

Super Bowl Ads: Diversity efforts fall far short of a touchdown

Article

The news: The **Super Bowl** is advertising's largest US stage, with its commercials receiving almost as much attention as the on-field action. Those prominent ads not only showcase products but also can reflect a brand's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, a closer look reveals that the industry struggles to authentically integrate these values into its high-profile campaigns.

- An Ad Age analysis of the celebrities featured in Super Bowl commercials reveals a mixed picture of representation.
- Most celebrities in this year's ads were **male** and **white**, though Black, Hispanic, AAPI, and multiracial individuals were represented.
- Some major advertisers, like **Uber Eats** and **Volkswagen**, provided only generic DEI statements or did not offer specifics about their Super Bowl ad campaigns' DEI efforts.
- Notable ads with diverse casting include the **NFL's "Born to Play,"** featuring a predominantly West African cast, and an ad by the **Foundation to Combat Antisemitism**, which stands out for its inclusivity.

Calls for improved DEI in ads: Despite some progress, the approach to DEI in Super Bowl ads often lacks depth and authenticity.

- Many ads continue to follow a formulaic approach, featuring predominantly white, male celebrities in Western-centric storylines.
- Challenges in measuring DEI progress persist, partly due to guidelines restricting disclosure of personal identity information.
- Media analysis firm Alltold's data shows a decline in representation of people with darker skin tones since 2021, suggesting a retreat from the racial justice commitments made in 2020.

Deep dive: The authenticity of cultural depictions and differing attitudes toward diversity among age groups present additional layers of complexity:

- **Doritos'** ad wins praise for genuinely representing Hispanic culture, yet such examples remain the exception rather than the rule.
- Younger generations show greater approval for DEI themes compared with baby boomers.

Why it matters: US Internet users expect brands to feature diverse individuals in advertisements (40%) and ensure ads and content are accessible to those with disabilities (39%).

- A November study found that 35% of US brand and agency respondents indicated that they would be significantly or somewhat more focused on DEI in 2024.

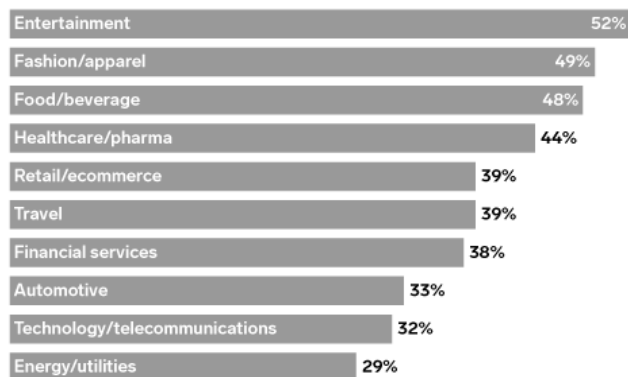
- DEI marketing investments show a significant payoff in employee attraction (29.8%) and customer retention (36.6%), according to US CMOs, underscoring the business case for DEI beyond moral and social imperatives.
- Senior marketers worldwide shifted their priorities from 2022 to 2023, with diversity, equity, and inclusion moving from 22% to 18%. While DEI is still a priority, the emphasis on it has eased compared with other elements like operational efficiency and data analytics.

Our take: The Super Bowl advertising scene reflects the broader challenges and opportunities facing the ad industry in its pursuit of DEI. While some brands make notable strides toward inclusivity and authentic storytelling, there is a need for deeper commitment and action.

- As consumers increasingly expect brands to reflect diverse voices and stories, the advertising world must rise to the occasion, ensuring that its highest-profile campaigns truly represent the diverse society they aim to engage.

Types of Companies/Brands/Advertisers That Should Play a Role in Advocating for Diversity and Inclusion According to US Internet Users, March 2023

% of respondents



Source: Integral Ad Science (IAS), "Diversity and Inclusion," June 1, 2023

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