

BEYOND THE RAINBOW  
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AN INVESTIGATION INTO LGBTQ+ MARKETING AND ITS FUTURE

WPP UNITE  
WPP's LGBTQ+ Community



# WHO WE ARE

**We are WPP Unite:** the LGBTQ+ community of the creative transformation company WPP. We're a collection of LGBTQ+ thinkers, doers and creators, united across the many different agencies

and businesses of WPP's global network to ensure diversity of thinking and creativity thrives within our workplaces, and within the work we create for our clients.

**Study partners:** Human Rights Campaign Foundation, UK Black Pride, DIVA magazine, myGwork



UK BLACK PRIDE

DIVA



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# INTRODUCTION

In 1981, vodka brand Absolut made the bold decision to place an advert in *The Advocate*, an LGBTQ+ magazine published in the United States. Showing support for LGBTQ+ people then was a move that could hardly be described as 'brand-safe', particularly in an era where existing prejudices were starting to include the social stigma of HIV and Aids infections.

Today, the situation is very different. Every June, as Pride month gets underway, there is a slew of related campaigns from brands seeking to engage with LGBTQ+ people and our allies. However, such progressive steps from marketers are sometimes made amid concerns about possible backlash from the intended audience, which could include accusations of 'rainbow-washing' or 'virtue-signalling'.

Fears about negative reactions may hold back brands from beginning their journeys to getting things right, which in turn could mean that a more informed and thoughtful era of LGBTQ+ marketing takes longer to arrive. Such an era would usher in a meaningful acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ audiences, where brands accept that to keep up with developing attitudes to sexuality and gender identity, they need to make the effort to understand LGBTQ+ communities, cultures and lifestyles – and not just for Pride month campaigns.

In *Beyond The Rainbow*, WPP Unite explores the current state of LGBTQ+ marketing and attempts to answer the question of how its future may develop.





## OUR OBJECTIVE

We have created *Beyond The Rainbow* with the aim of equipping our people, clients and industry with insights which will enable them to connect and communicate with LGBTQ+ people on a meaningful level. Our hope is to help develop a more inclusive future for LGBTQ+ marketing.

Many studies have shown that people are increasingly likely to openly identify as LGBTQ+. Over time, fewer people are defining themselves as 'straight' or 'cisgender',<sup>1</sup> while younger generations are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+. In the UK, US and Canada, our survey found that **22%** of 18–24s identify as lesbian,

gay, bisexual, or something else other than straight.<sup>2</sup> That's more than double the population average of **9%**. Interestingly, when asked if they're explicitly heterosexual, less than half of young people agreed.<sup>3</sup> In a generation's time, LGBTQ+ audiences could represent a significantly higher proportion of the general population. We are no longer a niche minority.

With these shifts in demographics, it is critical that marketers of any variety have a thorough understanding of their audiences. This report is designed to raise the collective understanding of LGBTQ+ identities and how they engage with brands and media.

## A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

**Language around LGBTQ+ identities is complex and ever-evolving.**

We have consulted our partners and expert resources to make sure we use inclusive language throughout this report. In addition, we recognise that not everyone will be familiar with all the words or phrases used, so there is a glossary of key terms at the end.

Throughout this report we use the catch-all terms 'LGBTQ+' and 'queer'. In doing so, we are referring to everyone who doesn't exclusively

identify as both heterosexual and cisgender. We had extensive discussions about the use of the word 'queer' while creating this report and recognise that it has long been used as a slur against LGBTQ+ people. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort in our communities to reclaim 'queer' to refer to us in a celebratory way and, in this report produced by a team of queer people, the word should only be interpreted as such.

## A NOTE ON INTERSECTIONALITY

**There is no one way to be queer.**

Queerness spans gender, race, income level, those who live with a disability, family arrangements, religion, age and other factors. The variety of identities and lived experiences is vast and critical to individual expression.

This is a particular challenge for marketers. Our industry 'groups'

people because marketing fundamentals are based on the power of collective reach. With any audience study, it's important to have an umbrella label to help overall comprehension. In this report, we will look at the LGBTQ+ audience at large. However, it's important to recognise that we're not talking about a homogenous group.

<sup>1</sup> Gallup poll, US, 2012–2021; ONS annual population survey, UK, 2014–2020

<sup>2</sup> Choreograph Audience Origin study, UK, US, Canada, 2022

<sup>3</sup> IPSOS, LGBT+ Pride 2021 Global Survey



# 3,500 RESPONSES FROM LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ACROSS THE US, UK AND CANADA

## METHODOLOGY

*Beyond The Rainbow* is the result of a mixed-method survey. WPP Unite partnered with Choreograph, WPP's global data company, on research design and recruitment.

To boost the LGBTQ+ sample, and to ensure the intersectionality of the community was captured, the team also partnered with UK Black Pride, *DIVA* magazine, the HRC and myGwork, who shared the survey with their audiences. The aim of this approach was to avoid

skewing the results by being influenced too heavily by a larger sample size of white, gay, cisgender men – a recurring problem that WPP Unite has identified with previous surveys of LGBTQ+ people. These partnerships ensured we had robust sample sizes of groups underrepresented in existing research.

Through this approach, we spoke to 3,500 LGBTQ+ people across the US, UK and Canada. To understand perceptions among a broader audience, we also spoke to a comparative sample of 4,000 non-LGBTQ+ people.

# WHAT WE LEARNED

The following pages focus on the highlights from our survey results, with expert commentary from across the industry. The report is in three sections.

## 01. IDENTITY

This section is designed to help readers understand how people see themselves and how, according to our sample, that plays out in the world around them.

- **The future is fluid:** 74% of LGBTQ+ people and 61% of non-LGBTQ+ people think that sexuality will become more fluid in the future
- **That fluidity is reflected in young people's identities:** 18–24s are 2.5 times more likely to identify as something other than 'heterosexual' and 4.2 times more likely to identify as something other than 'cisgender' compared with the average adult
- **More than half of LGBTQ+ people are still not completely out at work:** Only 40% are completely open about their sexuality with colleagues, while 50% are open about their gender identity
- **There's an income gap when it comes to being out at work:** Those on the highest incomes were 37% more likely to be completely open at work than those on the lowest incomes



# THE FUTURE IS FLUID



# 02. MEDIA

As a space for LGBTQ+ audiences to explore their identities – and for non-LGBTQ+ people to learn more – the media, in all its forms, has been vital and has also increased our visibility. This section looks at its role today and how it might evolve in the future, according to our sample.

