



COMMUNICATION & ADVERTISING: HOW CAN BRANDS SPEAK AUTHENTICALLY ABOUT DIVERSITY?



Marcio Aguiar,

Ipsos UU

The turning point regarding diversity came in 2020 after the tragic assassination of George Floyd in the US which sparked protests around the world.

Because the difference only exists through a perspective, that is, in order to a person to be person is white, he needs to be white versus another color, if the white person does not consider himself part of the equation, it is established that there is ME and OTHERS.

Before thinking about how diversity is used in inclusion campaigns, it is important to realise that diversity has been, and is still, used for specific interests. What has changed is that this interest now has a more positive focus. Migration policies, birth control, racial apartheid, religious segregation and persecution of sexual minorities have always been ways of executing power centered on diversity – or difference. Therefore, it is wrong to say that talking about diversity is something new. On the contrary, the world has always been obsessed with talking about differences and using them according to their needs. Knowing that this is the way the world operates today, we recognise that exclusion exists and therefore need to work hard on the opposite process.

What changes for 2022 is that, after many years of construction, a dialogue has been established in which people different from what the market was used to now sit at the decision-making table. This does not only refer to the increased participation of women, black people and LGBTI+ individuals in decision-making positions in large corporations, but the influence exerted by

SCENARIO

the public and consumers that often makes executives and executives around the world compelled to return to their tables and rethink strategies, as well as a contingency plan to remedy errors. People are increasingly aware of the attitudes of companies they spend their money on.

As we observed in 2020, and at other times in history, the street played an important role in building an alliance for equalising race relations in the US. It is to be expected that, with the return to the public space, the street will once again be the stage for social demands, leading to conversations that start in theory, then move into the physical world, where consumption also takes place.

EMPATHY AND WORKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

For marketers, the main task is to listen and respond to the needs, desires and wishes of the public. It is therefore important to put yourself in people's shoes.

Inclusion starts with a truly diverse and inclusive environment and marketing design team. Successful innovations must reflect the true philosophies and ethos of an organisation while seeking to connect with the needs of those who consume it. When we see brand marketing and product design going wrong, the cause may be related to the lack of a truly diverse team that can bring different points of view.

When designing for a specific community or audience, it is essential to have designers and consultants who are members of these communities and who can bring first-person experience to the process. Using someone as a consultant, as an afterthought, is no longer enough. They have to be part of the process.

UBISOFT: BEWARE OF PROMISES

One of the first loading screens of games from the franchise "Assassin's Creed", from producer Ubisoft, shows the following message:

Inspirada em eventos e personagens históricos, esta obra de ficção foi desenhada, desenvolvida e produzida por uma equipe multicultural de várias crenças, orientações sexuais e identidades de gênero.

This type of statement generates an expectation that the gaming experience offered and the entire narrative are firmly aligned with entertainment that respects plurality.

The problem is when reality does not live up to what was indicated. After the game's release and a widely publicised public dispute over allegations of sexual harassment within the company, Bloomberg journalist Jason Schreier informed the public that the main character, Cassandra, is shared with her brother, Alexios, following a direct demand from the marketing executive who led the team at the time, Serge Hascoët.

Some team members even stated that the main justification given by the marketing team for this is that "women don't sell", leaving a large part of the population out of the dialogue.

“THE DEVELOPERS OF ‘ASSASSIN’S CREED ODYSSEY’ WANTED KASSANDRA TO BE THE ONLY PLAYABLE PROTAGONIST, BUT UBISOFT’S MARKETING TEAM AND CREATIVE LEADER SERGE HASCOËT DIDN’T ALLOW IT: WOMEN DON’T SELL, THEY SAID.”

SCENARIO

Despite this, it is possible to see throughout most of the game that there was an effort to make the experience of the player as broad as possible in terms of sexuality. Regardless of the chosen character (Kassandra or Alexios) it is possible to relate to people of any gender. Then came the DLC (Downloadable Content) with an expansion to continue the game after the end of the main story).



Erwin Vogelaar @ErwinVogelaar · Jan 15, 2019 

Odyssey is the first Assassin's Creed in which you can play the entire story as female character. And you get the freedom to play her as lesbian. Now in the newest DLC, Ubisoft is forcing the player into a straight romance and having a baby... Spoilers: reddit.com/r/assassinscre...



