Construing LGBT Responses To Mainstream LGBT Advertisements During Pride Month: An Application Of Perceived Brand Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Pride month comes as a celebratory period where the LGBT community celebrates self-expression. This also comes as a period where brands all over the world color their logos in rainbow colors to show their support for the LGBT community. However, there is much to doubt about brands' intentions as their rainbow-colored logos resort back silently as the pride month passes. This might appear immoral, unethical, and inauthentic to many LGBT community members. This research attempts to unearth the factors that lead to LGBT brand authenticity. Antecedents were subjected to multiple regression to further identify the antecedents most predictive of LGBT brand authenticity.

KEYWORDS: Advertisement, LGBTQ, LGBT Brand Authenticity

Introduction

According to Witeck Communications, there are currently $830 billion LGBT adults worldwide. LGBT+ Pride Month is significant for brands, perhaps even a deal-breaker. India has been sluggish in embracing rainbow marketing compared to the international scene. The decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 has led to a significant increase in the number of community members coming out (Number 13, 2021).

LGBTQ representation in advertisements

Many consumers complain that such representation can feel unauthentic, and some advocates contend that marketers are squandering opportunities to connect with the LGBT audience by consistently including people who are homosexual or transgender in their marketing campaigns. According to previous study with

practitioners, indirect or implicit gay marketing, also called as gay window advertising, has already been employed in advertising (Bronski, 1984; Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Do brands care about the LGBTQ?

Today, a lot of Western companies, especially those in the US, employ homosexual symbolism in their advertising, such as ads with lesbian or gay endorsers (such same-sex couples) or other gay or lesbian symbolism, like a pink triangle or a multi-coloured flag (Angelini and Bradley, 2010).

Burger King, for example, garnered extremely positive comments on social media for its 2014 pride campaign, that showcased the "Proud Whopper" covered in a rainbow of colours and featuring the motto "We are all alike inside."

"Good-Washing" in Advertising

Many consumers are typically ignorant of the hidden agendas many businesses have, even while some consumers support brands and their use of "good-washing" in their marketing strategies.

"Some cautioned that the degree to which brands are pursuing purposeful marketing — and the reasons they`re doing so — is symptomatic of a particularly misguided and media-hungry moment for the business," while consumers are being duped by rainbows to support the LGBTQ+ community or green logos to support the environment (Watson,2019).

Review of Literature

Perception of pride collections

Businesses have been showing their support again for LGBTQ community more frequently in recent years. LI invented the phrase "rainbow washing" to characterize a brand's use of LGBTQ symbols in marketing without truly promoting the community or the rights of its members. During Pride Month, which commemorates the Stonewall Riots in 1969 in New York City, which inspired protest and activity in favor of homosexual rights, rainbow washing is frequently seen (Library of Congress, 2019).

The LGBTQ community is encouraged internationally, especially by groups and organisations like InterPride, which holds World Pride celebrations every other year in cities all over the world (GayPrideCalendar.com, n.d.). There is a discernible surge in branded goods and marketing that supports the social problem concurrent with the celebration. Crew, H&M, Nike, Adidas, Disney, Target, Apple, Levi's, and several more, promoted products in rainbow-colored packaging as a part of "Pride collections," which are collections of goods created expressly for Pride Month.

Despite their widespread use, few studies have looked examined Pride collection advertising. Given the skepticism and rainbow washing witnessed in Pride collection ads, as well as the concurrently expanding support for the LGBTQ community in many nations (Flores & Park, 2018), it is crucial to look at the methods by which companies can demonstrate their true support of a social problem.

Research Methodology

Since the existing literature is limited to perceived brand authenticity and lacks clarity on what comprises brand authenticity for LGBT consumers, an attempt to identify and confirm the factors comprising brand authenticity for LGBT was made. Three approaches were followed

Approach I: Strangely, most of the research that has been done in the field of perceived brand authenticity has been carried out in general contexts, and the LGBT target market, which accounts for "LGBT Money" worth $3.9 trillion worldwide and US$132 billion in India, has been largely ignored (marketingmag.com, 2017).

It is of the utmost importance to address the issue of perceived brand authenticity from the perspective of the LGBT market. LGBT customers differ from conventional consumers in a number of ways. Previous study suggests, on the other hand, that not only do members of the LGBT community have different gender orientations than regular individuals, but that each individual within the LGBT community should be viewed as a separate target market. Existing literature was reviewed in order to understand the factor structure of this phenomenon and also to extend the concept further to "brand Authenticity" for LGBT members. This was done despite the fact that there is a lack of research on the topic of brand authenticity in the context of LGBT members.

