



MIRROR ON

Transgender People



In partnership with



powered by





Contents

- 01 The Lived Experience of Transgender People**
- 02 Representation and Portrayal**
- 03 The Industry Problem**
- 04 What Can Brands Do About Backlash?**
- 05 Case Study: E45 & “This Is Me, This Is My Space”**
- 06 Summary**



In partnership with



powered by





At Channel 4, we've been running our award winning '**Mirror on the Industry**' project for 5 years. This is a study that audits TV advertising to see how diverse and representative it really is.

We are now building on the project with the '**Mirror on...**' series. A series of individual reports that take a closer look at some of the topics we evaluate in the wider study and dig deeper into the feelings and perceptions of our audiences.

So far, we have covered Body Diversity and Women's Safety, Neurodiversity and Class & Social Grade.

In this report we aim to explore the lived experience of **transgender people**, uncover the current state of representation and portrayal of transgender people within the media industry, explore the causal root of brand reticence, and set out tangible steps brands can take to create and launch successfully trans-inclusive campaigns. We hope you find this report interesting, and for those of you who are time poor you'll also find a one pager on the 4Sales website.



In partnership with



powered by





Methodology

We worked with independent cultural research specialists The Diversity Standards Collective on a three stage in-depth research approach:

1



Targeted Community Research 50 participants

A survey of 50 transgender people to explore their lived experience of being transgender- both the challenges and the joys- and what they think of current representation and portrayal of transgender people in ads.

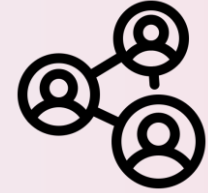
2



Consumer Community Council 3 participants

An in-depth focus group with three transgender people with different backgrounds and intersectionalities, exploring the main themes from the survey in more detail, their perceptions of the 'transgender community' and how representation and portrayal in ads could be improved.

3



Professional Community Council 3 participants

An in-depth focus group with three transgender media industry professionals to uncover what they think needs to be done to improve awareness and understanding of trans identities and issues, and explore how brands can address any backlash that may arise when representing transgender people.

We also supplemented our findings with existing research from **Channel 4's Mirror on The Industry** report and **Wavemaker's Beyond the Rainbow** whitepaper, as well as other relevant secondary sources.



In partnership with



powered by





Glossary

Sourced from 'Beyond the Rainbow' and HRC'S glossary of terms

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual etc. In this report, we refer to 'transgender people' rather than the 'transgender community' as not everyone in our research felt part of or represented by a 'community'. **Please note, whilst these were the views of respondents for our research, all individuals identify and use language which feels right for them.*

Cisgender: Describes a person whose gender identity aligns with that generally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender binary: Where gender is classified in two strict categories of 'male' or 'female' and gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth, while gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

Gender identity: A person's innermost concept of the self as 'female', 'male', both or neither –how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do so.

Intersectionality: The acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and the need to consider everything and anything that can marginalise people, which may include aspects of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability etc.

Non-binary: An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a woman and a man, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While some also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do so. 'Non-binary' can also be used as an umbrella term to encompass identities such as 'agender', 'bigender', 'genderqueer', 'gender-fluid' and others.

Queer: Often used to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. 'Queer' can be a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or people who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This word has historically been used as a slur, but is increasingly being reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQIA+ movement.

Gender Fluidity: Where one's gender identity isn't permanently fixed.

Agender: Not having a gender – being genderless or gender-neutral



In partnership with



powered by





Summary



- 01** There is broad agreement that people need to **be more aware and educated** on the challenges transgender people face, with a shared belief that any education attempt needs to put lived experiences of transgender people at its heart. These **lived experiences include many moments of 'trans joy'** that come from self-acceptance, support and community, whilst the challenges they face often come from situations where they have limited control.
- 02** Portrayals of transgender people in ads are **commonly sensationalised**, too focussed on the physical side of being trans, lacking diversity and real 'everyday' style representation. Our research identified **five key ways** brands can improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people.
- 03** There has been a **noticeable decline in brands supporting and working with transgender talent** at a time when it's needed most. Brands' reticence is strongly **attributed to the fear of anti-trans backlash**, which undermines the market size of those who support the community and the scale of social progression brands can influence. Brands need to harness their **power to influence and normalise the visibility** of transgender people.

- 04** How brands respond to backlash is as important as facilitating trans-visibility to begin with. Before jumping in, **touch base with transgender people's needs**, identify the role your brand could play in trans-advocacy and inform and execute your campaign through insight into **lived-experience, testing executions** and working with **representative teams**. **Prepare for backlash in advance** with anti-hate procedures, equipping your teams with crisis management skills, knowledge and escalation routes clearly defined. Finally, stand your ground all year-round.
- 05** E45's **"This Is Me, This is My Space"** creative thoughtfully and authentically portrays transgender experiences in a way that was commended for breaking down stereotypes. It perfectly exemplifies the efficacy of taking one key insight (in this instance, the fact that transgender people often feel most uncomfortable in their skin) and creating a **powerful and sensitive campaign** around it, that both educates and shift perceptions.



In partnership with



powered by





O1

The Lived Experience of
Transgender People



In partnership with



powered by





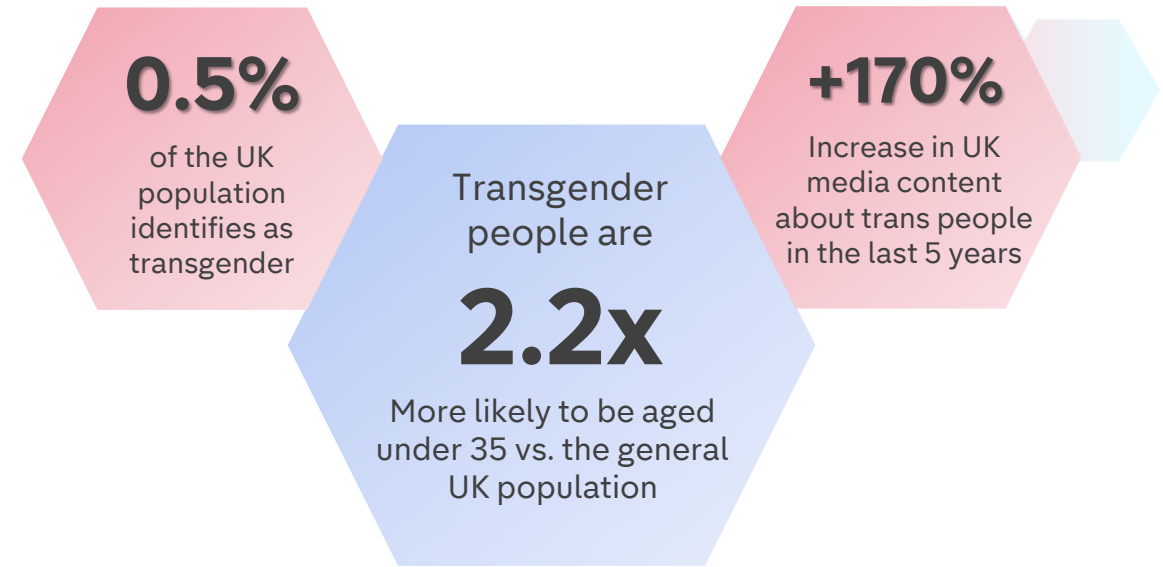
There is a clear need to educate people on the lived experience of transgender people

