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

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Introduction

Advertising is starting to embrace diversity in gender and race equality, but not yet to the extent that people can feel comfortable and not complain when they see nonconformity in advertisements. There is now more of a movement within advertising to reflect society, especially after the death of George Floyd on the 25th of May 2020. As a black person, over the last 10-15years I have seen the change come gradually myself, with most advertisements containing some form of diversity. This is a great step forward and hopefully, the more people are exposed to this sort of advertising, the more the complaints from the public will eventually stop. As society slowly becomes more equal, I believe advertising agencies have realised that it is not only the white, heterosexual communities who have money to spend. To increase revenue for brands, advertising agencies have started expanding into different demographics. This essay will examine the history of discrimination in advertising and how this has changed over time. We will look at the importance of representation and conclude on the overall effect advertising has on society.

The question 'when will advertising embrace diversity, gender and race equality' is such a relevant question today because there is such a big move to be inclusive within society, as people become more tolerant of others and how they wish to live. It would make sense for the advertising world to become more multicultural and equal for all. Even though we are moving forward, there still seems to be a lack of diversity within the industry itself. This has been shown in the Ad Association's census which reveals that the industry in the UK is only made up of 3% black workforce and 7% Asian (Ormesher, 2021). These very low percentages do not bode well for the advertising industry.

Although there have been great leaps forward in diversity and inclusivity in advertising recently, we must look at the past first to see how far we have come. Throughout history, there has been discrimination against many types of people. The most usual form of discrimination was against black and ethnic minorities, depicting them as grotesque caricatures in newspaper adverts, demonising them or showing them as the unclean, for example, the early 19th century advert for Pear's soap, which showed a black person being able to wash their skin white. The advert inferred that to be black was to be unclean and to be

white was to be pure. These sorts of images were commonplace in society at that time. Most racist advertising was aimed at minorities. From the eighteenth century to the first fifty years of the twentieth century, advertising virtually ignored minority consumers because of white advertisers, who thought that advertising to black and ethnic minorities would damage the image of the brand they were promoting, and they also felt that white people had the financial power to obtain what was being advertised to them (Wonkeryor, 2015). Many white people did not think there was anything wrong with this type of advertising due to the fact they were taught that minority groups were 'less than'.

As advertising began to grow as a business in the early 1900s, the derogatory, condescending advertising continued but after World War II, black consumers finally started to have the financial power to be able to match some of the white communities' buying power. Even though they finally had purchase power, advertising companies still used negative images against black people (Wonkeryor, 2015, p. 9). By the 1950's and up to the 1980's, advertising started to become slightly more diverse but only after events such as the Civil Rights struggle in America, which gave black people slightly more of a leading role (Wonkeryor, 2015). It seems like for minorities to get anywhere, it takes people to become organised and make their voices heard. Unfortunately, during this time, there were not a lot of allies to make voices heard as well as they are heard now. It seems, even though discrimination slightly decreased within advertising, minorities were still seen as 'less than' and treated as such.

We now have laws in place to stop discrimination, such as the 'Race Relations Act of 1965' which made it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of who they are or characteristics they have, such as race, religion, or sexuality (BBC, 2018), but this did not go far enough. This was then amended in 1968 to stop people being discriminated against in employment, housing and advertising (Gloucestershire County Council, 2020). It was amended again to include indirect discrimination and once more in 2000, the Act was updated to include the police (Gloucestershire County Council, 2020). We would hope discrimination of ethnic minorities is now long in the past. We look to the future of inclusivity and diversity within society. Moreover, we hope to achieve a level of understanding of the past to make sure the digressions of the past do not reoccur.

Advertising reflects society's thoughts and actions, and it takes a progressive thinker to stop to think 'wait a minute, this isn't right'. After the death of George Floyd, there has been a huge uptake in diversity in advertising, almost to the point it is so obvious it almost feels as though brands are jumping on the bandwagon. It is not a bad thing to see more diversity in advertising, but hopefully companies are doing it for the right reasons and not just to make more money. Of course, companies need to make a profit but hopefully there is also some substance behind the adverts, reflecting a genuine desire for and belief in diversity.

Although there is a lot of progress, there is still continuous backlash against diversity in advertising. As advertising tries to reflect our multicultural society, to be more inclusive, unfortunately racism raises its ugly head again. As advertising becomes more diverse, it has been debated that advertisers are using individuals from the BAME and/or LGBTQ communities in a token manner which is not acceptable. Tokenism is when an advertising

agency creates an advert that uses a member of the BAME and/or LGBTQ community as a prop to further aid a brand's sales but does not actually practice what they are trying to preach. A study done by YouGov commissioned by Channel 4 in 2019 found that '37 percent of commercials featured black people, even though they only make up about 3 percent of the British population' (Moore, 2019). The same study found that people from the LGBTQ community only appeared in three percent of adverts, even though they account for six percent of the population, and nearly two thirds have seen themselves portrayed negatively as stereotypes (Moore, 2019). The way people from these communities are portrayed is usually as the add on to the white heterosexual gender narrative, to make advertising seem inclusive, but the organisations themselves do not facilitate many plans of action to include people from these communities. Black people make up only three percent of the industry workforce and Asian people only seven percent, according to a survey conducted by the Ad Association (AA) in 2021, in the UK (Beardsworth, 2021). There has now been an 'action plan' put in place to combat these numbers but will it go far enough? The plan will help advertising companies become more diverse, but they must make sure there is no element of tokenism. We can also look at a survey which was done by YouGov and the Gay Times, which found that 32 percent of advertising companies engage with the LGBTQ community outside of Pride month, compared to 84 percent during it (Beardsworth, 2021). This further illustrates how the advertising industry uses people to further the agenda of some brands, but only when it suits them.

