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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.

When will Advertising Embrace Diversity, Gender & Race Equality and Start Reflecting the Real World?

Advertising plays a significant role in shaping society, influencing consumer behaviour, and preserving culture. Although, despite progress towards inclusivity and advancements in social awareness, the advertising industry (in this generation still) fails to reflect the real world's diversity. For far too long, advertising has been suffused with stereotypes, lack of diversity, and inequality when it comes to gender and representation. According to Lloyds plc, 'only 7% of adverts feature Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups as the dominant or main character.' (Ethnicity in advertising 2018)¹. Additionally, the Advertising Association states that 'nearly 90% of the advertising industry is white' (Credos, The whole picture: How advertising portrays a diverse Britain 2021)². 'Since 2015, the inclusion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic characters in UK advertising has doubled from 12% to 25%' (Ethnicity in advertising 2018). Even though this may seem like an improvement, there is still further to go, as 60% - this equating to 3 in 5 adverts - still feature a majority of white people. This has

created an unrealistic view of the world, proving that the time has come for advertising to finally embrace diversity, and start reflecting reality.

In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for more diversity and inclusivity in advertising. A survey conducted in June 2020 by Statista shows that '42% of responding Americans want more racial diversity in advertising. Moreover, **55% of 18-34-year-olds**, representing two key consumer groups (Millennials and Gen Z) whose buying power continues to grow, want to see more racial diversity in advertisements' (Pilgrim, Genuine diversity in advertising creates lasting brand impact 2023)³. We can see from these statistics, consumers are becoming increasingly vocal about the lack of representation in advertising, and are quick to call out brands that fail to represent the diverse world we live in. However, some adverts completely miss the mark when it comes to showing diversity. An example of this is a Dove Advert Campaign, that was posted onto Facebook in 2017.



Fig 1: *Banned Dove Facebook Advert Campaign, 2017*

<https://youtu.be/pAlgDredHpw?si=B7nAHoe5Q-Jf-rCF>

The advert used a series of three images, starting with a black lady, taking off her T-shirt, to reveal a white woman underneath her skin. The white woman then goes on to undress, revealing an Asian lady underneath. It was said to demonstrate that the 'after product' was the same, no matter whose body it may be. However, viewers of the campaign didn't hesitate to take to Facebook and Twitter to express their opinions of the controversial ad,

causing it to spark a lot of debate, with some people accusing the brand of whitewashing and racism. The video was soon removed, and Dove responded with an apology which read “An image we recently posted on Facebook missed the mark in representing women of color thoughtfully, we deeply regret the offense it caused.” (Dove apologizes for racially insensitive Facebook advertisement 2017)⁴. The statement then went on to say “Dove is committed to representing the beauty of diversity. In an image we posted this week, we missed the mark in thoughtfully representing women of color and we deeply regret the offense that it has caused. The feedback that has been shared is important to us and we’ll use it to guide us in the future.” (Dove apologizes for racially insensitive Facebook advertisement 2017). People accused Dove of giving a weak apology and were quick to remind the company this is not the first time this has happened.

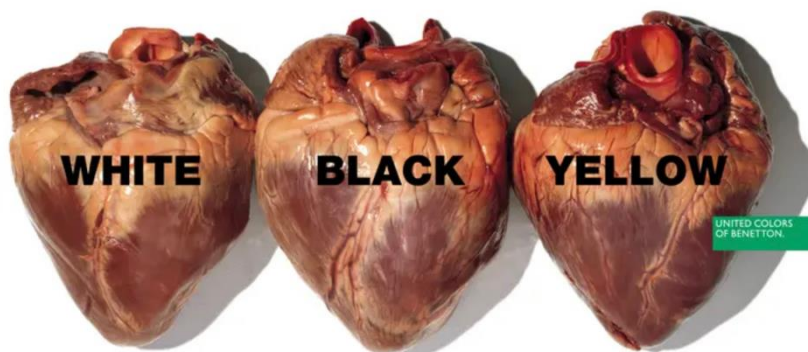


Fig 2: *United Colors of Benetton*, Oliviero Toscani, 1996

Italian photographer, Oliviero Toscani, created a controversial campaign for United Colors of Benetton. The image captured three human hearts (later found out to be pigs hearts) with the words ‘white’ ‘black’ and ‘yellow’ written on each. It is said that Toscani’s aim behind the image was ‘stop racism and to show the world that everyone is the same.’ (Analyses 2022)⁵. Benetton wanted to convey the message that no matter the persons race, everybody has the same heart, therefore proving we are all the same and should all be treated equally. During

this time, there were a plethora of other campaigns all addressing racism, therefore, being the reason the Benetton's campaign didn't raise objections, but only started conversations between people regarding the matter. Even though this was one of Benetton's less offensive campaigns, given time, it provoked some acute reactions. It was said that the image caused offence to 'the association of Italian blood transfusion recipients who claim that this "crude imagery" intensifies fears of receiving organs from donors of a different race.' (Hearts not moved by New Benetton ad campaign 1996)⁶. Toscani responded to the reactions caused by saying "A heart is a heart," said the author, "no matter what race or nationality it belongs to." (Hrivnáková, The king of controversy Oliviero Toscani 2023)⁷.