According to census data, **0.5% of UK adults identify as transgender**.¹ That is, for 0.5% of the population, the gender they identify with is not the same as their sex registered at birth. The data suggests that on average, the transgender population is younger than the UK population at large as they are 2.2 times more likely to be aged under 35. ²The same is true of the LGBTQIA+ community at large and this is thought to be down to significant cultural, political and social progress in recent decades, meaning people are more comfortable to disclose their gender identity and sexual orientation. **Note – these figures may be underestimated due to the census being based on limited disclosure and self reporting.*

Despite progress, there has been a **+170% increase in UK media content about trans people over the past 5 years** which disproportionately focuses on single sex spaces, sports and crime. ³Through our research, it was clear that the focus of recent media coverage is causing immense frustration among the trans population.

98% agreed that people outside of the trans community need to be better aware and educated on trans challenges. When discussing the best way of delivering this education, there was a shared belief that it needs to put lived experiences of trans people at its heart. As is true of any group of people, the trans population is hugely diverse and spans age, religion, race, geography, political beliefs, and more. **There is no one way to be trans. There is no one way to transition. In exploring lived experiences, this research aims to capture the diversity of the population while recognising the individuality within it.**

¹UK Census data, 2021; ²Beyond the Rainbow, 2022; ³Community database: Dysphorum, Home Office, Gov.uk



Community research respondents on how to improve education on the lived experience of transgender people:

“Conversations, involving people with lived experience of being trans, our allies, and perhaps those who are unsure but want to learn more and be more supportive.”

“Awareness that trans people are no different from anyone else, they live normal lives and contribute to society just like everyone else”

“More normal trans folks just telling their stories - not the crazy ones they tell in the news, just an actual real life trans folks being honest. I think brands could help with the relationship and sex side for sure- being inclusive with their ads and social media.”



In partnership with



powered by





The idea of 'trans joy' was a strong theme throughout our research and key to our respondents' life experiences

In our research, the idea of trans joy and its meaning to our participants came up multiple times. Reflecting the intersectionality of the participants we spoke to, the answers were hugely varied.

While deeply personal, examples of trans joy fell into 3 broad themes:

1. Self-acceptance

Trans joy often means moments of self-acceptance. There is often a feeling among trans people that they haven't always been able to be the person they wanted or were supposed to be. Therefore, the experience of self-acceptance can often be powerful to the extent that they feel euphoric.

"Finally, being able to be the version of myself I've always wanted. Not caring whether others think my identity is valid."

"Trans joy means being comfortable in my body and slowly becoming who I was always supposed to be"

"It just means myself allowing to fully express myself with no boundaries, no fear, and live my life the proudest. I can be the most open, I can be the most authentic...around my gender identity and letting my trans identity sit side by side with all my other identities. And if they clash, they clash. If they don't clash [and] harmonise, that's great as well. But ultimately, it's just about full-blown self-expression, authenticity, and living life without fear and obstacles."



In partnership with

karo
healthcare

E45

T&P^m

powered by

**THE
DIVERSITY
STANDARDS
COLLECTIVE**

MIRROR ON
Transgender People



The idea of trans joy, while deeply personal, can be explored across 3 broad themes:

2. Support and gender affirmation from others

Intrinsically linked to self-acceptance is the acceptance from others. That may be from loved ones, colleagues, medical professionals or complete strangers. Very often, examples of joy came from gender affirmation. Sadly, there were many examples of this coming after a long period of difficulty, such as family members taking a while to accept their loved one's trans identity. Other times, examples focussed on being correctly gendered in a day-to-day setting, such as a medical appointment or simply at the supermarket.

"Moments of existential happiness that come about from existing as trans, normally this is linked with acceptance, either from the self or from the other."

"Being able to get on with my life as me, to be celebrated, or actually just treated as the person that I am - simple micro-validations bring joy, positive gendering, being included and talked about in positive ways - invited to be part of conversations and social groups. Having the love and support of my family."

Correctly gendered by NHS staff when I was giving birth as a 1st time Dad:

"When every single medical person that came into the room, whether they were coming in to bring a tool or to bring water or to pass on a message, first came up to me and said, introduced themselves and said 'Hi are you excited to be a dad?'...When I saw my kid for the first time, the doctor looked me in the eyes and said, 'Congrats, you're a dad.' Everything that there is around people is saying if you give birth, you have to be female...but someone who had only just met, looked at me and affirmed immediately, 'congrats, this is your kid, and you are their dad.' And I don't think I've ever felt like I did in that moment."



In partnership with



powered by



The idea of trans joy, while deeply personal, can be explored across 3 broad themes:

3. Community and safe spaces

88% of the people we spoke to agreed that the wider trans community is important. This idea of community came through in many of the examples of trans joy. Often the sense of community was felt powerfully in 'safe spaces,' which transgender people felt facilitated acceptance, both from transgender and non-transgender people. Of course, the fact that safe spaces can bring such joy inherently suggests that the sense of safety is lacking in the wider world.

Examples of safe spaces ranged from big cross-community events such as Pride to smaller, local community events such as the LGBTQIA+ hiking club mentioned by one participant.

88%

agree that the wider Trans community is important

"Sharing moments of gender euphoria with each other, being able to meet up in public and have fun doing activities that let us experience each other just as people and not having to be scared. Spaces that are safe enough to let our hair down and present/act/be exactly who we are, without having to hide or dress a particular way."

"I think the time I went to Pride. It was the only place I felt I could act in the ways that felt right to me in each moment and be accepted for my eccentricities. I knew I could write my chosen name and use my pronouns without being interrogated as to why I was doing so. It was also comforting to know that most people around me were queer as well which was a very different but good feeling to what I'm used to"

"In LGBT+ community spaces and events, I belong to an LGBT outdoors group where we go hiking and climbing together, I find it really comfortable because it's relaxed without the intensity and self-consciousness involved in things like club nights"



Key challenges faced by transgender people stem from those outside of it and from situations where they have limited control

Most of the moments of trans joy are rooted in overcoming challenges and identity struggles which are common for trans people. Some of the key challenges faced by the community stem from those outside of it and from situations where they have limited control: stigma in the media, the government, and NHS wait times. These have a knock-on effect on societal attitudes which in turn contribute to feelings of fear among transgender people and the consequent need for safe spaces.

1. Stigma in the media

"I think stigma is a huge issue. Bear with me but it's basically a daisy chain effect where there's a strong force of negative reporting and discourse coming from outside the community debating our existence and choosing how we access health care which then steamrolls into negative outlooks and strongly opinionated debates that argue our existence. So in my opinion it stems from the leaders of this country deciding that they dislike our existence and will make it difficult for us to do basic things like receive health care or use the bathroom."