- **Queer media is not just for queer audiences:** Almost all (9 out of 10) LGBTQ+ people seek out specific queer media; interestingly, 60% of non-LGBTQ+ people also seek it out
- **Among young people, queer media has become truly mainstream:** 93% of LGBTQ+ 18–24s and 85% of non-LGBTQ+ 18–24s actively seek out queer media, proving its universal appeal
- **Within the queer media landscape, every touchpoint plays a unique role:** As is reflective of the broader media landscape, people are most likely to seek out queer content in TV, film and social media. Yet, digging into examples of queer content, it is clear that every touchpoint plays an important role and offers interesting opportunities when it comes to serving the needs of the diverse LGBTQ+ community
- **Despite widespread appeal, the quality and quantity of queer media needs improvement:** Just 38% of those who seek out queer content are satisfied with the way LGBTQ+ people are represented, and 2 out of 3 LGBTQ+ people want to see more queer representation
- **Improving representation means more diversity on and off screen:** 80% think LGBTQ+ representation would be improved by a more diverse range of LGBTQ+ characters/people, while 76% want to see more content created by LGBTQ+ people

# JUST 38% OF THOSE WHO CONSUME QUEER MEDIA ARE SATISFIED WITH THE WAY LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ARE REPRESENTED



# 03. COMMUNICATIONS

We explore the ways in which brands express themselves in the queer marketing space and investigate how they can navigate the future of LGBTQ+ marketing.

- **There's a recognition that LGBTQ+ representation in communications has improved: 74%** of queer people in our sample agree that LGBTQ+ representation in ads has improved in recent years
- **But the disproportionate focus on limited communications during Pride month is clear:** More people (both LGBTQ+ and non) recall seeing a brand change its logo to the rainbow flag colours during Pride month than remember seeing an ad simply featuring an LGBTQ+ character
- **The annual change of logo may be where communications start, but shouldn't end: 52%** of LGBTQ+ people tell us that they do like it when brands change their logos to the rainbow flag colours during Pride month. However, there's a clear desire for more year-round support, as **3 out of 4** LGBTQ+ people and **half** of non-LGBTQ+ people think brands should do more to support LGBTQ+ people outside Pride month
- **For brands, that means moving away from stereotypes, raising awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, and supporting LGBTQ+ charities.** That approach needs to run through long-term communications strategies

Read on to explore the full findings of our survey, including commentary from industry experts and takeaways for marketers.

# THE ANNUAL CHANGE OF LOGO CAN BE WHERE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS START, BUT SHOULDN'T END



# 01. IDENTITY

## YOUNG PEOPLE ARE BREAKING DOWN BINARIES AND BOUNDARIES

In the three markets we studied (the US, UK and Canada) there is a general recognition among both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ respondents that their societies are more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people than in the past (83% of LGBTQ+ people and 78% of non-LGBTQ+ agree).

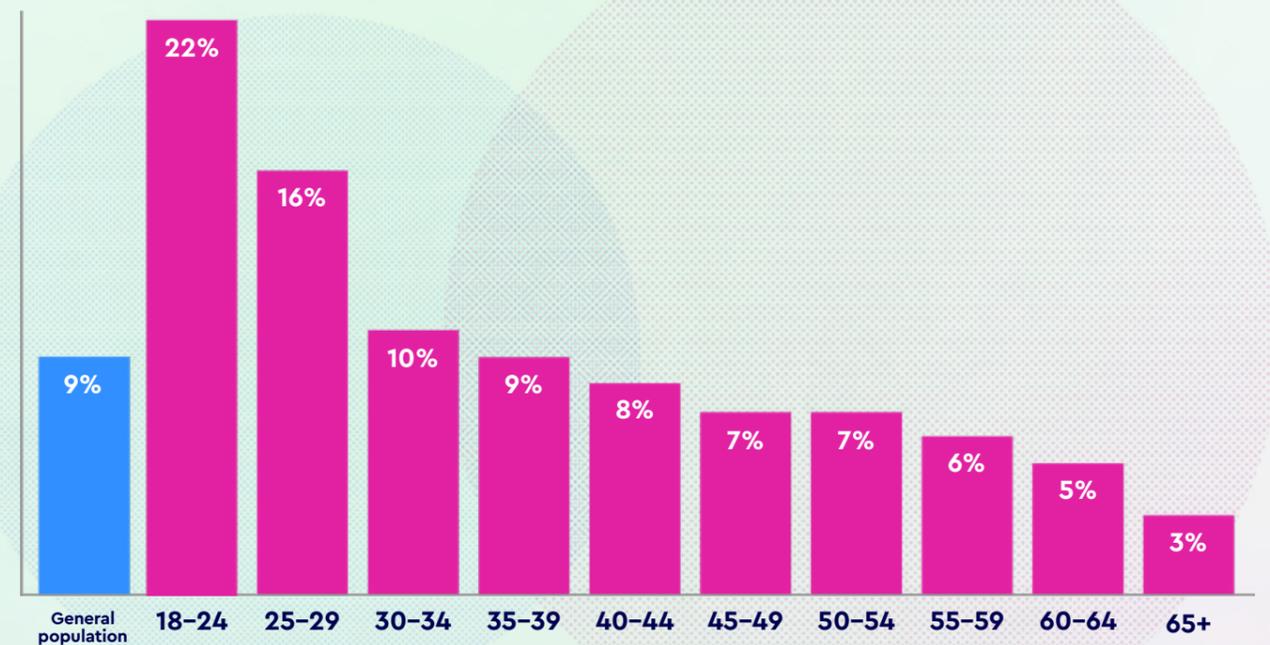
This shift towards inclusivity appears to be allowing people to define their sexuality more freely. Majorities in both groups agree that sexuality will become more fluid in the future (74% of LGBTQ+ people and 61% of non-LGBTQ+). That feeling is stronger among younger generations, with 18-34s being 27% more likely to agree than those aged over 35.

## 61% OF NON-LGBTQ+ PEOPLE THINK THAT SEXUALITY WILL BECOME MORE FLUID IN THE FUTURE

Younger generations' openness towards sexual fluidity is reflected in their own identities, as 22% of 18-24s identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>4</sup>

That figure falls in each subsequent age bracket. Overall, the figure is 2.5 times higher among 18-24s than the general population aged over 18.

