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Determining the Influence of Electronic Messages on Consumer Behavior Based on Perceived Source Trust and Credibility

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how heterosexual consumers react to explicit LGBT images in advertising, specifically pertaining to their personal relationships with LGBT individuals. The methodology used for this study was an online survey containing likert-scale, multiple choice, free response, and demographic questions. The survey was distributed online with the help of several organizations. The findings from this research show that heterosexual consumers generally have positive attitudes toward advertising that used LGBT imagery. Further, having a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT seems to have an effect on overall attitudes toward LGBT imagery in advertising.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the responses of consumers to visual advertisements that use lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) visual cues. It is a specific look into how visual cues in advertisements affect consumer perceptions and attitudes, specifically in regard to personal relevance. From a marketing perspective, it is hard to deny that the LGBT community is an essential cultural group that holds substantial buying power. With the changing political landscape around the LGBT community, it is more important now than ever that marketers begin to target the LGBT community on a similar scale to how they target the general public. Because the LGBT community's buying power has grown exponentially and offers high-probability of developing brand loyalty (Oakenfull, 2013), marketers are seeking to become more inclusive with their advertising. Research has shown that there are ways to target the LGBT community that do not alienate general consumers, even those who are in opposition to the topic.

In the course of American history, advertising directed towards the LGBT community is a relatively recent marketing segmentation. Because of its fresh inception into modern advertising there has been little academic literature completed to further evaluate and improve current marketing decisions that are aimed toward the LGBT community (Oakenfull, 2013). As a result, several differences within the LGBT community segmentation have been neglected or overlooked: Advertisements aimed toward the gay or lesbian communities fail to successfully market to the Bisexual and Transgender communities; advertising aimed at influencing the LGBT community using male imagery tends to neglect the lesbian community (Oakenfull, 2005). A study by Kates (1999), found that marketers have overwhelmingly targeted gay consumers using gay-male imagery in advertising and print media, with lesbian-targeted imagery accounting for only 3% of advertising content. This is problematic not only because of the lack

of equality among gay men and women but because heterosexual consumers tend to feel less negatively about lesbian based imagery (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004).

When it comes to advertising images there is also the issue of personal relevance. Previous research shows that consumers who are members of the group being targeted by an advertisement – gay men, bisexuals, heterosexuals, etc. - are more likely to have positive attitudes toward the advertisement than consumers who are members of the non-targeted groups (Dotson, 2009). For example, lesbians who identify with gay males have more positive attitudes toward ads that use gay-male imagery, while lesbians who do not identify with gay males have more positive attitudes toward ads that use lesbian imagery (Oakenfull, 2013). That being said, consumers in the general population who do not connect with the LGBT community on some personal level will be less driven by LGBT visual cues or will have less favorable attitudes toward ads featuring LGBT imagery (.) Following this same trend, individuals who do not identify as LGBT but are involved with the LGBT community on some level, through personal relationships or community involvement, will be more likely to view advertisements featuring LGBT visual cues positively (,).

The significance of this research is to understand the perceptions, attitudes, and influence visual advertisements, that reflect or symbolize the LGBT community, have on consumers. One study suggested that people exposed to non-gay-themed ads had more positive attitudes towards the brand than those who were exposed to gay-themed ads (Um, 2014). However, other studies have suggested that heterosexual consumers do not develop negative attitudes towards brands when they are exposed to gay-themed ads. The purpose of this study is to answer the questions: What role does personal relevancy play when consumers are developing attitudes toward an advertisement? To what extent does this personal relevancy shape their overall opinions and purchase behavior? Does personal relevancy guide attitude formation at all? This research will compare how consumer responses to advertising images that feature LGBT visual cues equates with their personal involvement and relationships with members of the LGBT community. It will provide insights in order to further understand the influence of the LGBT community on the general market and provide recommendations for marketers on how to more effectively target the LGBT community in a manner that will be receptive and beneficial for both those who identify as LGBT and the general public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the LGBT Market

A booming and influential niche market of gay and lesbian consumers emerged in the United States in the 1990's, when the gay and lesbian political movement achieved an unprecedented level of visibility. Gay advertising, which began with a few adventurous companies, such as Absolut Vodka in 1979, is now a certifiable trend sponsored by many mainstream advertisers. Simultaneously, there was an explosion of discourse about the gay market circulating in mainstream media, the gay press, advertising trade publications, and scholarly journals (Tsai, 2004). In 1995, *American Demographics* featured an article announcing that the gay niche market was "Out of the Closet."