It is clear to see that these two advert campaigns are both very similar yet very different. This meaning that both companies who designed each adverts had the right intentions in mind – I.e. being diverse and equal, showing that race does not differentiate who we are – however, only one was able to convey that message in an appropriate term. This surprisingly being Benetton's from 1996. Apart from these two, it is not rare that adverts often miss the mark in being racially equal, and frequently fail to accurately represent racial diversity.

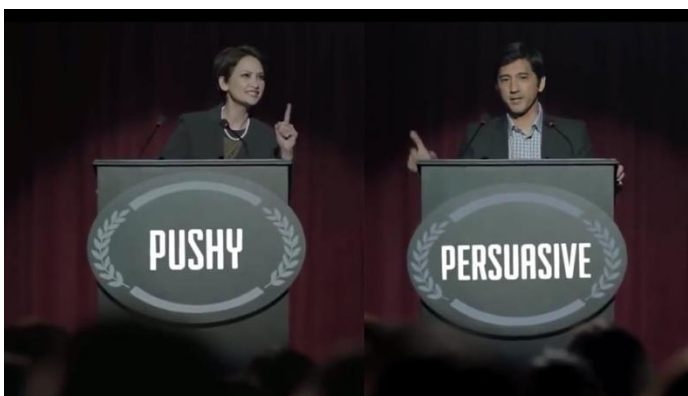


Fig 3 (left) & Fig 4 (right): Pantene 'Labels against Women' Case Study, 2013

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFxaL_79nMU

Gender representation and double standards in advertising has been a prominent issue in the industry for years. This is particularly widespread in the way products and services are marketed to different demographics, based on economic status, gender and race. According to Independent, 'Men are almost 40 per cent more likely than women to be featured prominently in adverts' (Men are 38% more likely than women to be featured prominently in adverts, study finds 2019)⁸. Despite this, in many other adverts, women are often portrayed as being overly concerned with their appearance, whilst men are depicted as being focused more on wealth, success and their achievements. Gender definitely influences marketing as 'it can positively or negatively impact the ideals and attitudes of your target audience.' (Sih, Should marketers shape or shatter stereotypes? 2023)⁹.

Back in 2013, an advert campaign was launched in the Philippines for Pantene haircare, which is owned by the company P&G. The advert reveals the gender bias double-standard that happens, particularly in the Philippines' society. One of the examples shown in the video (as pictured above (left)) consists of a man and a woman standing up, delivering a presentation to an audience. On the men's podium is written 'persuasive' but on the women's is written 'pushy' – this represents how society views each gender, proving that when a man addresses his thoughts he is clearly heard, yet when a woman proposes her ideas, she is seen to be arrogant and bossy. P&G's Marketing Manager, Pepe Torres, claimed 'this experimental campaign was created to help them start a conversation with their audience and gain emotional relevance with them.' (by admin & *, Pantene: Fighting Gender Equality with labels against women 2020)¹⁰. The advert uses strong words such as "vein, selfish and show off" which society use to judge and degrade women, and then goes on to paint this picture that men are seen as being 'the leader of the pack' and are praised for being a boss like figure. It

shows the irony of how men and women can be doing the exact same thing yet can be judged very differently for it. According to CauseMarketing.com, Francine Gonzales (Managing Director for P&G), said the company had ‘conducted research that stated that 70% of men actually think that women need to downplay their personality to be accepted.’ (Organ, Pantene Philippines 'labels against Women' Case Study 2017)¹¹. In addition to this, they shockingly discovered that 58% of women agreed with that fact. These upsetting statistics confirm that women feel unless they bow down and act in accordance with these make-believe standards men are creating in their heads, that the female population won't be accepted for who they truly are.

In 2019, the British Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) announced that they had banned all gender stereotypes from British adverts, with a six-month buffer period before. The ban followed a report the ASA published on ‘how gender stereotypes in ads “can lead to unequal gender outcomes in public and private aspects of people’s lives”’ (Tiffany, Gender stereotypes have been banned from British ads. what does that mean? 2019)¹².