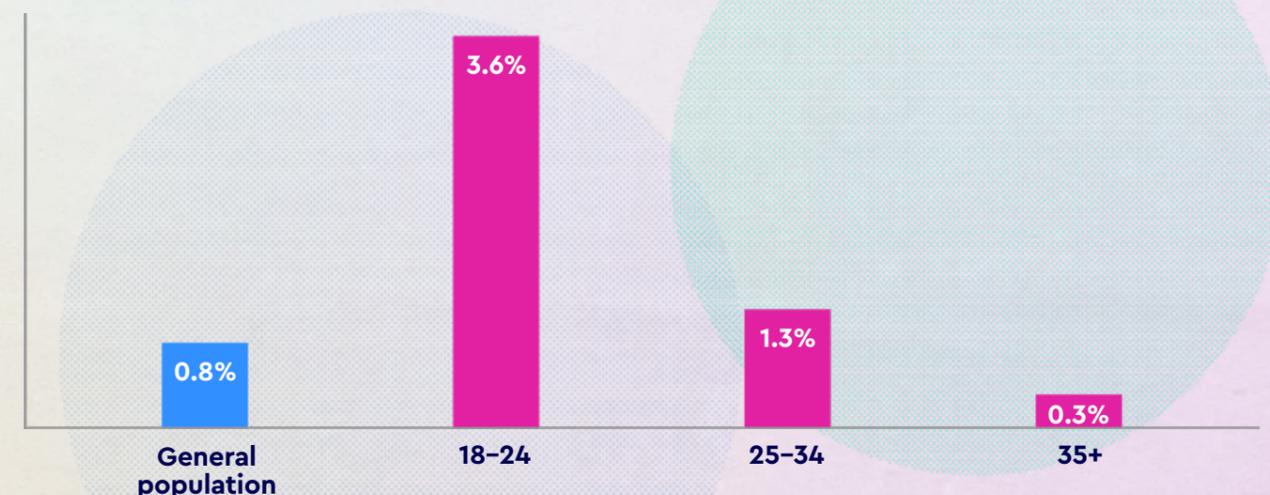
**Sexuality:** % who identify as something other than 'heterosexual' (includes 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual', 'pansexual', 'asexual', 'queer' or 'other')



When it comes to gender, there is a clear shift away from binary thinking among the younger generation. 57% of 18-34s agree that there are more than two genders and are 46% more likely than over-35s to feel that way. As we see with sexuality, this increased

acceptance and understanding of gender among younger people is reflected in their own identities: 3.6% of 18-24s identify as 'trans', 'non-binary', or something other than 'cisgender'. That is 4.2 times higher than observed across the general population aged over 18.<sup>4</sup>

**Gender:** % of people who identify as something other than 'cisgender' (includes 'transgender', 'non-binary' or 'other')

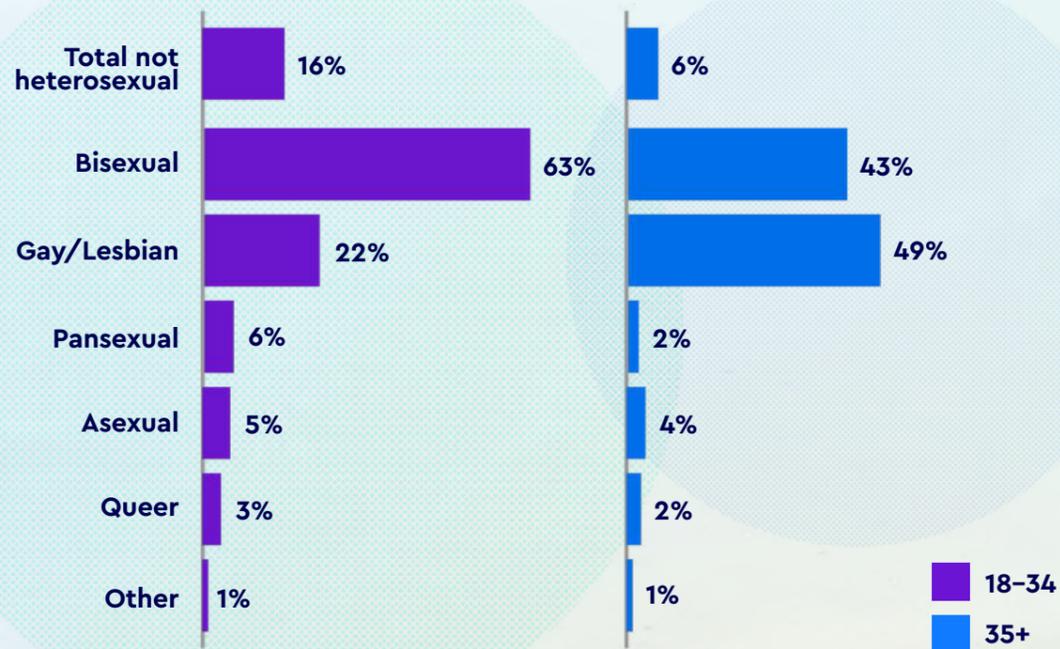


<sup>4</sup>Choreograph Audience Origin study, UK, US, Canada, 2022

So young people are less likely than their older counterparts to identify as 'heterosexual' – but breaking down sexuality further shows that young people who identify as something other than 'heterosexual' are also less likely to identify as 'gay' or 'lesbian'. In fact, just

**22%** of 18–34s identify as 'gay' or 'lesbian' compared with **49%** of those aged over 35. Instead, compared with over-35s, 18–34s are more likely to identify as 'bisexual' (**1.5 times more**), 'pansexual' (**2.8 times**), 'asexual' (**1.3 times**) or 'queer' (**2.2 times**).

Breakdown of sexuality by age group



## DESPITE CHANGE, THERE'S STILL WORK TO BE DONE

Although there's a growing feeling that we're shifting away from a binary view of sexuality and gender, this doesn't necessarily indicate that everyone will embrace that shift.

In fact, despite cultural and societal shifts, LGBTQ+ people still experience significant discrimination – transgender people in particular. As an example, in the US **more than 1 in 3** LGBTQ+ people faced

discrimination of some kind in 2020, including **more than 3 in 5** transgender people.<sup>5</sup> In the UK, reported hate crimes targeting sexual orientation were up by **42%**, while reported crimes against transgender people by were up by **56%** in the year to March 2022.<sup>6</sup>

While there is much to be celebrated, a consolidated effort is still required to improve equality.

<sup>5</sup> Center for American Progress, *The State of the LGBTQ Community*, 2020

<sup>6</sup> UK Home Office figures, year to March 2022

### DAVID ADAMSON (HE/HIM), DEPUTY HEAD OF STRATEGY, THE&PARTNERSHIP (LONDON, UK), FOUNDER OF WPP UNITE

"Looking at the data, it's clear that marketers need to proactively keep pace with audiences' changing attitudes to gender and sexuality. Start this journey internally. When the time comes to invest in refreshed segmentation and audience profiling, why not challenge your team to put more focus on understanding LGBTQ+ audiences within the make-up of your brand's broader demographics? Recognise that you're positioned to push for greater creative representation of LGBTQ+ people within your brand's comms. To do this with insight and

authenticity, the voices, ideas, and concerns of LGBTQ+ people during comms development must be heard (both from within your team and the teams of your partner agencies). But remember, signals of inclusion within comms are only as effective as the customer experience those comms are promising.