While attitudes toward the LGBT community are continuously changing, this niche market is not a natural result of increased social acceptance, but an attempt by marketers to harness “gay dollars” (Oakenfull, 2013a). It is estimated that 6.8% of Americans over the age of 18, roughly 15 to 16 million people, self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Additionally, the buying power of this segment was estimated to be \$743 billion in 2010 (Harris Interactive, 2010). Also, because members of the LGBT segment are generally highly educated and usually have no dependents, they tend to have higher levels of disposable income (Kahan & Mulryan, 1995). As a result, American corporations now spend approximately \$231 million a year targeting the LGBT community through print media, online media, and sponsorships (Oakenfull, 2013a).

Previous research suggests “gays represent a distinct subculture, rather than just a consumer segment within the main culture” (Oakenfull, 2005). The gay community is far from homogenous, and is highly diverse in terms of race, gender, age, class, religion, political agenda, and even stage of coming out (Tsai, 2004). Studies found that gay and lesbian consumers consider the following when deciding if they should support a company: corporate policies such as offering domestic partner benefits, supporting anti-discrimination policies, encouraging acceptance of diversity in the workplace, advertising in both gay and mainstream media, providing financial support to gay causes, and including gay themes in advertising (Tuten, 2005). To reinforce this notion, a survey of LGBT consumers found that 64% of LGBT adults reported that they are more likely to purchase products and services from companies that market directly to the LGBT community (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004). It is reported that more than 90% of gay men and 82% of lesbians read mainstream magazines like Time, People, National Geographic, New Yorker, Vanity Fair, and Men’s Health. This apparent interest in mainstream media emphasizes that the LGBT community will identify more with companies that target to them openly in the mainstream, versus strictly through gay media (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004).

Attracting LGBT without Alienating the Mainstream

Some brands utilize “gay vague” advertising appeals, which allow a brand to simultaneously target the LGBT community and the mainstream, heterosexual community (Tuten, 2005). Gay vague advertising, a term coined by Michael Wilke, is advertising that speaks to gay and lesbian culture without garnering recognition of gay positioning from heterosexuals (Tuten, 2005). These appeals can include neutral images, unconventional gender behavior, in-group language, ambiguous scenarios, and symbols of gay subculture (Tsai, 2010). Some symbols of gay subculture could be specific clothing styles, rainbows, pink triangles, and other elements of physical appearance. Not only will these implicit cues work with heterosexual consumers, they are often seen as an “inside joke” within the LGBT community that allows them to feel bonded with the advertiser (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004).

Studies have indicated that responses to gay-themed advertisements are dependent on general attitude toward homosexuality (Gibson & Hester, 2007). Therefore, inherent biases are reflected in the attitudes toward illustrated advertisements by allowing imagery to confirm perception. In the case that explicit gay imagery is used in mainstream advertisements, heterosexuals tend to have a more negative response to gay-male imagery than they do to lesbian imagery (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004). This is problematic because mainstream media predominantly uses gay-male

imagery in their advertising. More specifically, when dealing with gender, heterosexual females are more likely to have favorable or more accepting attitudes toward LGBT individuals than heterosexual males (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Based on research from Wills and Crawford (2002), women are more likely than men to believe in equal rights for gays and lesbians, support gay and lesbian marriage, and generally show more favorable responses when it comes to other LGBT issues and attitude based ideals. Gay and lesbian consumers have equally favorable responses to advertising that features implicit gay-male and lesbian imagery (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004), and prefer both explicit and implicit depictions of gay imagery to mainstream, heterosexual imagery (Tsai, 2010). Thus, by using implicit gay-male and lesbian imagery in mainstream media advertising, marketers can appeal to gay and lesbian consumers with little risk of creating negative sentiments among heterosexual consumers (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004).

Interpreting LGBT Advertising.

The way the LGBT community is interpreted in advertising may have a direct correlation to attitudes and perceptions of how their cultural group is viewed. LGBT representation in mainstream advertising is significant because advertising is often perceived as an official sanction from Corporate America (Tsai, 2010). Many LGBT consumers see this social visibility as progress in the fight for their rights, and reward companies that are considered “gay-friendly” in their policies and marketing efforts (Oakenfull, 2013a). However, some features of ads may lead to a “campy sensitivity” mindset. “Campy sensitivity” can be described as the result of a LGBT person’s experience with the need to pass as straight, and disguising themselves so they could appear to fit in with non-LGBT people (Tsai, 2004). “Campy sensitivity” is the mindset of oppression. Though lesbians and gay men are seen, they are not fully recognized by the mainstream society.