Approach II: Using the snowball sampling method, 15 volunteers who represented a variety of gender orientations across the LGBTQ spectrum were personally contacted and asked to participate in approach II. Prior to their participation, the volunteers were given an explanation of the purpose of the study and were given assurances that their identities would be kept anonymous.

Approach III: In the third strategy, items for the questionnaire were generated using several antecedents that were chosen at random. In order to evaluate the face validity of the questionnaire, which contained a total of 30 items, it was given to a panel of twelve academic experts. The completed questionnaire included a total of 25 questions. In the end, a total of two hundred LGBT young adults from the Lovely Professional University in Punjab were asked to fill out the questionnaire. After gaining an understanding of the component structure through the application of EFA and determining the internal consistency of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was distributed to a new sample consisting of 200 LGBT members from three educational institutions located in the state of Punjab.

Objectives

1. To explore and investigate the antecedents of 'LGBT Brand Authenticity'

2. To identify the factors (explored in EFA) most predictive of brand authenticity for LGBT consumers

Discussion On Results and Findings

Objective 1: To explore and investigate the antecedents of 'LGBT Brand Authenticity'

The purpose of this study was to identify and understand the factors that contribute to "Pink Brand Authenticity," hence an initial step was to conduct an exploratory factor analysis. The results showed the presence of five dimensions of pink brand authenticity. A reliability test (Cronbach Alpha) was performed to show that the utilized model was consistent within itself. The tabulated results of the tests are as follows in Table 1:

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Scores

Sr No	Dimensions	Cronbach Alpha
1	Continuity	.810
2	Integrity	.804
3	Credibility	.801
4	Symbolism	.843
5	Responsibility	.837

Data appropriateness for structure detection was evaluated using KMO and Bartlett's Test. Each dimension has a -Cronbach alpha value greater than 0.7, showing that it is a reliable one and that items associated with it can be used to measure the dimensions/constructs. The outcomes are summarised in the table below. 2

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.861
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7249.472
	Df	199
	Sig.	.000

Source: Primary Study

Source: Primary study

In order to conduct an accurate factor analysis, the sample sufficiency of the KMO measurements should be somewhat close to 0.5. (i.e., whether or not the response of the sample is adequate). A KMO score of 0.861 gave significant support for the notion that it was fair to condense a high number of variables into a smaller number of components. Because the significance value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was 0.000, the correlations in the data set were also eligible for EFA. This is because of how sphericity was tested.

Factor Extraction and Total Variance Explained

The eigenvalues and the percentage of the total variance that can be assigned to each of the components are tabulated and displayed in Table 3 of the output provided by SPSS. In addition to that, the eigenvalue was presented in the table in the form of a percentage of the overall amount of variance. In this instance, the first component was responsible for 21.18% of the total variation, followed by factors 2-4, which were responsible for 11.367, 7.909%, and factors 4-5, which were responsible for 14.459% of the total variation. The exploratory factor analysis resulted in 25 assertions, which were clustered into 5 factors that accounted for approximately 68.108% of the variation. Table 3 demonstrates how these factors were formed.

Table 3: Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	6.000	23.002	23.002	5.547	21.187	21.187	4.423
2	4.220	15.878	38.880	3.865	14.459	35.646	3.789
3	3.437	13.747	52.627	3.047	11.187	47.833	4.017
4	3.083	12.332	64.959	3.092	11.367	60.200	4.221
5	2.283	9.130	74.089	1.977	7.908	68.108	3.279
Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.							
a. When factors are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.							

Source: Primary study

Brand integrity reflects the way consumers perceive and interpret a brand as compared to the claims and ideals it professes to uphold. A brand has integrity if it stands for the rights and equal representation of LGBT community members. Integrity also has traits in common with virtue (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) and a lack of commercial interest (Holt, 2002) where the brand celebrates LGBT inclusivity.

Objective 2: To identify the factors (explored in EFA) most predictive of brand authenticity for LGBT consumers

R value of 0.829 indicated a good level of prediction. This is an overall measure of the strength of association and does not reflect the extent to which any particular independent variable is associated with the dependent variable. Model summary statistics also showed the value of R square (coefficient of determination) as .771 which indicates independent variables are capable of explaining/predicting 77.2% of variance in dependent variable (LGBT Brand Authenticity). The adjusted R-squared is a modified version of R-squared that is adjusted for the number of predictors in the model (Five in this case). Adjusted R square value of .771 (almost same to R Square) again signals toward the predictive power of independent variables.