If your new brand advert includes trans characters, but a trans customer gets to your website and can't register for your products and services in a way that reflects their gender identity, then you've lost and frustrated them."

## 18-24s ARE 2.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ+ THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION



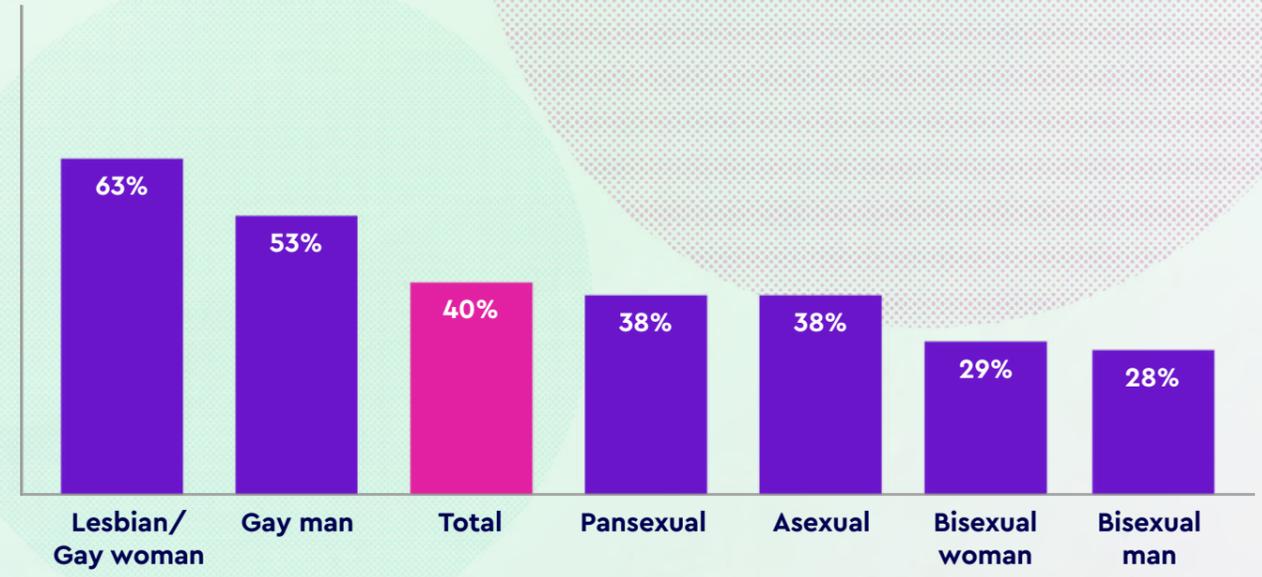
WPP's LGBTQ+ Community



# LESS THAN HALF OF LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ARE COMPLETELY 'OUT' AT WORK



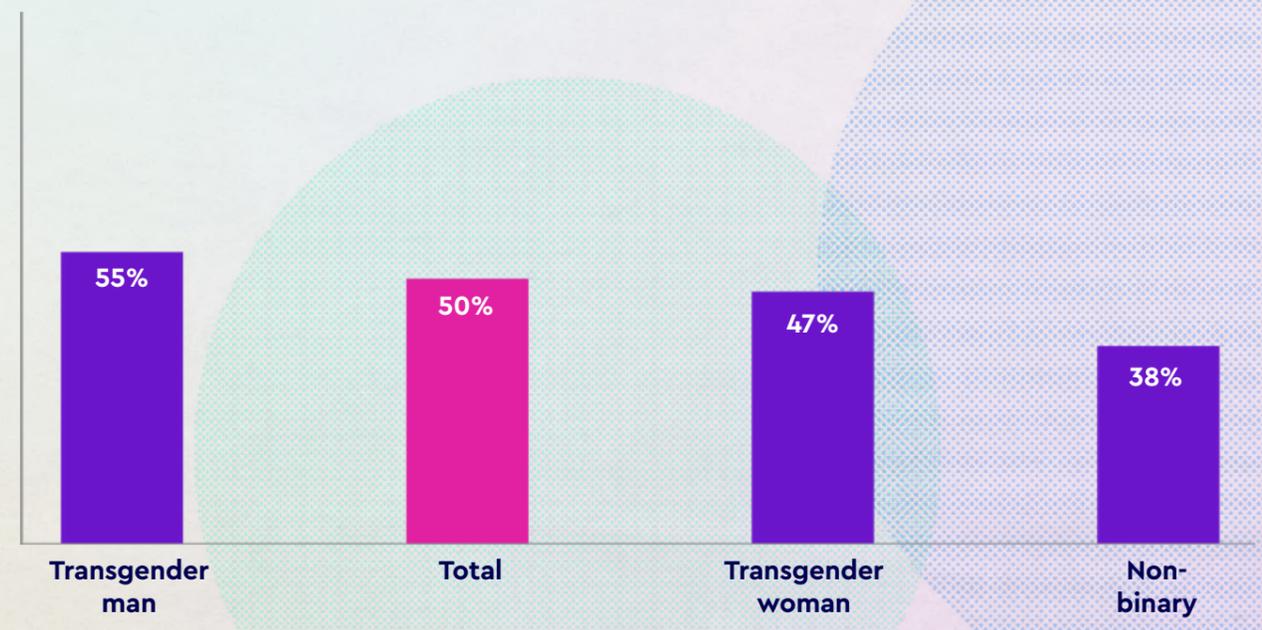
% completely open about their sexuality at work (excludes those who identify as 'heterosexual')



Among LGBTQ+ people, just **40%** are completely open about their sexuality and **50%** open about their gender identity at work.<sup>7</sup> Breaking that down further, there are clear differences across LGBTQ+ groups. Those who identify as 'gay' are much more likely to be open about

their sexuality at work compared with those who are 'bisexual', 'pansexual' or 'asexual'. When it comes to gender, transgender men and women are more likely to be open about their gender identity at work than non-binary respondents.