Tsai conducted a study of minority groups, specifically gay-males and lesbians, in regard to their interpretations of gay advertising. The study focused on understanding explicitly gay themed mainstream commercials in relation to their “disadvantaged social status and their direct experience of struggle and discrimination” (2011). The results of the study indicated that while there are concerns among LGBT consumers over proper representation in advertising, the validation of the gay community through ads significantly outweighed the troubling aspects of the market (Tsai, 2011).

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Advertisements that represent the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community have a direct impact on LGBT purchase behaviors and have provided insight to the way the mainstream media portrays LGBT individuals. Visual cues in advertising affect consumer reactions based on their perceptions, personal relevance, and attitudes. While there are many theories that can be identified in interpreting these reactions, Social Identity Theory plays a prominent role in this research.

Social Identity Theory, as defined by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, revolves around a person’s self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. The theory can also be used to explain intergroup behavior, or behavior that is between two or more social groups.

Previous literature by Park states that if members of a group know that an in-group member has a close relationship with an out-group member, this can lead to more positive intergroup attitudes (2012). The same literature says that the “mere awareness or observation” of other in-group members befriending out-group members could change the observers attitude toward the out-group overall (Park, 2012). In 2005, a thesis called “para-social contact hypothesis,” found that simply being exposed to out-group members can increase in-group members' understanding of the out-group and further improve their attitudes toward the out-group (Park, 2012). This literature is relevant because if a heterosexual individual feels a perceived membership or personal connection with a member from the LGBT community, the relationship can work both ways to improve out-group attitudes.

Therefore, based on the above theory, if individuals identify more with advertisements that reinforce their self-identity or in-group membership, and if exposure to out-group members can improve understanding and out-group approval, it is likely that heterosexual individuals who spend time with LGBT community members will have more favorable attitudes toward the LGBT community overall. Therefore,

[H]: Individuals that identify as heterosexual who have personal relationships with LGBT individuals will have more positive attitudes toward ads with explicit LGBT visual cues than heterosexual individuals who do not have personal relationships with LGBT individuals.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

The methodology for conducting this research was an online survey. The survey was created using the Qualtrics software provided by Florida State University. In order to bring awareness to the survey, e-mail correspondence was used to contact and request support from both LGBT and non-LGBT organizations. For this research study, FSU’s Pride Student Union, Georgia Equality, FSU’s chapter of Lambda Pi Eta Communications Honor Society, and FSU’s chapter of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin sorority agreed to support the study by assisting with data collection. They were given links to the survey as well as a brief description of the contents, and were gracious enough to share the link within their organization’s newsletters, social media pages, and e-mail correspondence systems. Throughout the data collection process some other organizations were contacted in a less formal format and agreed to aid in data collected as well. In addition, the survey link was sent through e-mail and made available on the researcher’s personal social media pages as well as social media sites that allow public postings. Sharing of the survey through word-of-mouth communication was also encouraged.

Sampling

The populations of interest for this study were both LGBT and heterosexual individuals, as results from each group were relevant for testing the hypothesis. A non-probability sample was used to collect the data. In some cases, a judgment sample or snowball sample was also utilized to gather respondents. The aforementioned organizations distributed the survey link through their communication outlets as well. The survey was distributed in an online format to these

organizations and the general public through social media channels and via e-mail. The target sample size was 400 total respondents; 200 LGBT individuals and 200 heterosexual individuals. This sample size was predicted to yield the most reliable and valid results.

Instrument

The purpose of the questionnaire was to measure the attitudes of the LGBT community and heterosexuals concerning explicit LGBT advertising images, as well as explore how these attitudes influence and interact with numerous other variables. Respondents were prompted to complete the anonymous survey at their leisure. The survey contained a set of two advertisements that were pre-tested for inter-judge reliability.