Fig 5: Philadelphia banned advert, 2019

<https://www.YouTube.com/watch?=-avtzdOTbzbo>

The report was brought on by a series of adverts in the UK, such as the Philadelphia advert (as pictured left) which shows two new fathers in a restaurant placing both their babies on what they think is a table, whilst distracted chatting, which turns out to be a food conveyor belt. The fathers get distracted by the food on the conveyor belt and don't notice they're babies circulate the restaurant on the belt. At the end of the advert one of the fathers say "let's not tell mum" as they both get their babies back. This advert in particular was banned by the ASA as said it 'reinforced the idea that men were ineffective childcarers.' (First ads banned for contravening UK gender stereotyping rules 2019)¹³. Like the reasoning why the ASA banned this advert, it paints a picture that men are incapable of being fathers and looking after their children, proving they're irresponsible, and that only the woman/mother is capable of safely looking after the child. This portrays how society used to view women in the 1950's. The post-war boom (1948-1950) brought an increase in good jobs and wages, these being enough wages that only the man of the house had to work. However, this forced women to become stay at home mothers/housewives, leaving them questioning their roles. It was not until the 90's when being a stay-at-home mother became less popular and women took back control of their decisions and lives. Furthermore, this Philadelphia advert seems to suggest that mothers should be with their babies all times as they are the only ones who are responsible for their children.



Fig 6: *Banned Flora Advert, 2013*

In 2013, food company Flora created an outrageous advert that caused offence to the whole of the LGBTQ+ community. The photographed advert consisted of bullet shaped typography which read “uhh dad, I’m gay” flying towards a white and blue bone china human heart. The advert implied that it was like shooting a bullet to the heart when coming out to family, especially the father. It suggests that ‘dads need a strong heart to deal with their son or daughter coming out.’ (Mertes, 15 offensive advertisements: Ads that were banned or made people angry 2023)¹⁴. Unilever (the company that own Flora) said that they had used an external South African company to create the ad, however no one at Unilever actually approved it before it went out. The advert was homophobic, causing immediate offence, and was highly unacceptable. Shockingly, some people don’t see an issue with this advert, claiming that they thought it was ‘humorous and tongue in cheek’ (Igual, "homophobic" flora ad generates controversy 2013)¹⁵. The advert was created with the intentions of showing that you need a strong heart in today's age, as the product they are selling (margarine) helps with heart disease. Overall, this advert has generated a judgemental

impact, indicating that the whole coming out experience would undoubtedly be negative. It sends a message to the LGBTQ+ community who are yet to come out that it will be a difficult process, leaving them with a somewhat unrealistic thought.



Fig 7: AccessiBe 'The Internet is Inaccessible' Advert, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mPnS8sPqvY>

According to The Drum, 'Disabled people only featured in 4% of UK TV ads in 2021, leading a measly 1% of observed spots despite around 22% of the UK population having some form of disability' (Bowler, A mere 4% of UK TV ads featured disabled characters in 2021 2022)¹⁶. It is not rare people with disabilities feel excluded from society and majority of normal, everyday activities. However, adverts that did include a disabled person were five times more likely to include a disabled sportsman, especially ones with a high profile, this leaving disabled women feeling ignored. To delve deeper into research that has been conducted, 'mobility impairments were the most commonly shown disabilities, shown in 19% of ads, followed by limb differences at 8% and hearing loss at 5%.' (Bowler, A mere 4% of UK TV ads featured disabled characters in 2021 2022). In addition to this, it has been found that mental health and Neurodiversity are the least represented impairments on-screen.

The company AccessiBe have created an advert that raises awareness for web accessibility, as well as empowering people with disabilities. A person without disabilities wouldn't think

twice about using the internet and looking on websites to do online shopping, research or other various things, however for a person with disabilities, these 'easy' everyday tasks are very challenging. The campaign is called #WeAreUnstoppable which features people with different disabilities, such as blindness, motor impairments, deafness and so on. The people in the advert show that they don't let their disability hold them back from pursuing their dreams, proving that they are unstoppable. AccessiBe says 'Our campaign aims to open the hearts and minds of business owners to the importance of web accessibility. As amazing, unstoppable people who contribute to all facets of society, people with disabilities should have access to the Internet and its full potential.' (#weareunstoppable national TV commercial | web accessibility is AccessiBe 2021)¹⁷. By creating an advert that gives an insight into disabled people's lives and putting it onto mainstream TV, the company make it clear that people with disabilities deserve to have access to modern day technology, 'even when their physical and mental capabilities impose inherent restrictions on what they can do under typical scenarios.' (AccessiBe debuts 'The unstoppable' national us tv ad campaign for web accessibility 2021)¹⁸.

In conclusion, advertising has a powerful influence when it comes to society's attitudes and social behaviour. By embracing gender and diversity, advertisers have the opportunity to create more meaning and inclusive messages, which can be shared with a diverse audience. Furthermore, by promoting understanding and challenging stereotypes, advertising can contribute to a more inclusive society. Relating back to the question "When will Advertising Embrace Diversity, Gender & Race Equality and Start Reflecting the Real World?", from the research I have conducted throughout this essay, I believe it has definitely already started, however I do think there is still room for improvement. Advertisers seem to somewhat

understand the issue raised, but have however missed the mark when trying to act upon it.

As previously mentioned, 'nearly 90% of the advertising industry is white' (Credos, The whole picture: How advertising portrays a diverse Britain 2021) and I think until this percentage decreases, more needs to be done.

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