% completely open about their gender identity at work (excludes those who identify as 'cisgender')



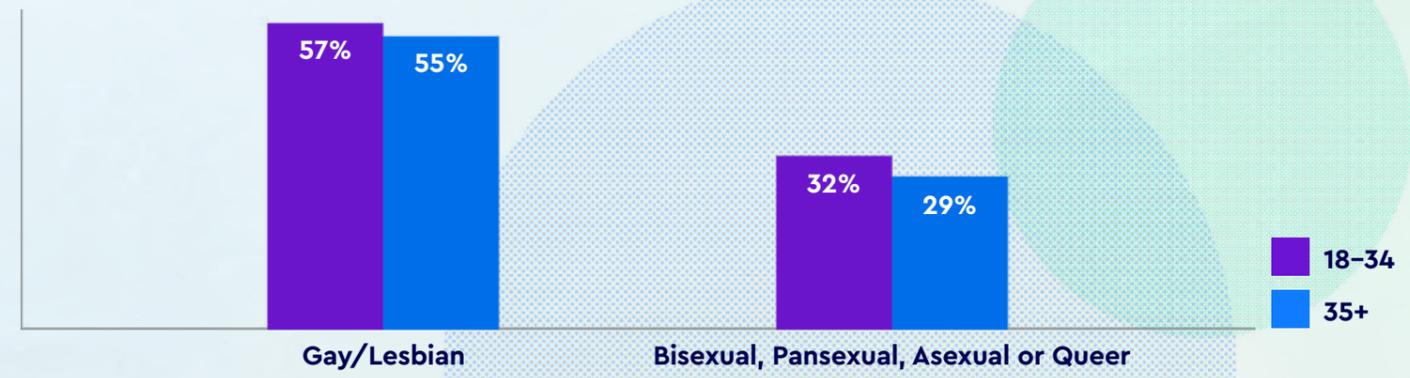
<sup>7</sup> Data about openness in the workplace is based on the working population only

It appears that those who fall into a 'binary' sexuality or gender identity group are more likely to be open about it in the workplace than those who don't. Given that young people are, as the previous section put it, 'breaking down binaries' around gender and sexuality, it might appear that age is a driving factor. However, among both younger (18-34s) and older (35+) groups, those who identify as

'gay' or 'lesbian' are more likely to be open at work than 'bisexual', 'pansexual', 'asexual' or 'queer' people.

Despite a recognition among most respondents that sexuality will become more fluid in future, those whose sexuality doesn't fit within the binary appear to face nuanced barriers to presenting as such in the workplace.

% completely open about their sexuality at work



# THOSE ON A LOWER INCOME ARE LESS OPEN ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY IN THE WORKPLACE

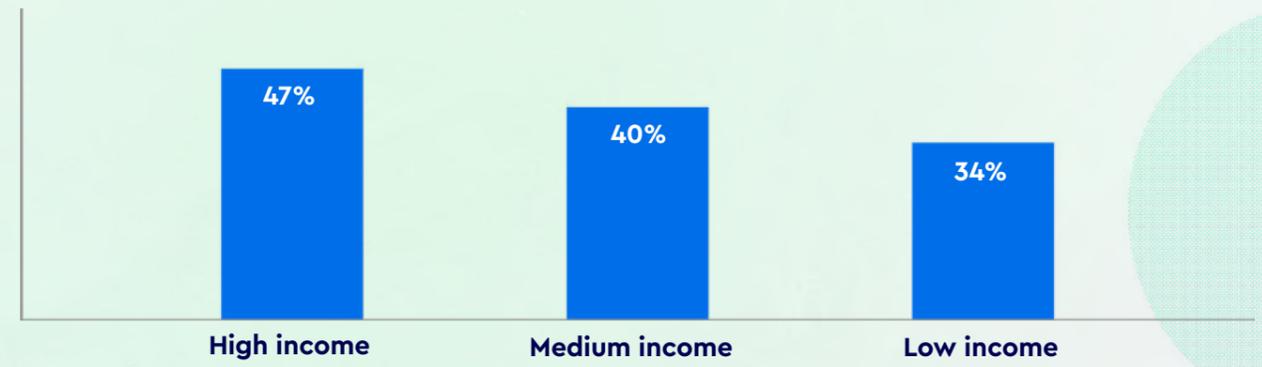
In addition to the differing levels of acceptance experienced by different LGBTQ+ identities, there is another factor which appears to affect people's openness in the workplace: income. Those on a high income are **37%** more likely to be completely

open at work than those on a low income.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that queer people with more economic stability are more comfortable with expressing their sexuality and gender identity openly in the workplace.

There could be many factors behind this, including types of job and levels of seniority. Conclusions cannot be

drawn through this study alone, but the relationship between income and openness warrants further research.

% completely open about their sexuality or gender identity at work by income level



## ADRIEN GAUBERT (HE/HIM), CO-FOUNDER & CMO, MYGWORK (UK)

"We at myGwork are not surprised by these findings. LGBTQ+ discrimination is still rife in the workplace. Our own recent survey indicated that the majority of LGBTQ+ graduates entering the workplace would return to the closet if their colleagues weren't allies or supportive of them being out at work, even though **83%** have been out at uni. That said, savvy Gen-Zers are now looking for clear signposts demonstrating how LGBTQ+-friendly an organisation is before they even consider joining it.

So organisations today need to go above and beyond performative measures to show that they are serious about creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where LGBTQ+ professionals can be authentic and out at work without fear of discrimination. Role models, visible acceptance through the use of pronouns in emails/name tags, and rainbow lanyards, alongside LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Groups, will go a long way to attracting and retaining LGBTQ+ professionals."

## SHOSHANA GOLDBERG (SHE/HER), DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

"What this means for businesses is that they will need to ensure their workplaces and policies are LGBTQ+-affirming, as the workforce is going to get much queerer in future years, while the ally population grows as well. This report shows several of the ways that businesses can go about indicating their support

for the LGBTQ+ community and pro-equality causes. Pride flags and rainbow logos during June are no longer sufficient - instead, LGBTQ+ people are increasingly seeking out action from brands, be it raising awareness of legislation, or donating to LGBTQ+ charities."

<sup>8</sup> Low income <=50% average national household income (HHI), high income >= 250% average national HHI

# 02. MEDIA

## TECHNOLOGY FACILITATES LGBTQ+ EXPLORATION AND EXPRESSION

At the risk of stating the obvious, the internet has transformed the entire media landscape – and for LGBTQ+ audiences, it's been truly revolutionary. Among other aspects, the internet has created more spaces to connect with other LGBTQ+ people, share queer content and encourage LGBTQ+ creators.

Of course, for LGBTQ+ people the digital revolution hasn't come without its challenges, but it has certainly facilitated identity exploration in a way that simply wasn't possible 30 years ago.

In fact, nearly all (96%) of LGBTQ+ students aged 11–19 say the internet has helped them to understand more about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.<sup>9</sup>

## QUEER MEDIA ISN'T JUST FOR LGBTQ+ AUDIENCES

It is unsurprising that almost all (9 out of 10) LGBTQ+ people seek out queer media.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, 60% of non-LGBTQ+ people also seek

it out, showing both the universal appeal of queer media and its role in the everyday life of allies.

