Room for improvement seen in ad portrayals of multicultural audiences

Article

The trend: The recent uproar over **Levi Strauss**' plans to use AI-generated models rather than human ones to boost diversity in its advertising is focusing attention on the depiction of underrepresented groups in promotions, raising concern that artificial intelligence could be used to convey a false impression of authentic inclusion.
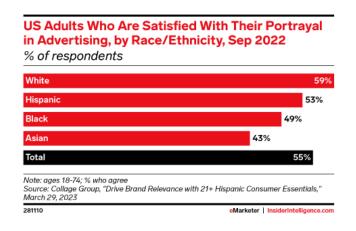
This could be a potential problem for brands as the US population grows more diverse.

Seeing differently: US Black, Asian, and Hispanic adults are less satisfied with their portrayal in advertising than white Americans, new research shows.

- 55% of US adults overall expressed content with their representation in ads, but differences arose along racial lines, with just 43% of Asian and 49% of Black adults saying the same, according to a September 2022 Collage Group survey of 4,029 adults.

US Adults Who Are Satisfied With Their Portrayal in Advertising, by Race/Ethnicity, Sep 2022
% of respondents

White	59%
Hispanic	53%
Black	49%
Asian	43%
Total	55%

Note: ages 18-74; % who agree
Source: Collage Group, "Drive Brand Relevance with 21+ Hispanic Consumer Essentials," March 29, 2023

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A quality and quantity issue: The perceived accuracy and amount of media portrayals among diverse audiences remains mixed.

- In a 2021 and 2022 Nielsen survey of smartphone users on TV viewing, 32% of Black respondents felt representation of their identity group on TV was accurate, but 30% indicated it was inaccurate.

- In Nielsen's *Attitudes on Representation on TV* study, 34% of respondents indicated they don't think there is enough content that represents them.

Why it matters: The focus on ad portrayals of multicultural audiences comes as recent data show corporate pledges to address racial inequity are faltering amid the softer economy and efforts to roll back diversity programs at some colleges. This is occurring as consumers increasingly tie inclusion to their purchase decisions.

- The Collage Group survey showed 39% of Black adults and 28% of Hispanic adults were more likely to buy from brands whose advertising messages challenge racial and ethnic stereotypes.

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Our take: Advertising messages and portrayals of Black, Hispanic, and Asian consumers need careful consideration. Brands can face backlash if they don't make the effort to showcase authentic people and voices.

- According to a December 2022 survey by Direct Digital Holdings and Horowitz Research, a majority of Black, Hispanic, and Asian consumers feel brands can demonstrate support for their communities by showcasing ads or content that is inclusive.

- That means embracing authentic ethnic representations without retouching or photoshopping images and promoting messages that challenge racial and ethnic stereotypes can be effective.

Ways a Brand Can Demonstrate Support For Diverse Communities According to US Internet Users, by Demographic, Dec 2022
% of respondents in each group

	Black	Hispanic	Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)	LGBTQIA+
Purposefully investing marketing/ advertising dollars with media that is owned by/focuses on the [x] community	70%	65%	60%	72%
Creating ads/content that are inclusive of the [x] community	70%	67%	62%	75%
Posting messages that are inclusive of the [x] community on social media	63%	61%	59%	66%
Creating ads and content in both English and Spanish/additional languages	-	74%	56%	-

Note: ages 18+; responses were 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale where 1=does not demonstrate support at all and 5=strongly demonstrates support; read as 72% of LGBTQIA+ respondents who were surveyed indicate that purposefully investing marketing and advertising dollars with media that is owned by/focuses on the LGBTQIA+ community demonstrates/strongly demonstrates support
Source: Direct Digital Holdings, "Dollars & DEI: Multicultural Consumers' Insights on Brands' Media Buying and Marketing Practices" conducted by Horowitz Research, Feb 14, 2023
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