The questionnaire begins with a consent form, followed by an age screening question, and brief instructions. Once subjects consented and were identified as age appropriate, they were able to move on to the image portion of the survey. The survey featured two images that were said to be advertisements for a non-existing fragrance brand called "AL." One image depicted culturally normative behavior between a same-sex, gay male couple and one image depicted culturally unacceptable behavior between a same-sex, gay male couple (See Appendix, Images 1 and 2). This study was a one advertisement experimental design, meaning that participants were randomly exposed to only one of the two previously mentioned advertisements. Prior to beginning data collection, six images were tested for inter-judge reliability to ensure two things: one, that there was no question as to the sexual orientation of the people in the images, and two, that the images were properly perceived as socially acceptable or socially unacceptable. The image that received the lowest average social acceptability score and the image that received the highest social acceptability score were chosen for the final experiment, with at least a 90% consensus. These two images also scored above 90% on perceived homosexuality.

After being exposed to the advertisement, the layout of survey questions was as follows: attitude toward the ad, intent to purchase, word-of-mouth communication, sexual orientation, gay lifestyle questions, LGBT involvement, acculturation, and demographics. Likert scale questions and semantic differential scales were used to measure various aspects of respondent attitudes. In addition, dichotomous scales, multiple choice questions, and open-ended questions were utilized to gather information from respondents.

The survey questions measured respondent attitudes as well as current perceptions and factors that could influence these attitudes. The scales used in the questionnaire were previously validated and had reported alpha values over 0.7. They were modified from their original versions to fit the scope of this research study.

Data Collection

An online questionnaire was the chosen data collection method for this research study. In order to gather participants and data, support was requested from several different organizations. The organizations that agreed to help with data collection were: The Florida State University (FSU) Pride Student Union, FSU's chapter of Lambda Pi Eta Communications Honor Society, Georgia Equality, and the FSU chapter of the Latin sorority, Lambda Theta Alpha. These organizations

helped by making the survey link available to their organization's members through social media, e-mail correspondence, or a hyperlink in their organization's newsletter. Their help was greatly appreciated and added to the overall quality of this research. The survey was open for a period of thirty-five days.

The data provided by all participants was used to test the hypothesis. Excluding open-ended questions, all of the results were inputted into the SPSS data analysis program. Resulting attitudes from the advertisement-based portion of the questionnaire were calculated into an attitudinal scale so that the findings could be compared more clearly. The findings from the SPSS data analysis were used to test the hypothesis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Pilot Study

Previous data was collected in relation to this research. The preliminary results showed that overall, LGBT respondents had more positive attitudes toward ads with explicit LGBT visual cues than ads with heterosexual visual cues. It was hypothesized that heterosexual females would have more favorable attitudes toward ads with explicit gay imagery than heterosexual males, but the data was not able to support that. It was also hypothesized that compared with heterosexual respondents, LGBT respondents would have more favorable attitudes toward ads with explicit LGBT visual cues, but this was also not supported by the preliminary data. Based on the data and findings, marketers could use explicit gay-male or lesbian advertisements in mainstream advertising without alienating heterosexual consumers. Through mean comparison it was determined that the most "favored" ad across all groups - lesbian, gay-male, transgender, bisexual, and heterosexual - was the ad featuring explicit lesbian imagery. The data also showed that the age group 18-24 held the most favorable attitudes toward the ads.

Overall, the data would have benefitted from a larger sample size. However, it could be concluded that LGBT respondents' attitudes toward visual advertisements differ from the attitudes of heterosexual respondents. It can even be said that there are attitudinal differences within the segments of the LGBT community. The present research findings are not a direct extension of the previous research, but seek to compliment the research area as a whole by continuing to focus on LGBT visual cues and how heterosexuals, or the mainstream market, respond to them.

Validation and Reliability

There were no found reliability issues with this research. All scales that were used in this research were found to be valid. The attitude factor used to test the hypothesis was found to have a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.883.