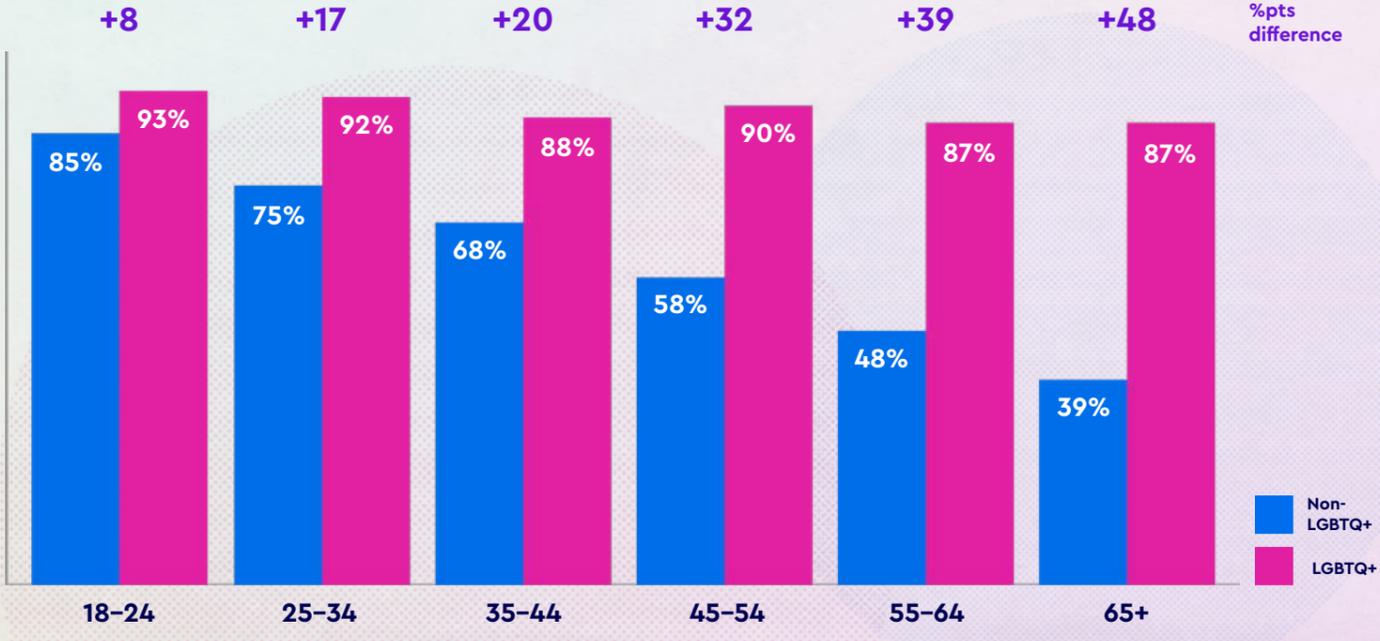
## 60% OF NON-LGBTQ+ PEOPLE SEEK OUT QUEER CONTENT

Breaking it down by age, there is little difference across LGBTQ+ people. In fact, regardless of age, gender, race, income, religion, disability status or education, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ people seek out queer content. However, among non-LGBTQ+ people, the generational differences are stark. Among 18–24s, 85% of non-LGBTQ+ people seek out queer media – a large majority of that group and just 8% fewer than their LGBTQ+ counterparts. That gap increases

with age – there is a significant 48% between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people seeking out queer media among the over-65s.

For young people, queer media reaches almost everyone, regardless of sexuality and gender identity; among older age groups, queer media predominately reaches LGBTQ+ people. As our findings in the previous section demonstrate, the youngest age groups are most likely to identify as LGBTQ+, so perhaps this isn't surprising.

% seeking out queer content in media by age



<sup>9</sup> Stonewall School Report 2017

<sup>10</sup> "Queer media" or "queer content" refers to stories about LGBTQ+ people (fictional/non-fictional) and content created or presented by openly LGBTQ+ creators (e.g. journalists, actors, presenters, influencers, etc.)

# QUEER MEDIA NORMALISES AND CHANGES ATTITUDES AROUND LGBTQ+ LIVES

These generational relationships with queer media consumption and identity are important. While it is impossible to determine cause and effect through this study alone, they appear to be interlinked, pointing to the power of media to normalise and celebrate LGBTQ+ identities. Almost all young people are consuming

queer media and it plays a key role in making them feel comfortable with their own identities and those of others. In fact, when respondents were asked why queer media was important to them, answers focused on the important role that media plays in normalising and changing attitudes around LGBTQ+ lives.



*"I'm almost 70 years old. I did not have role models or even other people like me in the news or media. I think it's extremely important for youth to be able to see people of all colours and sexualities to realise they're not alone."*

*"I still feel uneasy about some people knowing I am bisexual. The media can help by erasing the stigma people sometimes feel about their sexuality."*

*"It is important to me because I live alone in the woods of eastern Ohio and I enjoy consuming gay content to feel connected to the community."*

*"You can't be what you can't see. We deserve content that tells our stories as full human beings."*

Given its broad appeal among younger generations, queer media looks set to grow even further in the future. As it evolves, it's likely that the boundaries between queer media and non-queer media will become increasingly blurred,

and queerness will become an established part of mainstream media. Queer people and topics will run through all media types, which is likely to continue to affect how people – particularly younger generations – understand and express their own identities.

Quotes from *Beyond The Rainbow* survey respondents

## **BRETT PETERS (HE/HIM), GLOBAL LEAD, TIKTOK FOR GOOD**

*"These learnings reaffirm our belief at TikTok that people want to feel they can relate to a brand rather than having the brand speak at them. We encourage brands to jump in, be on the platform, understand how the community engages and what they care about, and see how they can join the conversation in a way that's not only true to their brand, but true to the way audiences use our platform as well. Brands who show up authentically are embraced by the*

*community in ways they've never been before. Trusting and working with LGBTQ+ creators is an effective way to connect with the community on TikTok. They drive conversations, power entertainment, and are true platform experts who know their communities best. When creators are part of a brand's storytelling, it both builds relationships with the TikTok community and drives measurable results."*

## **AARON CARTY (HE/HIM), HEAD OF MARKETING AND BRAND, UK BLACK PRIDE**

*"It is essential for us to understand what the community needs are. These findings offer a real insight into the needs and wants, and more importantly, how social issues are affecting the community.*

*Only by understanding can we truly identify how we can best serve them, create crucial safe spaces and ensure all minority groups are heard and seen."*

