this step themselves. "Advertising helps us as consumers and citizens understand the social world and our place within it" (Tiffany, 2019). It is possible more laws will come into place to help stop the lack of insensitivity some brands have portrayed throughout the last few years in their advertising. It would be beneficial for people to ask themselves 'How can we be more diverse?'

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