Table 1
Scale Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.883	.883	4

Sampling

The total number of respondents for the survey was 232, however two respondents did not consent to the survey so there were 230 valid responses. Due to drop out rates, each question has the potential to have a different number of respondents. Of the 227 respondents who reported their age, 73% (166) fell into the 18-24 age range, 13% (n=30) were 25-30 years old, and the remaining 14% (n=31) were above 31 years old. Out of the 185 respondents who reported their ethnicity, the majority, 66% (n=122) were white, non-Hispanic. This was followed by Hispanic with 22% (n=41), African American with 8% (n=15), Asian and “other” made up 4% (n=7) of the respondents. The majority of respondents were female (72%, n=133), 26% (n=48) were male, and 2% (n=4) were non-binary. 186 respondents reported their sexuality. The majority reported being heterosexual (85%, n=159). The other 15% were self-identified as LGBT with 5% (n=10) being bisexual, 4% (n=7) being gay-male, 3% (n=5) reported being lesbian, and 3% (n=5) reported being transgender. Of those who identified as LGBT, 1 respondent was “closeted,” 48% (n=13) were “out” to their close friends, and 48% (n=13) were “out” to everyone.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between if the respondent had a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT and attitude toward the advertisements. There was a positive, but weak, correlation at the 0.01 alpha level between having a personal relationship and perceived advertisement appropriateness ($r=0.213$, $n=158$, $p=0.007$). At the 0.05 alpha level there was a negative, but weak, correlation for perceived ad inappropriateness ($r=0.167$, $n=158$, $p=0.036$). The variables questioning if the advertisement was “good,” or “offensive,” were not significant. When a correlation was run between personal relationships and the attitude factor as a whole, there was a positive, but weak, correlation at the 0.05 alpha level ($r=0.171$, $n=158$, $p=0.031$).

Table 2
Correlations (personal relationships vs. attitudes)

Correlations (n=158)

	Respondent has a personal relationship with an LGBT	1	2	3	4	5
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		person					
ad was:- Appropriate (1)	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	.213** .007 158					
ad was:- Good (2)	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	.139 .082 158	.702** .000 159				
AttitudeFact or (3)	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	.171* .031 158	.924** .000 159	.830* .000 159			
ad was:- Inappropriat e (4)	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.167* .036 158	-.849** .000 159	-.644** .000 159	-.918** .000 159		
ad was:- Offensive (5)	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.056 .486 158	-.613** .000 159	-.487** .000 159	-.777** .000 159	.662** .000 159	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of attitude toward the advertisement on the likelihood that the participant has a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT. Using only the significant variables from the previous correlation analysis, the logistic regression model was statistically significant, $X^2=7.147$, $p<0.05$. The Nagelkerke R^2 explained 85% of the variance in personal relationships and correctly classified 88% of cases. Having a

positive attitude toward the advertisements was associated with an increased likelihood that the participant would have a personal relationship with someone who identified as LGBT.

Table 3.
The Logistic Regression Model Test Results (personal relationships vs attitudes)

Test			P-Value
2-Log Likelihood	108.96		
Chi-Squared	7.147		.028

Classification Table			
Group	Predicted Group		% Correct
	LGBT relationship	No relationship	
LGBT Relationship	139	19	88%

Parameter Estimates for the Logistic Regression Model				
Variables:				
	B	Wald	Sig.	
Ad was appropriate	.805	3.242	.072	
Ad was good	.102	0.55	.815	
Constant	-.258	.017	.896	

Additional Findings

Out of all respondents, 166 reported having a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT. Of these respondents, 35% (n=58) had a relationship with a family member who identifies as LGBT, 87% (n=145) had a friend who identifies as LGBT, 64% (n=106) had an acquaintance who identifies as LGBT, and 42% (n=69) had a co-worker who identifies as LGBT. From those responses it was gathered that 70% (n=116) of the relationships were with lesbians, 81% (n=134) were with gay-males, 44% (n=73) were with bisexuals, and 20% (n=34) were with someone who identifies as transgender. It should be noted that respondents could have had more than one personal relationship with someone who was LGBT and they could have selected multiple responses for these questions.

Overall, attitudes toward the ads were relatively favorable. On a scale of one to four, with one being the most negative attitude and 4 being the most positive attitude, the average was a 2.938. When measuring specific variables, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between if the respondent had a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT and word-of-mouth (WOM) participation with the LGBT social cause. There was a positive, but weak, correlation at the 0.05 alpha level between having a personal relationship with someone who identifies at LGBT and the WOM variable that said “I talk up this social issue to people I know” (r=0.165, n=158, p=0.038).

Table 4
Correlations (personal relationships vs WOM)

Correlations (n=158)

		Respondent has a personal relationship with an LGBT person	1	2	3
I "talk up" this social issue to people I know (1)	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.098 .220 158			
I bring up this social issue in a positive way in conversations with friends and acquaintances (2)	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.165* .038 158	.588** .000 159		
I often speak favorably about this social issue (3)	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.153 .055 158	.583** .000 159	.766** .000 159	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of WOM on the likelihood that the participant has a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $X^2=4.167$, $p<0.05$. The model explained 50% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in personal relationships and correctly classified 88% of cases. Using WOM to talk up the social issue was associated with an increased likelihood that the participant would have a personal relationship with someone who identified as LGBT.