2. The government

"The media and the government and the whole rhetoric that's being pushed regarding trans people. The back-end agenda that encourages more divide and the comments from politicians just to get votes from other people who have shown hate and dislike towards the trans community because they feel that trans is being pushed on their kids, which is really the government's doing."

3. NHS wait times

"NHS waiting times are having a massive impact on the trans community mental health and wellbeing - most people forced to go private if they can even afford it otherwise, you're stuck in limbo for 5 years"



In partnership with

karo
healthcare

E45

T&P^m

powered by

**THE
DIVERSITY
STANDARDS
COLLECTIVE**

MIRROR ON
Transgender People



O2

Representation and Portrayal



In partnership with



powered by





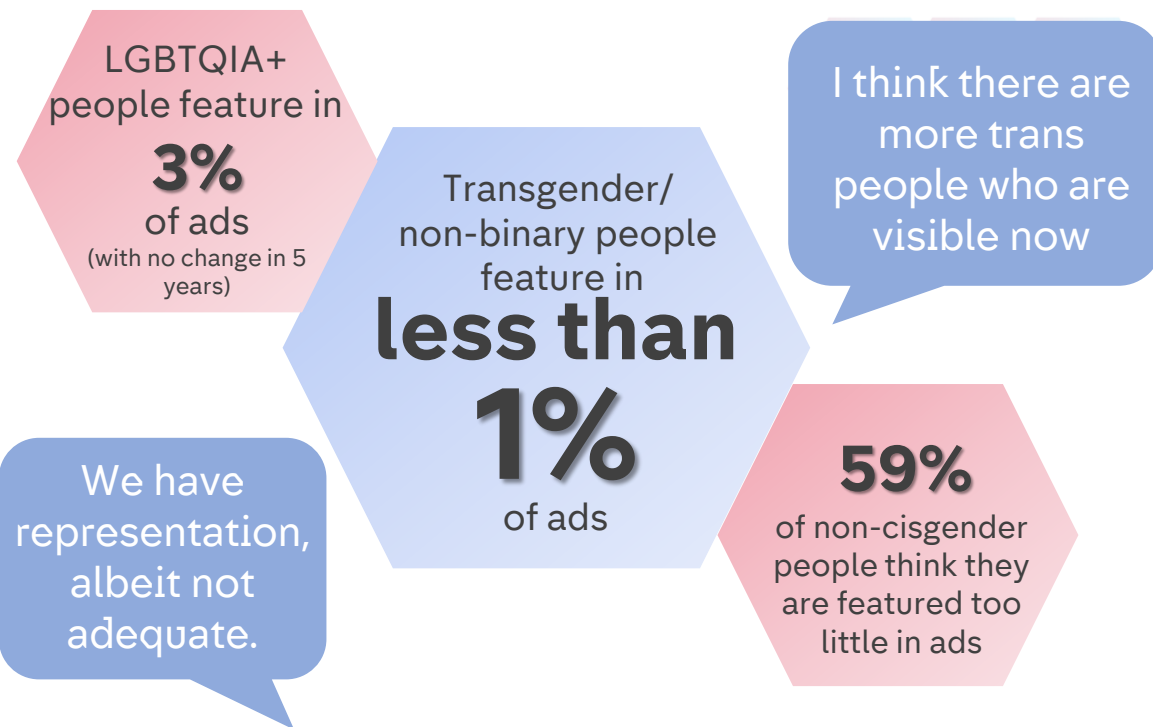
Despite transgender people appearing in a very small number of ads, representation levels are perceived to have improved by some

Our Mirror on The Industry ad audit, which looks at 1000 TV ads in order to measure how well represented minority groups are in TV advertising, **highlighted that LGBTQIA+ people, and particularly transgender people, currently appear in a very small number of ads** - both in general and in lead roles.

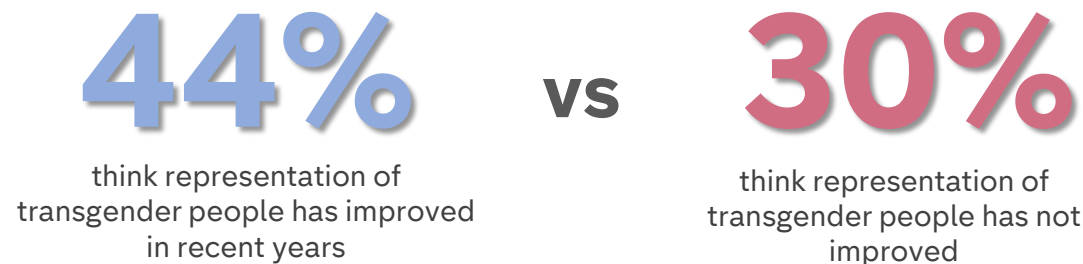
Our research uncovered that amongst transgender people there is some perception that levels of representation have improved – but this is **compared to a previous baseline of zero representation**, so any visibility at all is an improvement. However, we also found that nearly **1/3 of respondents had seen no improvement**, and the overall sentiment across our focus groups was that whilst visibility has increased, the **representation** has a lot further to go to be deemed adequate. It is also important to note that visibility alone doesn't necessarily mean being treated better, and brands could be doing more to stand with transgender people as abuse and hate crimes are on the rise.

"In terms of visibility, representation has improved. But that doesn't directly correlate to being treated better. Transphobic abuse & hate crimes are going up. It is hard to see visible celebrities e.g. Sam Smith being continuously mocked in comments etc, which are then seen by vulnerable people in our community."

Community research respondent



Mixed perceptions of progress...



"It has improved, but it could go even further"

Community research respondent

Sources: MOTI Ad Audit 2023, MOTI Quant survey 2023



In partnership with



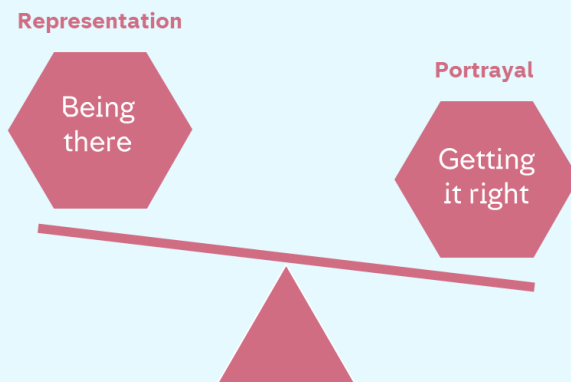
powered by



However, the portrayal of transgender people in ads is widely seen to be sensationalised and damaging

When talking about inclusion of minority groups in ads, it's important to remember that both representation **and** portrayal need to be improved.

Representation is simply being there in an ad at all, whilst portrayal is getting it right, and being authentically inclusive.



Our research showed that poor portrayals of transgender people within advertising can be **particularly damaging as they contribute to toxic media** narratives and make the people featured within them face backlash and ultimately feel unsafe.

“Portrayals that are negative make us face backlash.”

