# Are companies too afraid of backlash to do inclusive adverstising?



Representatives from agencies, marketers, and members of the LGBTQ+ community have convened at Meta’s headquarters on Brock Street to engage in a dialogue regarding the decline of queer representation in advertising. This roundtable sought to address two pivotal queries: the reasons behind the regression of LGBTQ+ visibility in advertisements and potential strategies for reversing this trend.

In a notable departure from its history, global sportswear giant Nike did not unveil a Pride collection this year, marking the first occasion since 1999 that the brand has chosen to forgo this initiative [pic: an earlier campaign]. A study conducted by GLAAD in November revealed that many brands are now prioritising the avoidance of backlash over their commitment to the LGBTQ+ community. This shift raises concerns about the visibility and representation of queer identities in mainstream advertising.

Chris Dunne, co-chief executive of Outvertising, underscored the importance of advertising as a medium for representation, stating, “Advertising gets into the corners that other types of content cannot – [it] exposes people who would not be opting into LGBT+ content or storytelling.” This sentiment reflects the broader analysis conducted by System1, which examined the state of queer representation in advertisements over the past four years. The findings revealed a stark reality: only 2.5% of advertisements aired in June, traditionally recognised as Pride month, featured any form of LGBT+ visibility, with a mere 0.65% presenting LGBTQ+ themes as central to the narrative.

This decline in representation stands in contrast to YouGov data indicating a generational shift within the UK population. Currently, approximately 9% of individuals describe themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other, with this figure rising to 14% among millennials and reaching 25% within the Gen Z cohort. Such statistics suggest an increasing acceptance and visibility of queer identities, thereby raising questions as to why advertising has not similarly evolved.

While the Outvertising consumer report concluded that LGBTQ+ representation does not significantly influence the overall effectiveness of an advertisement, it highlighted an essential distinction: such representation impacts how advertisements are received within the LGBTQ+ community. This insight prompted a call from panel participants for brands seeking to engage this demographic to enhance their representation efforts, particularly regarding intersectional experiences. The emphasis was placed on the inclusion of a wider array of diverse creators to reflect the multifaceted nature of the LGBTQ+ community.

Ade Yeo, a representative from the creative agency Hijinks, elaborated on the nature of queer representation within the industry, noting a tendency to confine LGBTQ+ themes to sectors perceived as 'fun', such as alcohol, fashion, and beauty. They expressed the challenges faced by individuals with trans, non-binary, or racialised identities, often finding themselves alone in their perspectives within predominantly homogeneous creative teams. “It is really hard to be the only person responsible for checking the work, ticking all the diversity check boxes, carrying the emotional labour and educating your colleagues,” Yeo stated.

Further emphasising the need for systemic change, Chloe Davies, founder and chief executive of It Takes a Village Collective, urged brands to take an intentional and respectful approach when engaging with the LGBT+ community. She advocated for brands to “put your hand in your pocket and pay the fee that they ask for,” highlighting the importance of tangible support that extends beyond tokenistic representation.

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

## References

* <https://glaad.org/releases/glaad-releases-results-of-its-2024-visibility-perceptions-in-advertising-survey/> - Corroborates the GLAAD study findings on the importance of LGBT+ representation in advertising and the industry's fear of backlash.
* <https://glaad.org/glaads-2024-visibility-perceptions-in-advertising-study-results/> - Provides detailed key findings from GLAAD's 2024 Visibility Perceptions in Advertising study, including increases in the importance of transgender, bisexual, and nonbinary representation.
* <https://hispanicad.com/news/2024-visibility-perceptions-in-advertising-report-finds-supermajorities-of-industry-leaders-support-lgbtq-inclusion/> - Supports the findings that a significant majority of industry leaders support LGBT+ inclusion and highlights the challenges and barriers faced by the industry.
* <https://www.q.digital/4-lgbtq-ad-trends-to-watch-in-2024/> - Discusses the importance of authentic representation and the impact of LGBT+ inclusion on consumer trust and business success.
* <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/future-of-marketing/management-and-culture/diversity-and-inclusion/lgbtq-inclusive-advertising-advice/> - Highlights the commitment of most advertisers to LGBT+ inclusion despite potential backlash and the importance of authentic representation in marketing strategies.
* <https://glaad.org/releases/glaad-releases-results-of-its-2024-visibility-perceptions-in-advertising-survey/> - Details the increase in industry sentiment that the LGBT+ community is very important to their business and the allocation of funds for targeting this community.
* <https://glaad.org/glaads-2024-visibility-perceptions-in-advertising-study-results/> - Emphasizes the need for companies to stand by their decision to support or include LGBT+ people in advertising and the importance of partnering with nonprofits for guidance.
* <https://hispanicad.com/news/2024-visibility-perceptions-in-advertising-report-finds-supermajorities-of-industry-leaders-support-lgbtq-inclusion/> - Supports the finding that companies facing backlash are more likely to increase their commitment to featuring LGBT+ people in advertising.
* <https://www.q.digital/4-lgbtq-ad-trends-to-watch-in-2024/> - Discusses the trend of celebrating LGBT+ consumers beyond Pride month and the importance of continuous support for the LGBT+ community.
* <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/future-of-marketing/management-and-culture/diversity-and-inclusion/lgbtq-inclusive-advertising-advice/> - Highlights the broader societal acceptance and the role of advertisers in promoting LGBT+ equity and inclusion.