 (｡◕‿◕｡) ☰ ☱ ☲ ☳ ☴ ☵ ☶ ☷
@SpongeMariin

I though I bought assassins creed adyssey not the handmaid's tale

4:16 PM · Jan 15, 2019 

 107  2  Share this Tweet

After the first episode of misogyny that generated several questions about the promise of a story really thought by different people, the continuation of the game required that for players to complete the main mission, they had to have a relationship with someone of the opposite gender and have a son,

regardless of whether, during all their playing hours, they had chosen same-sex relationships. After the accusations, the main executives involved in the two cases resigned from their positions and left the company.

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE: DIVERSITY IN DIVERSITY



14 years ago, a TV show called RuPaul's Drag Race was born, a competition between drag queens to find the next US Drag Superstar. The show has won over audiences around the world as well as several television awards, establishing itself as one of the most successful reality shows.

For those who are not familiar with it, the beginning of each episode sees RuPaul enter the room and brief the competitors on the week's challenges, then kicking off the events announcing "Gentlemen, start your engines, and may the best woman win"

People may gather from the premise of the show that it is a display of inclusion and diversity; led by a gay black man that has been openly celebrating the LGBTI+ community for more than a decade. However, the work is never complete when dealing with cultural movements.

SCENARIO

Now it's twelfth edition, some important adaptations are still being made, including the language used; changing "Gentlemen" to "Racers", for a more inclusive call to action.

This type of movement brought to attention talents such as Gottmik (Kade Gottlieb), one of the participants in the 2021 series. Kade is a transgender man who has encountered prejudices from the community in general and obstacles in his career as a drag queen. He explains that some people think that a trans man would have advantages in impersonating a woman in a drag queen competition. Gottmik not only succeeded in having one of the most engaging narratives of the season but was also one of the show's four finalists (sorry for the spoiler).

What can a brand learn from RuPaul's Drag Race?

That there is no "map" for diversity and inclusion because the path is formed along the journey. When a brand sets out to work with diversity in an authentic way, it must be willing to leave behind old arguments, be open to the possibility of having to apologise, and recognise that everything can change quickly.

TOKENISM

A brand on the living process of diversity may take shortcuts along the way. One of them is "fake fairness": the act of "tokenising" people to appear more diverse. For example, if when reviewing an advertising piece, you notice that everyone in an advertisement is white, you notice a problem in the process the realization has come too late. But what usually happens is that then a race to include at least one black person there in the frame.

It's not about appearing diverse and rushing in at the last minute to make adjustments that sell a shallow image of inclusivity. Instead, it is about bringing and representing more diverse perspectives; from our teams, our audience, and our communities – at the beginning and at every stage of the process.

If done as a symbolic, superficial gesture, it can do more harm than good.

To authentically demonstrate diversity and inclusion, start by being less focused on the messages, visuals and context used in your brand communication. Sharpening your focus to understand which aspects of diversity are most important to your audience and then actively represent, recruit and invite those views. Putting a line in the briefing for an agency to “include diversity in the campaign” is not the best solution, as the public is aware not only of the campaign and what the brand communicates, but also what is behind the brand.

FATIGUE

Another issue is fatigue. Looking at a never-ending process full of pitfalls and with new actors emerging all the time seems tiring. It may have seemed that diversity was the promise of a process with a beginning, a middle, and an end. But, it is not that simple. Some very important arguments remind us why we shouldn't lose sight of diversity:

- Inclusion is necessary for brands to sustain themselves in the long term. It is only through the tension between the old and the new that new solutions and ideas emerge.
- The job market is re-organising so that more people are part of the conversation. This will continue as social movements demanding access to education and corporate inclusion programs bring more professionals from different backgrounds into the workforce.
- If you don't do it, someone else will. In a competitive market someone, either directly or indirectly, will prioritise diversity in their narrative and their brand may be left behind. It's worth noting that small brands that are often born with diversity in their DNA.

SCENARIO

- Position yourself or be positioned. Dialogue between brands and consumers is a demand from the public itself and this interlocutor will serve as judge and jury to decide whether the brand respects diversity or not, or is aligned with its own premise.

POINT OF VIEW

When brands keep diversity and inclusion at the heart of their product development, their message should be less about the brand and the product and more about how the product empowers people or changes their lives for the better. Ubisoft did not do this. In addition to frustrating its audience by delivering a completely different experience from the rest of the game, it also broke a promise that is reiterated every time players start a company game, wasting the opportunity to represent people who are normally marginalised.

A product or service that really values inclusion must be able to start a conversation with one person while not excluding various communities. Kat Holmes, Google's UX director, in her book "Mismatch: How Inclusion Shapes Design", mentions that "designing for inclusion starts with recognising exclusion".

This has to be the beginning. Recognising the factors that create exclusion and divisions between different communities is the first step towards creating a truly inclusive product or brand identity.