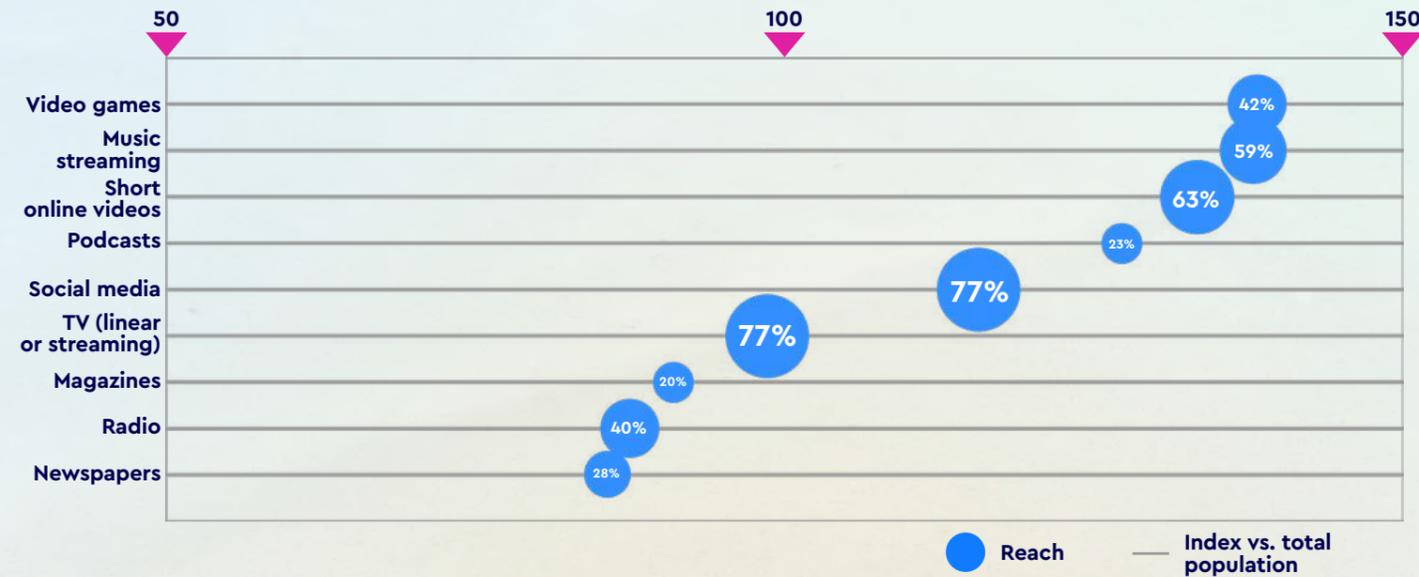
# UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE THROUGH AN LGBTQ+ LENS

On the whole, while media behaviour among LGBTQ+ people reflects that of the general population, as a group they are more likely to use digital touchpoints and video games on a daily basis.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, LGBTQ+ audiences are slightly less likely to engage with traditional

touchpoints like radio and print. As the identity section of this report has highlighted, the LGBTQ+ audience is significantly younger than the population at large. Therefore, the average age of this group largely explains their digitally led media consumption patterns.

## Daily reach and index of each media type

% of LGBTQ+ adults (16+) who use each media type daily or more, indexed against the generation population of adults (16+)

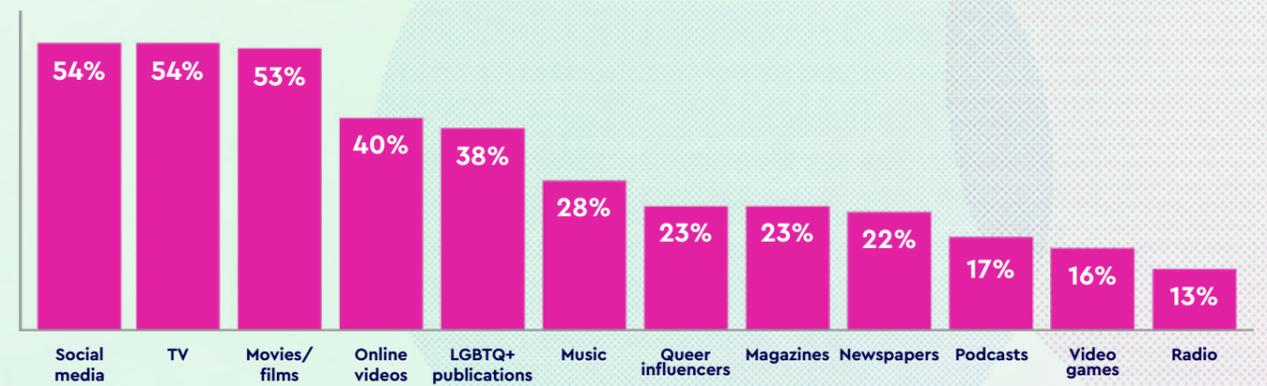


## EACH TOUCHPOINT PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE WITHIN THE QUEER MEDIA LANDSCAPE

To understand how media is used when it comes to queer content specifically, respondents were asked where they look when seeking out queer media. The most common responses were on social media, in films and on TV. Given that social media and TV are the highest-

reaching media types overall, it makes a lot of sense that those are also the most common places for people to seek out queer media. In fact, the queer media landscape appears to be broadly reflective of the media landscape at large.

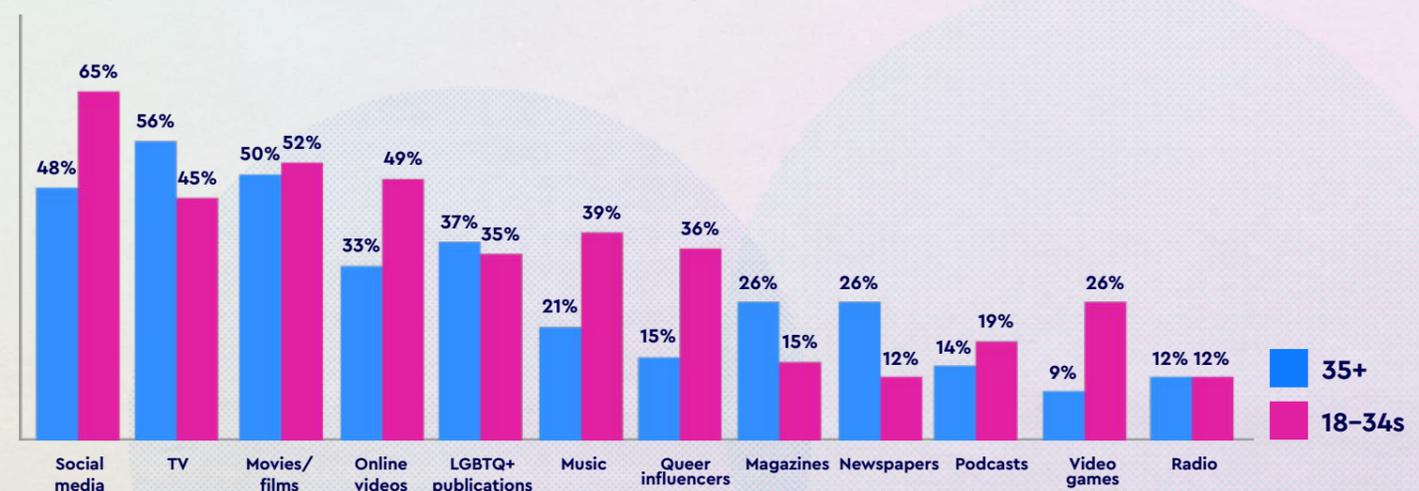
% of queer media consumers who seek out queer content on each touchpoint