The importance of representation is even more prevalent today due to how diverse society has become, from adverts now showing diverse relationships as well as diverse families. The ideal family is no longer just the white heterosexual stereotype, with two kids and a nice house. The industry is working hard to stop advertisers showing gender stereotypes, with a more diverse representation of what a family looks like now and showing happy people, no matter their sexual orientation, race or the fact they are all everyday people just getting on with their life. For example, even though there is a slow uptake in showing LGBTQ couples in advertisements and there are very few advertisements celebrating the trans community, in May 2019, Gillette released an advert celebrating trans with their #MyBestSelf campaign. This short film shows a dad showing his trans son how to shave for the first time. This is the kind of great forward-thinking advertising we hope to see more of in the future.

Representation is important because without it we lose out on others' perspectives. In the advertising industry, representation should reflect society as a whole. Advertising works better by showing people from all walks of life. It may help people to gain a better knowledge of how others live and shows we all have similar dreams and aspirations. It may even help that family member come out or to make others feel more comfortable in standing up for equality, by showing it is okay to do so. It can help to make people who feel not "normal", to feel included because they have a voice too. For instance, when someone is struggling with who they are, it can help them not feel alone. The Gillete advert probably helped parents struggling with trying to support their family member, by showing them no matter what, you can support someone, no matter who they are.

Although things are moving in the right direction, we have to be careful not to heterosexualise advertising even though we may be showing people from the same sex. There are some adverts which either show a heterosexual couple or a good-looking lesbian or gay couple, which omits others within the LGBTQ community. True representation means reflecting all aspects of the gender spectrum. Jonah Disend, founder of Redscout brand consultancy states “Heteronormativity in media is displayed as a cultural bias in favour of opposite-sex relationships and treats gender as binary – the idea that there is an either/or option of male or female, rather than a spectrum of gender identities. There is no nuance or insight in how we are portrayed sometimes – it just feels like casting – oh, look, two men or two women, generally with adorable children," (Disend 2017, as cited in Singh, 2017). Unfortunately, advertising is sometimes guilty of only showing you what the media states are the ‘beautiful people’, instead of showing you relatetable people. Being able to see yourself in someone on screen, on billboards, etc., can go a long way to helping advertisers sell. This also lends itself to how important representation is in advertising and the advertising industry. The more we feel represented by what we see, the more likely we are to be motivated to buy into what is being sold.

Similarly, women in previous years, in adverts and the advertising industry, have been treated as though they are less than their male counterparts, either in the adverts themselves as a stereotypical housewife or sexual objects and in the industry as a secretary to the ad men. Even though women are not supposed to be treated this way any longer, with the women's rights movement which began in the 1800s, the gender pay gap is still evident in the advertising industry, with a 17.8% pay gap in 2020-21 (Bradley, 2021). This shows that even for women, that representation is still very poor and that there needs to be a massive change in the way things are run.

The overall feeling is that advertising is struggling with representing people properly; it is like they are trying too hard, instead of just doing what is right, not only for the industry but for society in general. Even though this is the overall feeling, time has passed, laws have changed and society has changed, which makes a huge difference to the way advertising is perceived and seen. With the prevalence of social media, fast-paced lifestyles and the onslaught of ‘cancel culture’, advertising has become more forward thinking. I believe advertising is on the precipice of being great.

Advertising plays a role in moulding and reflecting our views in society. Advertisers are more willing to make a stand and show their political and social views to the general public. Pollay states ‘Advertising is seen as having profound consequences, despite the fact its intent is clearly the pedestrian one of effecting sales’ (Pollay, 1986). So even though the driving force behind advertising is sales for brands, the consequences it has on society as a whole is vast, meaning advertisers have to be careful of what they produce because of the power it has over people's thoughts and views.

Throughout this essay, we have examined the history of discrimination and how it has changed over the years and we have analysed representation and its importance in advertising. Discrimination within advertising has almost disappeared but representation is still a big debate within the industry. The questions for me are: What are advertising agencies going to do about it? and Why has it taken so long? I feel that yes, advertising is starting to reflect the real world but it has to be careful not to fall into the category of discrimination and

not to allow the views of the past to arise again by making careless mistakes. “Advertising reflects the times when society's values and norms change so then the advertising industry learns to change and adapt” (McDonald, Laverie and Manis, 2021). Therefore, we are being shown what the industry thinks we want to see. Advertising and the advertising industry has been on a long journey to get to where it is today and still has some way to go to be truly inclusive, diverse and equal. Within history, there have been great leaps forward in society which can be seen in the advertisements we see today. There is hope for the future of advertising.

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