Community research respondent

Our focus groups discussed how transgender portrayals in advertising were **commonly sensationalised**, with melodramatic, over the top, tones and overly focussing on physical moments, such as operations or binding. They felt this actually does very little to educate and in fact ‘others’ them, leading to a lack of understanding of the normal lives transgender people lead.

“I think overall it's gotten worse since 2016 because generally the media is so much more negative and trying to find the most sensationalist stuff ”

“Shallow tokenistic portrayals where we are either brave tragic figures or sassy side characters”

“I think there has been a rise in transphobia and any depiction of trans people causes a stir in the media. A few years ago a trans woman won Big Brother and nobody really batted an eyelid... today the whole media discourse has become toxic.”

The current representation and portrayal of transgender people in advertising is limited in 3 key ways:

1. Too focussed on the physical/medical side of being transgender

Our research highlighted that transgender people feel current representation is often too focussed on physical moments such as binding or shaving. This is often dramatized through music, camera angles and lighting which **automatically sensationalises and shifts the tone** of the content.

It is felt that zoning in on this focusses too much on what most feel to be a small part of their experience and identity – and often with too much of a melancholic tone.

“Any “before transition/after transition” timeline stuff usually really fetishises the idea of transition and appeals to cis people and gives them the idea that it's ok to ask anyone for “previous” photos and dead names and stuff”

“I don't want to see anyone binding with bandages or cutting their long hair off with scissors in the bathroom whilst crying. I don't want to see the “no one will love me” tragedy”



The current representation and portrayal of transgender people in advertising is limited in 3 key ways:

2. Lacks diversity and intersectional considerations

"Representation is getting more inclusive but there is still a favouritism of skinny, white, and androgynous trans people"

"Munroe Bergdorf [is a] great poster person for the trans community. But that's because she's accomplished and she's beautiful, and she is what media perceives to be finished... where are the people that are a little bit awkward?"

"Trans people of all gender identities, sizes, ethnicities and abilities should be featured. Sometimes it can feel you only are acceptable if you're white, slim/musclled and conventionally attractive."

Another key way in which transgender representation is limited is through the fact that casting is often very similar – fitting conventional beauty standards, playing to 'artistic' stereotypes and lacking intersectional considerations – there is **little to none ethnic or disabled representation of transgender people.**

Participants in our research discussed how this made them **feel that they are only acceptable if 'conventionally' attractive**, and held to much higher beauty standards. They see this as a huge blocker to non-binary representation that challenges gender stereotypes. The idea of transgender people only being represented when they're 'passing' was also discussed and it is felt that this is a cis point of view – there is no one way to 'pass' as a certain gender, and on screen representation should reflect this diversity in appearance.



In partnership with



powered by





The current representation and portrayal of transgender people in advertising is limited in 3 key ways:

3. Not 'everyday' style representation – solely defined by being trans

The final way in which our research identified transgender representation as being limited was through a real lack of 'everyday' style representation. It was felt that 'being trans' was central to the majority of narratives and as such **the focus is on how they're different, as opposed to how they're just another person going about their everyday lives.**

Our focus group participants discussed how they have many other facets to their identities and are not defined by being trans, so it feels unjust and counter productive that the majority of representation focuses on this.

"Shallow tokenistic portrayals where we are either brave tragic figures or sassy side characters, we should be able to have mundane representation, portrayals of people who happen to be trans but that's not the point of the character"

"The representation is still largely white and binary, with transness being the central storyline"

"I feel in two minds about seeing yet, another trans-coming out story, that seems to be the main storyline that was told when there is any representation. It's important we see the stories as obviously that is a part of being trans-, however, it's not the only aspect and therefore I feel like we could have more variety"



In partnership with



powered by





How can the representation and portrayal of transgender people be improved?



Our research has led us to some tangible tips that can help brands improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people –and all are underpinned by this sentiment:

“People don’t transition to be trans. They transition to have a **place in this world** and feel more comfortable. **Let’s show that we’ve got all these other intersections and passions**”



In partnership with

karo
healthcare

E45

T&P^m

powered by


**THE
DIVERSITY
STANDARDS
COLLECTIVE**

MIRROR ON
Transgender People



Five Key Ways

to improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people in advertising:

- 
1. **Be more boring!**
 2. **Make trans identity second**
 3. **Hire trans talent**
 4. **Do your research and make the little things count**
 5. **Remember you can't represent everyone**



In partnership with

karo
healthcare

E45

T&P^m

powered by

**THE
DIVERSITY
STANDARDS
COLLECTIVE**

MIRROR ON
Transgender People

Five key ways to improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people:

1. Be more boring!

A key theme picked up through all elements of our research was the desire to move away from sensationalised representation that focuses on their differences and instead to focus on more 'boring', normal, everyday types of portrayal. It was felt this is a really important and easy way in which brands can help create a safe space and move past divisive and toxic narratives. 'Boring' representation can help people connect, see commonalities and normalise transgender people and their experiences and reduce the current stigma that surrounds them.

4 in 10

non-cisgender people think one of the main ways to improve representation is to make it look more natural

"What I actively encourage with brands and companies that I consult for is, how can we make trans representation actually quite boring? How can we make it generic? How it can be just scanning your oranges at Tesco...what we need right now is really boring trans representation to nullify this divisive time that we're in"

Professional Council Consultant

"Just like normal people trying to make it in the world, relationships, jobs, friendships, you know. Me and my trans friends are just a group of people like any other group of people, there is a lot of similarity to being human"

Community Council Respondent

"I know so many trans people who are 'average', boring even. And I mean that in a positive way. We shouldn't be treated as special or different all the time"

Community Research Respondent



Five key ways to improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people:

Linked to increasing more 'everyday' representation is the recommendation to make trans identity second when including transgender people in ads. This means including them with little or no mention of their trans identity. Our focus groups felt this was a powerful way of improving portrayal as it means they can express their talents and interests without 'trans-ness' being sensationalised at the forefront. This would allow for more accurate depictions and greater depth of character, once again normalising and educating about transgender people and their lives.

2. Make trans identity second

1/2

non-cisgender people think one of the main ways to improve representation is to include fewer stereotypes

"Complex, interesting characters who are not defined by being trans, but just accepted for who they are. Stories about lawyers, doctors, firefighters, superheroes, gangsters etc who are flawed and complex who just happen to be trans too, but it's not the story."
Community Research Respondent

"We just saw the Mugler campaign come out with Hunter Schaeffer. Incredible. Nothing to do with her being trans. Brands like that are really pushing the bar, you know?"
Professional Council Consultant

"I want trans people to be included as actual people. I don't want our whole story to be about our trans experience, it's just a part of us but these storylines reduce us to just our trans identity"
Community Research Respondent



In partnership with



powered by





Five key ways to improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people:

Another key element in getting representation and portrayal right is through hiring trans talent, both in front and behind the camera. Involving the people you're trying to communicate about and to in every stage of the process ensures authenticity from the outset and is crucial in avoiding feelings of tokenism. This also means ensuring diversity is front and centre – rather than just casting and recruiting from the same pools of people, hiring transgender from different backgrounds, with different intersections, appearances and experiences. Thinking about diversity in this 360 way will only strengthen an ad and it's message.

