# Where is the queer joy in advertising?



The business case for inclusive advertising in capturing LGBTQ+ representation is well-established, yet the reality remains starkly lacking in depth and nuance. While brands that embrace diversity may gain goodwill and market relevance, the role of advertising transcends commerce—it actively shapes societal culture. Each time a brand chooses to depict queer lives authentically and with respect, it chips away at the outdated notion of queer identity as exceptional or external to mainstream society.

However, the representation of queer narratives in advertising still suffers predominantly from a heteronormative lens. Frequently, queer stories orbit around coming-out journeys, struggles, or emotional reconciliations. These experiences, while genuine, do not encompass the full spectrum of queer life. What remains conspicuously absent is the portrayal of queer joy—those everyday, unremarkable moments where queer existence is not defined by conflict or spectacle but simply allowed to be. This absence was underscored by the finding that LGBTQIA+ representation comprises less than 1% of advertising content, according to a report from Kantar. This minuscule presence means the stories told lack nuance, often recycling stereotypes rather than embracing authentic diversity.

There have been promising signs of change. Industry gatherings such as the Unstereotype Alliance summit feature transgender activists sharing space with trade veterans and corporate leaders, signalling progress toward co-existence and co-creation in advertising. Yet, the journey towards true inclusivity is incomplete. Advertisements like Ariel’s ShareTheLoad campaign, which featured a trans woman doctor simply living her professional and personal life without spotlighting her identity as a conflict, provide glimmers of hope. Similarly, collaborations such as Walkers & Co's with the Aravani Art Project highlight trans artists through their craft rather than their identities as objects of pity or inspiration. Another example is Bausch & Lomb’s warm portrayal of human connection, which includes queer characters without defining them solely by sexuality or gender.

These examples illustrate that genuine presence in advertising is not about visibility that feels performative but about normalising diversity so it becomes unremarkable—presence without trauma or triumph, just life. The key to crafting these authentic stories lies in perspective: queer stories told through queer eyes. Yet, the advertising industry still faces a lack of queer voices in decision-making roles, which leads to campaigns that feel external and superficial rather than internal and authentic. This gap is critical because authenticity is as much about who creates the narrative as who appears in it.

Two particularly impactful ads exemplify this. V-Guard’s campaign featuring a same-sex couple and their elderly neighbours did not hinge on a narrative of tolerance but on genuine curiosity evolving into warmth. Similarly, Future Generali’s #WelcomeHome campaign integrated a same-sex couple naturally into everyday domestic scenes, portraying a home filled with acceptance rather than tokenistic edge or spectacle.

The wider data landscape bolsters this narrative. GLAAD’s 2023 Advertising Visibility Index revealed only 1.42% of screen time in major national ads featured LGBTQ individuals, with a mere 3% of campaigns showcasing any LGBTQ inclusion. The quality of representation was often insufficient, lacking the multidimensionality that 80% of consumers desire. Moreover, Numerator’s survey in the same year found that 63% of consumers believe diverse representation matters, with nearly half more inclined to buy brands exhibiting such inclusivity—particularly younger generations placing heightened importance on LGBTQ+ representation.

Yet, challenges remain, especially in bridging generational perceptions. A Statista survey found that just over half of Gen Z respondents felt LGBTQ representation in advertising was explicit enough, compared to over 70% in older groups. That younger consumers perceive less explicit inclusivity signals a need for advertisers to deepen their approach to LGBTQ representation to meet evolving expectations.

On a more encouraging note, societal acceptance appears significantly positive. Another Statista survey from 2023 showed that 75% of U.S. consumers are comfortable seeing LGBTQ individuals in advertisements, suggesting brands can confidently incorporate such representation without fear of alienating audiences.

The path forward may not be measured solely by incremental increases in screen time but by systemic change within the advertising ecosystem. When top marketing officers dialogue with activists, and executives who themselves belong to marginalized groups rise to decision-making roles, tokenism stands a better chance of being dismantled. What once was a tool for compliance—the framework of Presence, Perspective, and Personality—is now evolving into a strategic weapon for genuine inclusion, wielded by those long excluded from the creative and decision-making process.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.socialsamosa.com/guest-post/waiting-see-queer-joy-ads-9403090> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://glaad.org/publications/advertising-visibility-index-2023/> - GLAAD's 2023 Advertising Visibility Index reveals that LGBTQ individuals received only 1.42% of screen time in 436 national linear television ads from the top ten largest advertisers, with just 3% featuring LGBTQ representation. The report highlights insufficient inclusion and calls for more authentic portrayals of queer lives in mainstream advertising. Consumers express a desire for multidimensional LGBTQ representation, with 80% seeking such inclusivity in ads. The study underscores the need for brands to move beyond tokenism and provide genuine, everyday depictions of queer joy.
3. <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2023/06/28/2696231/0/en/63-OF-CONSUMERS-SAY-DIVERSE-REPRESENTATION-IN-ADVERTISING-IS-IMPORTANT-47-LIKELY-TO-BUY-FROM-BRANDS-THAT-FEATURE-DIVERSITY-NUMERATOR-REPORTS.html> - A 2023 Numerator survey indicates that 63% of consumers consider diverse representation in advertising important, with 47% more likely to purchase from brands that feature diversity. The survey highlights generational differences, with younger consumers placing higher importance on LGBTQ+ representation. It also reveals that 44% of consumers agree that LGBTQ+ representation in advertising is important, and over three-quarters feel positive or neutral when seeing LGBTQ+ individuals or themes in ads. The findings suggest that inclusive advertising can positively influence consumer purchasing decisions.
4. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1405021/lgbtq-representation-advertising-explicit-enough-united-states/> - A 2023 Statista survey found that 54% of U.S. Gen Z respondents felt LGBTQ representation in advertising was explicit enough to be recognized, compared to over 70% among older generations. This indicates a generational gap in perceptions of LGBTQ inclusivity in ads, with younger consumers perceiving less explicit representation. The data underscores the need for advertisers to enhance the visibility and clarity of LGBTQ representation to meet the expectations of diverse consumer groups.
5. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1405011/consumers-comfortable-lgbtq-ads-united-states/> - A 2023 Statista survey revealed that 75% of U.S. consumers are comfortable seeing LGBTQ individuals in advertisements. This reflects a positive societal shift towards acceptance and inclusivity in advertising. The data suggests that brands can confidently incorporate LGBTQ representation in their campaigns without alienating the majority of consumers, aligning with the growing demand for diversity and authenticity in marketing.
6. <https://www.kantar.com/Company-News/GLAAD-and-Kantar-announce-partnership-to-measure-and-elevate-LGBTQ-representation-in-advertising> - In June 2023, GLAAD and Kantar announced a multi-year partnership to measure and enhance LGBTQ+ representation in advertising. The inaugural Advertising Visibility Index found that only 1-2% of U.S. ads include clear LGBTQ representation, highlighting a significant gap in inclusivity. The partnership aims to provide brands with data-driven insights and strategies to improve the quality and quantity of LGBTQ representation in their advertising, addressing the current underrepresentation and promoting more authentic portrayals of queer communities.