Table 5.
The Logistic Regression Model Test Results (personal relationships vs WOM)

Test		P-Value
2-Log Likelihood	111.941	
Chi-Squared	4.167	.041

Classification Table

Group	Predicted Group		% Correct
	LGBT relationship	No relationship	

LGBT Relationship	139	19	88%
Parameter Estimates for the Logistic Regression Model			
Variables:			
	B	Wald	Sig.
Respondent talks up social issue	.497	4.127	.042
Constant	.320	.154	.695

RESULTS

The hypothesis that having personal relationships with someone who identifies as LGBT affects someone's attitude toward advertisements that contain LGBT visual cues was supported. While the data supported the hypothesis, there were inconsistencies within the scale itself as some items were significant and some were not. We saw this when it came to items that used words like "good," or "offensive." It is possible that respondents saw this language as too extreme or that their opinions were not skewed enough in one way or another, but remained neutral. Due to the overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the advertisements, many of the other variables that were tested did not yield significant results and were excluded from this research paper. Explanations for this could be the absence of concretely formed attitudes or another factor that was not controlled for in this research.

DISCUSSION

Conclusion

Overall, attitudes toward the LGBT community are changing. As the segment becomes a more accepted part of culture, it is likely that the mostly positive attitudes we see in this research will continue to increase. What once polarized marketers in regard to wanting to reach the LGBT segment because of their buying power, but wanting to continue to receive support from the mainstream market, is becoming less and less of an issue. Based on the preliminary findings and this current research, it is clear that using LGBT images in advertising will not alienate the mainstream market and will make the LGBT market happy. Also, as the LGBT segment becomes more accepted in society, it is likely that more LGBT consumers will come out. It is also likely that more and more mainstream, heterosexual consumers will begin to have personal relationships with someone who identifies as LGBT, further increasing positive sentiments toward LGBT imagery in advertising.

Limitations

By using an online survey, it can be said that the sample was limited to those who have access to the internet. Furthermore, since the survey was distributed through e-mail and social media, primarily Facebook, the sample may have been limited to those who use social media sites and/or have an e-mail account. The online format did not hold respondents accountable, which allowed them to drop out of the survey at any time without completing it in its entirety. Also, due to the subject matter it is possible that respondents chose to stop taking the survey before completing it. This survey had an 81% completion rate. There was also the possibility for

careless responses caused by surrounding distractions or overall disinterest that could influence the accuracy of the data. The desired sample size of 400 respondents, 200 heterosexual and 200 LGBT, was not reached. The actual sample size was 230, which declined throughout the survey as respondents began to drop out. There were 159 heterosexual respondents and 27 LGBT respondents. This is well below the desired quotas for sample size. In addition, while the political landscape around the LGBT community is changing, it could be possible that respondents did not feel comfortable disclosing their sexuality even though the survey data is confidential. This could lead to inaccurate data. As previously stated, there was a lack of LGBT respondents in this data. While this did not affect the hypothesis being tested, it would have still been beneficial to have more input from them. It should also be noted that respondents' races were not widely dispersed.

Implications

This research can be used by marketers to segment their target geographic areas. If an area where they advertise is high in support for LGBT individuals, it is likely that those who identify as heterosexual in the area will have a personal relationship with someone who identifies as LGBT, thus increasing the likelihood that they will feel positively toward advertisements that depict LGBT couples, etc. These ads will also appeal to the LGBT community based on Social Identity Theory. This research shows marketers that there are ways to increase LGBT targeted advertising without alienating the mainstream market, which will allow them to penetrate the growing marketing segment and buying power of the LGBT segment.

Future Research Recommendations

If a study like this is conducted in the future, a larger sample size should be analyzed in order to get more accurate results and also having more time allocated for data collection. More LGBT respondents should be targeted to ensure they are properly represented in the data. The researcher should also use various images across different groups to eliminate the chance that one image just did not resonate well with respondents for some reason. It could also be helpful to conduct nation-wide research to measure attitudes across the country. New attitude scales should be created or implemented, as many variables from the currently used scales were not efficient at showing a statistical significance.

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