3. Hire trans talent

Non-cisgender people

50%

more likely

to say hiring more diverse people and identities in the ad industry will improve representation (than cisgender people)

"There still needs to be a thoughtful process in terms of casting. I think casting in a diverse lens is the only way forward"

Community Council Respondent

"I would definitely recommend that people invest in trans talent, whether that's people as part of the crew, that's a must. You absolutely need to have a trans person to consult every step of the way and then talent in front of the camera as well."

Professional Council Consultant



In partnership with



powered by





Five key ways to improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people:

Another key way of ensuring the representation and portrayal of transgender people and their experiences is accurate and authentic is by researching and speaking to them - then threading the learnings throughout a creative or campaign. We know that the idea of authentically representing transgender people can feel daunting but if you're doing it for the right reasons and have done your research this will shine through. Our research revealed that there are small, subtle nods you can make in a creative that will be noticed and mean a lot - for example, including a pronoun badge or highlighting everyday moments of trans joy. The best campaigns are often based on a single key insight. Our focus groups also expressed frustration that the media portrayed trans joy as rare or unattainable, so taking steps to understand and then normalise this would be powerful.

4. Do your research and make the little things count!

Non-cisgender people are over

1/3

more likely

to say more research into the groups being represented is the key to improving things (than cisgender people)

"The nuanced nature of each ethnicity or each culture needs to be explored. If you were to cast a trans person who was from a black community or an east asian community or a south asian community, their experience of transness, I guarantee you, would be different. And the characterization, the story, the elements would open up different intersections."

Community Council Respondent

"It would be nice for trans people to wear pronoun badges or even trans/non binary identity flag badges (this way it's not overtly a trans person but it acts as a nod to the community)."

Community Research Respondent

"Meaningful representation actually foregrounds trans people's stories, not the brand's own aims"

Professional Council Consultant



In partnership with



powered by



Five key ways to improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people:

Finally, when working on any campaign or creative representing transgender people, it's important to keep in mind that they are not one homogenous group and not everyone feels they are in the 'trans community'. Therefore, not every campaign will speak to all transgender people, and nor should it attempt to. Diversity initiatives are not supposed to be approached as 'one offs' designed to tick everyone off in one fell swoop. Instead approach representation in this space as a way to educate and share the stories of individuals – you're never going to represent *everyone*, so just pick *someone* and aim to get it as authentic as you possibly can.

5. Remember you can't represent everyone

"We're not a monolith and we're far more diverse than the representation we get. We are ordinary, we have entire lives outside of the fact of our transness."

Community Council Respondent

"I didn't transition to be a trans person. You know, I became who I was meant to be and that was kind of done and dusted years ago? So when you talk about the community, I don't see one. I don't know of one. I'm not involved in it"

Professional Council Consultant



03

The Industry Problem



In partnership with



powered by





Over the past 18 months, there has been a noticeable decline in brands featuring and supporting transgender talent

“ I actually think there's been a huge regression over the last 18 months. Everybody that I know that relies on brand work has taken a massive knock in their income over the last 18 months. I think that has come as a direct response to the backlash that the more progressive brands have faced.
Professional Council Consultant ”

Speaking with transgender people within the media and marketing industry it was evident that, as of recent, more brands are consciously opting to *not* work with transgender talent. With growing perceptions that standing with transgender people presents brand risk and conflating authentic inclusion with 'woke-ness', brands are in pulling investment out of the transgender community and risking icing out many of their customers by positioning themselves on the wrong side of LGBTQIA+ history.



In partnership with



powered by





Even brands known for supporting the transgender people with Pride campaigns have been pulling back

Brands rescinding support for the transgender and the broader LGBTQIA+ community, by stopping Pride campaigns, has had a direct impact on financial support for community causes, as well regressing conversations that drive change and uplift the transgender community and wider social morale.

Observing ally brands withdrawing support is particularly painful at a time where transphobia is being spotlighted through wide-reaching platforms and transgender rights being positioned as up for public debate. Especially when these same brands have profited off of the community previously.

[Brand] no longer does pride campaigns. They were generating so much money for the community, so much conversation. It's a joyous thing...It just knocks our morale...I love inclusive campaigns, I love Pride campaigns, I love it all. It's just very, very sad.

Professional Council Consultant

"It's hurtful to know that the campaigns are withdrawing their support, that brands are withdrawing their support because of fear and it's a time where we need them now more than ever...Even big brands that have made a lot of money off of these campaigns."

Professional Council Consultant



In partnership with



powered by





An extremely low proportion of transgender people currently feel supported by brands

The retreat in brand support noted by industry professionals isn't isolated to the media bubble. The UK's transgender population are also noticing brands' reticence to support the transgender community, with only 10% of transgender people feeling brands currently support them.

Participants consistently drew out observations of brands falling back at the first sign of backlash to protect themselves.

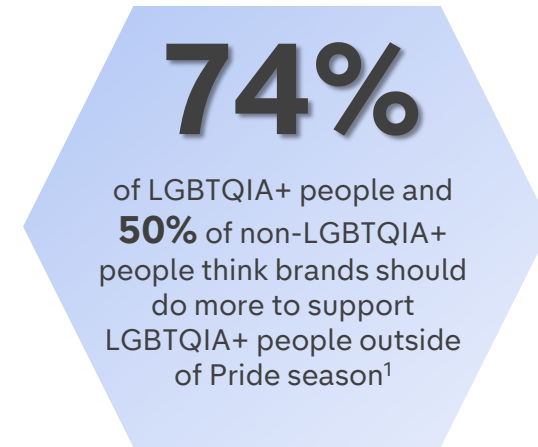
Half of Transgender people said they 'sometimes' feel supported (52%), leaving well over a third (38%) feeling completely unsupported.

Digging deeper, we found the feeling of being 'sometimes' supported stems from brand's opting for one-off Pride campaigns – but transgender people are calling out for commitment and consistency.



"Dipping a toe into showing positive trans representation and then immediately pulling back/ "defending themselves" when they get hate for it from bigots in order to protect their bottom line."

"I think it is so important if you want to start something during Pride, but finish it outside of Pride or carry it on beyond Pride, because we get very stuck in these...boxes where we're kind of wheeled out at a certain time of the year and then kind of shut away again."