The F-ratio in the ANOVA table tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The table shows that the independent variables (statistically) significantly predict the dependent variable, $F_{(5, 729)} = 1066.015$, $p < .0005$ (i.e., the regression model is a good fit of the data).

LGBT Brand Authenticity = .418 +.651* Continuity + .135* Symbolism + .203* Responsibility + .040* Credibility +.021* Integrity

In order to find out the most predictive antecedents of LGBT Brand authenticity, regression model was applied by taking "Factor 1 to Factor 5" as independent variables & "LGBT Brand Authenticity" as the dependent variable.

The regression model produced:

R Square= 0.771

F= 1066.015

P< .0005

Value of all the factors (Independent variable) & (Dependent Variable) was 0.000 which indicates all the factors contributes to the model and out of these factors. As visible from the multiple regression equation, a unit change in 'continuity' leads to .651 units change in LGBT Brand authenticity. This factor was found to be the most significant predictor of LGBT Brand authenticity. A unit change in 'responsibility' was found to bring a change of .203 units in LGBT Brand authenticity and was the second-best predictor of LGBT Brand authenticity. A unit change in 'Symbolism', 'credibility' and 'integrity' brought in a change of .137, .041 and .022 units respectively in the LGBT Brand authenticity

The p-value checks the null hypothesis for independent variables, that the "coefficient is equal to zero" (no effect). A small p-value (< 0.05) implies that the null hypothesis shall be rejected. In other words, an independent variable with a low p-value can be a significant contribution to the model, because variations in the value of the independent variables are correlated with variability of dependent variable. Contrastingly, if the p-value is larger, it reflects that any variation in the independent variable doesn't reflect a change dependent variable.

As visible from the regression analysis, all five independent variables were found to be statistically significant predictors of LGBT Brand authenticity

Conclusion

When a brand loses credibility, LGBT customers distrust it. Customers will trust, loyalty, and eventually spend their money on high-integrity brands if they can see that the brand supports its principles, operates in accordance with those values, and fulfils obligations to all consumer groups, including LGBT people. Brand symbolism encourages consumers to be themselves and celebrates their gender identities. Schau and Russell (2005) state that brand symbolic value "shapes, develops, and conveys customer self-concept." Self-expression must be concrete because self is abstract.

According to the report, consumers were willing to call out companies who capitalized on pride month by connecting with the LGBT community by appointment. LGBT consumers trust brands that care for and include customers. Responsibility can be defined as a brand's ability to make a meaningful difference on the LGBT consumer niche.

According to the results of the multiple regression equation, a change of one unit in the variable 'continuity' results in a change of .651 units in the LGBT Brand's authenticity. It was found that this particular factor was the most significant predictor of the authenticity of LGBT Brands. It was discovered that a change of one unit in the concept of 'responsibility' brought about a change of .203 units in LGBT Brand authenticity and that this concept was the second-best predictor of LGBT Brand authenticity. A change of one unit in each of the dimensions of "Symbolism," "Credibility," and "Integrity" resulted in a change of .137, .041, and .022 units, respectively, in the LGBT Brand authenticity.

Managerial Implications

Based on the findings of this research it can be proposed that:

Dimension of 'Pink brand Authenticity'	Action
Integrity	Be true to LGBT consumers
Symbolism	Help LGBT consumers embrace their uniqueness and in being true to themselves
Continuity	Be faithful to the LGBT cause throughout the year and not just during Pride month
Credibility	Do not only care about quality, care for LGBT consumers
Responsibility	Act financially, socially to support LGBT community

- Consistent and continuous engagement outside of Pride month require a business to incorporate LGBTQ+ advocacy with other social identity-based advocacy efforts (such as race, gender, and ability).

- Instead of making one-time donations or forming relationships solely during Pride month, brands should commit to supporting LGBTQ+ communities and causes all year round.

- All 365 days of the year, a corporation should do everything it can to advance the rights of LGBTQ+ people, whether that`s through boycotting homophobic and transphobic organizations or by lobbying in support of inclusive legislation.

Limitations

Current study was pursued only on millennials from select universities in the state of Punjab. Other studies can be carried out of generation Z and other LGBT members across India. Further mediating and moderating variables have not been studied in this study and could be explored in future research endeavors.

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