Source: [Beyond The Rainbow](#)



In partnership with



powered by



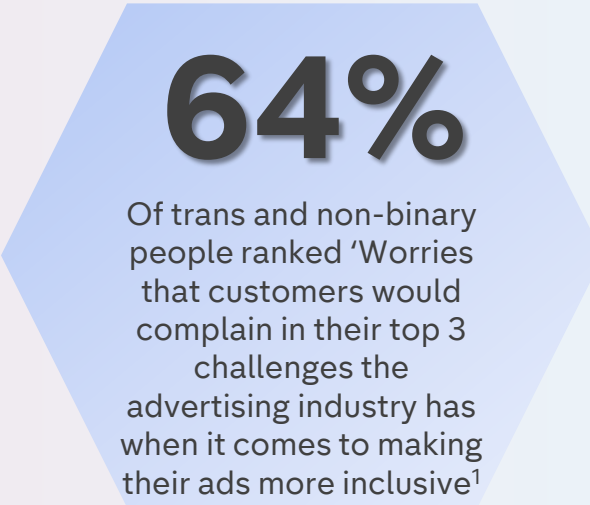


The fear of backlash is identified as the main blocker of progress when it comes to trans inclusive advertising

Our focus groups consistently drew out that fear was the resounding negative force holding back the progression of trans representation in media and advertising. From brands being scared to participate and receive backlash, to brands receiving backlash and rescinding support, it is all perceived as damaging.

Our Mirror On The Industry survey revealed that almost two-thirds of trans and non-binary and half of cisgender respondents ranked 'concerns about customer complaints' within the top 3 challenges for creating inclusive ads. Trans and non-binary people also put higher rankings against marketing professionals being out of touch with communities (52%) and teams lacking diversity (50%), followed by the fear of misrepresenting (48%) which was ranked higher and highest by cisgender people (54%).

Sources: ¹Mirror On The Industry Pt 4.



Major negative shifts in relation to the Trans community...

“ The fear of anti-trans boycotts and backlash meaning they drop us like a hot potato, the whole Dylan Mulvaney moral panic, it really showed everyone that brands tend to care only as far as it's profitable, again tokenism, it's made everyone much more cynical about brands trying to engage with the community.
Community Research Respondent ”

“ That brands will just back down to transphobic pressure and apologise to transphobes for daring to feature a trans person. I feel like a lot of brands don't provide any ongoing support to trans people caught up in this either.
Community Research Respondent ”

“ The backtracking after any online attack of the brand.
Community Research Respondent ”





Brands should harness their power and influence to educate and normalise the visibility of Transgender people

The transgender community are currently subject to the UK media's propensity to poke at moral panic. Media has a long history of taking differing opinions and magnifying them into inaccurate images of social division and are currently fuelling the illusion that transgender allyship is a political stance with an equal opposing side, rather than a moral stance that's shared with the majority.

Of course, it can't be ignored that intensified coverage and the debate-oriented framing of transgender rights is impacting public perceptions of transgender people. According to the British Social Attitudes report¹, whilst the majority still claim they're not prejudiced at all towards transgender people (62%), this has declined by 18 percentage points since 2019.

However, brands seem to be observing this growth in intolerance and misinterpreting the lesson. After seeing the backlash Bud- Lite faced after working with a transgender influencer, when asked how it made marketers feel about purpose, an alarming 25% agreed 'it was a real wake-up call to dial it down'².

By dialling down to mitigate backlash from the minority who *are* prejudiced, brands ignore the opportunity use their convening power to drive change by educating with trans-centred storytelling and normalising the visibility of transgender people. Ads have the power to shift awareness, attitudes and action, that is its whole purpose.

Sources: ¹[British Social Attitudes 40](#), ²[The Contagious Radar Report](#)

We've got the movable middle, we've got people who are on our side and we've got this kind of increasing large size of people who are radicalised, who are reading all those newspapers, looking at the media, and if all the information is coming from cis people who are rallying things up, who are riding things up with fear based nonsense, then people just don't have any understanding of what it is to be Trans.

Brands first need to take accountability for their exclusion of trans people. The media first needs to take accountability to fanning the flames. If you're not talking about your own role in this first - there's no way you can be a reliable source of education.



In partnership with



powered by





After all, the majority support equality for the LGBTQIA+ Community

The majority *do* think it's important to push against discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people and are looking out for brands that support LGBTQIA+ equality.

Allies and LGBTQIA+ audiences constitute a majority market size with substantial purchasing power. As such, aligning with this audience's values and authentically representing the community fosters an opportunity build long-term relationships and as a result, grow profitability.

However, it's important to remember that inclusivity is not merely a box to check or a performative gesture for profit; it has to be a reflection of a brand's core values and commitment to driving forward an inclusive and equitable society – otherwise audiences see through it.

2 in 3

people over 60 think it's important to fight discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ Community¹

82%

of non-LGBTQIA+ people believe it's their duty to promote an inclusive community for LGBTQIA+ people²

\$164bn

was the estimated UK spend power of the LGBTQIA+ community in 2023³

Over
8 in 10

allies say they were more likely to purchase from a company that supports LGBTQ+ equality⁴

Sources: ¹[The Generation A-Z Report](#), ²[Beyond The Rainbow](#), ³[LGBT Capital 2023](#), ⁴[Harvard Business Review](#)



In partnership with



powered by





04



What Can Brands Do About Backlash?



In partnership with



powered by





Preparation is key

Creating a transgender-inclusive campaign may feel daunting, but let the potential community, societal and brand benefits outweigh any reticence.

Unfortunately, we don't live in a discrimination-free world and we don't always get it right, so it's important to be fully prepared to create and protect your campaign, and all who have contributed to it.

Through our survey, consumer and professional councils, and own learnings as advertisers, brands and agencies, this section sets out to arm you with the advice to you need to see your campaign through from start to finish with confidence.



In partnership with



powered by





How brands respond to backlash is as important as facilitating Trans-visibility to begin with

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Whilst acknowledging any backlash a brand may face when working with transgender people is an amplified minority, it is still essential that brands understand that how backlash is handled can have significant impact on both the transgender community and your brand.

Many of our participants called out brands for performative pink-washing when observing the swift silence or back-peddling at the first sign of resistance to a transgender inclusive campaign, expressing the significant harm that this causes to the lives of transgender people in the short and long-term.

How a brand handles backlash signals to all consumers their commitment to diversity, informing brand credibility. By successfully handling backlash brands mitigate reputational damage, loss of customer trust, and boycotts from both supporters and detractors.

"I've seen more willingness to acknowledge our existence, which makes it much less bizarre to consume media. But often brands aren't prepared to handle the backlash, and when they try but fail to moderate comments or have a process in place to deal with the inevitable organised hate campaigns, it damages trans people. And if they back down in the end, it's a step back because it teaches transphobes that they can make our existence invisible, and therefore impossible and unliveable."

Community Research Respondent



In partnership with



powered by





Five Simple Tips

to deliver a campaign that serves both the transgender community and your brand



1. **Pick up the mirror**
2. **Be anti-hate**
3. **Equip your teams**
4. **Safeguard the talent**
5. **Stand your ground**



In partnership with

karo
healthcare

E45

T&P^m

powered by

**THE
DIVERSITY
STANDARDS
COLLECTIVE**

MIRROR ON
Transgender People



1. Pick up the mirror

Reflect on the current challenges transgender people are facing and the brand's own values. Be continuously guided by the transgender community throughout. Brands must root action in genuine intent and in the face of adversity return back to these reflections to be reminded of why this work is so important.

Reflect on the community

Take time to understand the lives and challenges of transgender people from their perspective. Do desk research, immerse yourself into the community, pay a consultancy and have open and curious conversations with transgender people to gain an understanding of the nuance in lived experiences.

Through these open conversations you can begin to understand how your brand might be able to support with a particular need or issue in an authentic way that connects to your brand, products and/or services.

Reflect on your brand

Look inwardly to understand how your brand currently fits in with transgender advocacy and whether you need to do any new or reparative work to get your house in order.

If you don't currently have a reputation in inclusivity, now is your time to start making a proactive effort to understand how your brand can futureproof serving the needs of transgender customers, clients and employees. Build your support into your brand's mission, purpose and values.

Reflect on your execution

Whether you want to educate audiences via an ad capturing trans joy or show a transgender person in an everyday scenario, it's important that the creative point of view is rooted in Transgender lived experiences.

Echoing the advice in the representation section of this report, do your research and hire trans talent, test executions and action insight to ensure your concept, scripts, casting and set foster true representation and inclusivity.



In partnership with



powered by





2. Be anti-hate

Brands must anticipate and strategically plan for it in advance. Rather than being caught off guard, back-peddling, staying silent or saying the wrong thing, prepare with robust crisis management strategies that speak to your brand's anti-hate values.

Taking a stance

Our industry focus group highlighted that brands must strike the balance between not allowing hate *and* not censoring speech when dealing backlash. We Are Social¹ reported that silenced trolls just take their bigotry elsewhere. By blocking, hiding or disabling comments, rather than calling them out, brands ignore the harm caused and become complicit in the cycle of discrimination.

If a brand doesn't tolerate hate, it should make it that known. To do this, it's recommended that brands create public anti-hate policies which lay out the ground rules for the brand's stance, what won't be tolerated, and procedures for handling hateful complaints, commentary, behaviours and sentiment overall.

Responding to hate

To bring an anti-hate policy into practice We Are Social's 'Braving The Backlash' sets up **The Three Rs** model to help brands address hate confidently and consistently:

Remain

Critical comments about the brand, campaign or contributors that aren't violent discriminatory, sexual or threatening remain

Reply

Comments deemed hateful should receive a reply that resonates with the brand's tone of voice and guided by the brand's anti-hate policy

Report

Extremely hateful comments should be screenshotted along with the user's profile and reported to the platform or, if severe, to local law enforcement

Sources: ¹[Braving the Backlash](#)



In partnership with



powered by





3. Equip your teams

Preparing teams for potential backlash against transgender-inclusive campaigns safeguards the transgender community as well as the brands integrity. Training, escalation routes, community monitoring and campaign context are essential for backlash management.

Process Preparation

As well as ensuring teams are up to speed with your anti-hate values and procedures, invest in crisis communication and conflict resolution training. Scenario-based training will prepare team members to respond effectively under pressure, this will be useful for all types of campaigns.

Established clear escalation procedures for escalating issues to senior leadership or legal counsel if necessary, to facilitate swift and coordinated responses that limit negative impact.

Campaign Monitoring

Utilise monitoring systems to track public sentiment, media coverage, and social media conversations surrounding the campaign. This can be monitored consistently upon launch and gradually less as the campaign goes on.

Upon launch consider holding regular debrief meetings to evaluate the response to the campaign and identify emerging issues or concerns. This will enable teams to escalate and exercise prepared protocols and strategies to address backlash.

Context and Education

A well executed transgender-inclusive campaign will have lived-experience and insights at its heart. Share this insight and context with comms teams so they're in touch with the campaign's roots; including terminology, challenges, and experiences.

Case studies, best practices, and expert insights help deepen understanding of transgender representation and advocacy, better preparing teams to protect such campaigns and those within them.



In partnership with



powered by





4. Safeguard the talent

It is critically important to ensure talent receive support beyond campaign production, whether that be on screen or off-screen talent. There are a few actions brands can take to ensure talent feel safe and supported in the event of backlash.

Provide resources

Check in with talent before and beyond any backlash to ensure they feel psychologically and physically safe. Have a prepared offering of resources to hand, such as access to gender-affirming healthcare and mental health services, legal assistance, and PR support.

“ Also I'd say with the contributors have something in place in case it does really affect them, like some sort of therapy or a voucher for something therapeutic. That always goes a really long way just to say, 'Listen, we've done the campaign, we've put it out there, but we're still thinking of you'.

Professional Council Consultant ”

Public Support

Utilise brand platforms to express support for the talent involved in the campaign in a statement affirming the talent's right to participate in the campaign without facing discrimination or backlash, and educate the public about the importance of transgender representation.

Consider working with LGBTQIA+ organizations, influencers, and allies to amplify positive messages of support for transgender talent in an effort to push back against any negativity.

Long-term Support

Offer ongoing support to talent beyond the duration of the campaign. Think about creating opportunities for continued collaboration, mentorship programs, or involvement in future initiatives or campaigns aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion.

By continuing to engage with and invest in talent, despite backlash, brands demonstrate a true commitment to the talent involved, the wider transgender community, your consumers and social progression at large.



In partnership with



powered by





5. Stand your ground all year round

Outvertising, a not-for profit organisation that advocates to make advertising and marketing LGBTQIA+ inclusive, put out a statement calling on advertisers to stand their ground when it comes to their LGBTQIA+ inclusive activity and campaigns¹, we couldn't agree more. There is no time left for performative gestures and back-peddling. We need to remain resolute all year-round.

Stand your ground

Standing firm in the face of anti-trans backlash is a moral imperative, it demonstrates a brand's unwavering commitment to transgender people and the broader social responsibility to shape a more inclusive world. By standing firm on representation of transgender people, brands amplify visibility which empowers the transgender community, validates their experiences and brings us closer to normalised inclusivity.

“The LGBTQIA+ community will not be silenced, and we will not be erased. Our community will remain visible. LGBTQIA+ people belong in ads. Trans+ people belong in ads.
Outvertising”

Sources:¹[Outvertising Press Release](#), ²[YouGov](#)

All year-round

Pride month and International Transgender Day of Visibility are great moments to show your support. However, 75% believe brands focusing activity on Pride month for positive PR purposes rather than genuine support².

It's time to move beyond token gestures and commit to sustained action that supports transgender people year-round. Run your Pride activity and prove your integrity beyond it:

- Raise awareness and celebrate trans joy
- Feature authentic transgender representation in advertising
- Invest in and partner with impactful transgender and LGBTQIA+ advocacy initiatives, charities and organisations
- Cultivate a transgender-inclusive workplace

Let's prioritize meaningful support over superficial gestures, creating lasting change and acceptance for transgender people.



In partnership with



powered by





“It's really important that brands recognise the power that they have just through visibility.”

Professional Council Consultant

Ultimately, we should be aiming to evolve to a society where transgender people feel safe, included and free to be themselves without the fear of discrimination - and brands shouldn't underestimate the power that visibility through advertising can have in getting there. **Through visibility brands can empower, educate, connect and ultimately normalise trans representation and inclusion to a point where there is no backlash.**

Normalcy doesn't stir up outrage, neither should the normalised visibility of Transgender people.

“

It's funny because we've just had trans day visibility. And a lot of my messaging was, you know, please be aware, but most of the onus is on allies, is to, you know, create a space where we can just exist...I did get a lot of comments saying, why visibility? Why do you need visibility? And it's the reason we need visibility is so that then we can just exist...Having visibility means that actually trans people could be invisible. And that for a lot of us is something that we don't get to have. And I think once we get past visibility, we can have trans invisibility.

Professional Council Consultant

”



In partnership with

karo
healthcare

E45

T&P^m

powered by

**THE
DIVERSITY
STANDARDS
COLLECTIVE**

MIRROR ON
Transgender People



05

Case Study E45 & "This is Me, This is My Space"



In partnership with



powered by



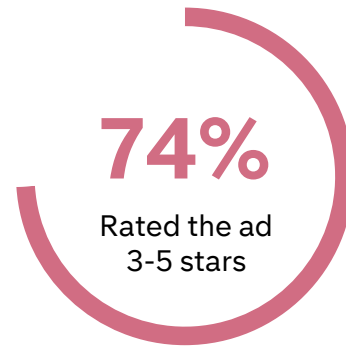


E45: Winner of Channel 4's Diversity in Advertising Award 2023

The Channel 4 Diversity In Advertising Award offers an annual £1 million airtime prize for a brand who best responds to a creative brief encouraging greater representation of diverse communities in advertising.

The 2023 brief encouraged brands to tackle the on-going lack of authentic portrayal and representation of LGBTQIA+ people, to which Karo Healthcare (the makers of E45) & agency T&Pm responded with a powerful creative **'This Is Me, This Is My Space'** based around the key insight that Transgender people often feel most uncomfortable in their own skin.

This is something we also covered in our focus groups, where our participants discussed that the idea of **feeling comfortable in your own skin can be both physical and an emotional metaphor**. Many described the feeling of discomfort which comes with being in a body they don't identify with and a euphoric feeling which transitioning can bring as a result of feeling and looking more like oneself. However, **the process of transitioning can be tough on skin**, causing side effects like dryness and sensitivity from hormone therapy, hair removal and surgery, just to name a few. Due to the very individual nature of transitioning, it can be a huge



We tested initial reactions and sentiment towards the ad via a survey of both our Core4 community, which is made up of a subset of our Channel 4 streaming registered viewers, and our 4Youth community, which consists of 16-24s.

The ad was well-liked, with **74%** of all respondents rating it **3-5 stars**. It landed particularly well with younger audiences, who were significantly more likely to rate the ad 5 stars.

"I don't recall seeing another advert that **supports trans people** so I liked that this was the first. I liked that it showed some of the trials trans people go through."
Female, 55-64

"The representation. It's still rare to see many ads **celebrating identity and diversity**. It was **really positive**."
Female, 25-34

The creative was highly praised for being **relatable, humorous and an authentic portrayal of transgender experiences**. Respondents noted the thoughtful portrayal of the different skin issues the transgender community might face, along with the inclusion of a **range of ethnicities and body shapes**.



"I liked the **real world aspect**. The **inclusivity**. Different shapes and sizes"
Female. 55-64

Source: Core4/4Youth Survey Apr 2024 | n = 1095



In partnership with



powered by

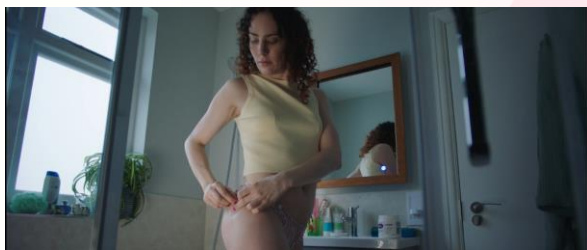




The creative was highly praised for being relatable, humorous and an authentic portrayal of transgender experiences

The key themes that emerged all centre around authenticity, everyday-ness and upbeat tones – direct examples of the tips we identified around representation and portrayal creating an effective ad. Respondents also praised the ad’s commitment to **helping break down stereotypes around transgender people and age.**

AUTHENTIC TRANS REPRESENTATION



Our tip: Hire trans talent & make trans identity second

*“It’s **SO refreshing** to see a brand openly & **positively acknowledge the existence of trans/NB/gender-diverse people!** Without making it a big deal! The radio/bath clip & depiction of HRT both stood out in particular as things that set this ad apart even from others who prioritise a gender-diverse cast.”*
Female, 25-34

UPBEAT PACE & HUMOUR



Our tip: Do your research and make the little things count

*“Its **quirkiness, its sense of humour**, all the different examples of when E45 might help, the shark at the end!”*
Female, 55-64

*“I can imagine it would make trans people feel very seen! I really liked the scene where the lady was looking happily at herself in the mirror, also **the waxing singing at the bus stop was funny.**”*
Female, 25-34

RELATABLE, EVERYDAY SCENARIOS



Our tip: Be more boring!

*“**Variety of different people** portrayed in the ad, they seemed to be in **normal situations**”*
Male, 45-54

*“I always love to see a variety of bodies represented on screen. I also liked seeing the bathroom as a kind of personal domain - **it felt true.**”*
Female, 35-44

Source: Core4/4Youth Survey Apr 2024 | n = 1095



In partnership with



powered by





06

Summary



In partnership with



powered by





Summary



- 01** There is broad agreement that people need to **be more aware and educated** on the challenges transgender people face, with a shared belief that any education attempt needs to put lived experiences of transgender people at its heart. These **lived experiences include many moments of 'trans joy'** that come from self-acceptance, support and community, whilst the challenges they face often come from situations where they have limited control.
- 02** Portrayals of transgender people in ads are **commonly sensationalised**, too focussed on the physical side of being trans, lacking diversity and real 'everyday' style representation. Our research identified **five key ways** brands can improve the representation and portrayal of transgender people.
- 03** There has been a **noticeable decline in brands supporting and working with transgender talent** at a time when it's needed most. Brands' reticence is strongly **attributed to the fear of anti-trans backlash**, which undermines the market size of those who support the community and the scale of social progression brands can influence. Brands need to harness their **power to influence and normalise the visibility** of transgender people.

- 04** How brands respond to backlash is as important as facilitating trans-visibility to begin with. Before jumping in, **touch base with transgender people's needs**, identify the role your brand could play in trans-advocacy and inform and execute your campaign through insight into **lived-experience, testing executions** and working with **representative teams**. **Prepare for backlash in advance** with anti-hate procedures, equipping your teams with crisis management skills, knowledge and escalation routes clearly defined. Finally, stand your ground all year-round.
- 05** E45's **"This Is Me, This is My Space"** creative thoughtfully and authentically portrays transgender experiences in a way that was commended for breaking down stereotypes. It perfectly exemplifies the efficacy of taking one key insight (in this instance, the fact that transgender people often feel most uncomfortable in their skin) and creating a **powerful and sensitive campaign** around it, that both educates and shift perceptions.



In partnership with



powered by





Thank You



In partnership with



powered by