There are some clear generational differences in the responses, with younger people more inclined to look to online videos, music, queer influencers and video games than the over-35s, who are more likely to go to magazines and newspapers. This is broadly in line with the media

landscape at large, as it is reflective of the way different age groups consume media. While it is useful to understand the scale of these touchpoints within queer media, it is also important to know that the picture is very nuanced.

% of queer media consumers who seek out queer content on each touchpoint



<sup>11</sup> Audience Origin, waves 1+2 2021, US, UK, Canada

Each touchpoint plays an important role within the queer media landscape, offering different ways to explore queerness – as we show here.

### SOCIAL MEDIA



54%

seek out queer content on social media

Social media has given a platform to LGBTQ+ people and enabled connection, education and a sense of community. When respondents were asked to give examples of queer content they search for on social media, they focused on groups and influencers. Queer influencers are particularly important because people can look up to and follow those who represent their lived experiences. That can be incredibly validating for marginalised groups.

22%

look to queer influencers



**Key audiences (social media generally):**

Under-35s (64%), bisexual women (66%) and lesbians (67%)

**Key audiences (queer influencers):**

LGBTQ+ people of colour (29%), LGBTQ+ people living with a disability (35%)

**Examples:**

Jojo Siwa, Jonathan Van Ness, Aaron Philip, Munroe Bergdorf

### ONLINE VIDEOS



39%

seek out queer content from online videos

As with social media, video-sharing services like YouTube have given a voice to LGBTQ+ creators, hosting content about almost anything you could ever think of! Whether it's comedy, video diaries, educational LGBTQ+ resources or how-to videos, there is almost limitless content to explore.



**Key audiences:**

LGBTQ+ people of colour (49%)

**Examples:**

Hey Qween!, Rose and Rosie, Tyler & Todd, Jeffree Star, UNHhhh

### MOVIES & TV



52%

seek out queer content in TV

According to GLAAD, there was a record number of LGBTQ+ characters on TV between June 2021 and May 2022.<sup>12</sup> While the LGBTQ+ media advocacy group's research also highlighted the shortfalls and missed opportunities that still exist, there is now a broader range of role models on mainstream TV and in movies. As queer media continues to evolve, film and TV will continue to play a key role in normalising and celebrating different LGBTQ+ identities.

51%

seek out queer content in movies



**Key audiences:**

Gay women/lesbians (71% movies, 66% TV) and gay men (61% movies, 63% TV)

**Examples:**

Heartstopper, Gentleman Jack, Love Simon, Moonlight, Sex Education, Euphoria

### LGBTQ+ PUBLICATIONS



36%

seek out queer content from LGBTQ+ publications

Many of the longest-standing queer media publications are media brands which started out in print at a time when queer content was scarce. These brands have earned a reputation for representing and engaging with LGBTQ+ people. They understand and know how to communicate with LGBTQ+ audiences and, as queer media becomes increasingly mainstream, will play an increasingly important role.



**Key audiences:**

Gay men (50%) and gay women/lesbians (50%)

**Examples:**

DIVA, Gay Times, Pink News, The Advocate, Attitude, Xtra, Out, Queerty, The Lesbian and Gay Review, Autostraddle, Equality (published by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation)

<sup>12</sup> GLAAD, Where We Are On TV, 2021-22

## MUSIC



**28%** seek out queer content in the music they listen to

Most of us will be familiar with the range of emotions that can be evoked by music. For queer people, it is vital to hear our stories reflected in song. Lil Nas X's dance with the

devil in his hit song *Montero (Call Me by Your Name)* broke boundaries in the industry and paved the way for more queer artists to tell their authentic stories through music.



### Key audiences:

Gay women/lesbians (39%), LGBTQ+ people living with a disability (38%), LGBTQ+ 18-34s (39%)

### Examples:

Lil Nas X, Lady Gaga, MNEK, Hayley Kiyoko, Sam Smith, Elton John, Melissa Etheridge, Tegan & Sara

## PODCASTS



**16%** seek out queer content on podcasts

From history and politics to pop culture and dating, there is an ever-increasing number of queer podcasts to educate and entertain. Interestingly, the format is particularly popular with trans and non-binary people, many of whom when responding to our survey talked about turning to podcasts to understand their own gender identity.



### Key audiences:

Non-binary (30%), trans people (21%)

### Examples:

*Gayish, Daddy Squared, Race Chaser, A Gay and a NonGay, We Can Do Hard Things*

## VIDEO GAMES



**16%** seek out queer content in video games

Respondents highlighted the challenges of representation in video games. "It's probably the hardest medium to find queer content, especially with queerness being at the forefront of the game and not just a character or a story arc," was one such response. However, many others talked about the ability to play with

gender and sexuality through their online personas. In giving the player the ability to lead the narrative, people can experiment with areas like same-sex relationships. As technology evolves, it will be interesting to see how this opens opportunities for further exploration.



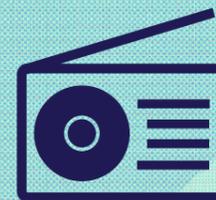
### Key audiences:

Trans and non-binary (37%), and LGBTQ+ people living with a disability (27%)

### Examples:

*The Sims, Dragon Age*

## RADIO



**12%** seek out queer content on the radio

Radio takes on a queer lens through both LGBTQ+-specific stations and DJs who identify as LGBTQ+. In fact, radio stations are some of the largest queer media brands out there and listeners tend to be particularly captive audiences.



### Key audiences:

Trans people (19%)

### Examples:

*Gaydio, Pride Radio, Proud FM, current and former BBC Radio 1 DJs Adele Roberts, Nick Grimshaw and Scott Mills, Trans Radio UK, The Stephanie Miller Show*

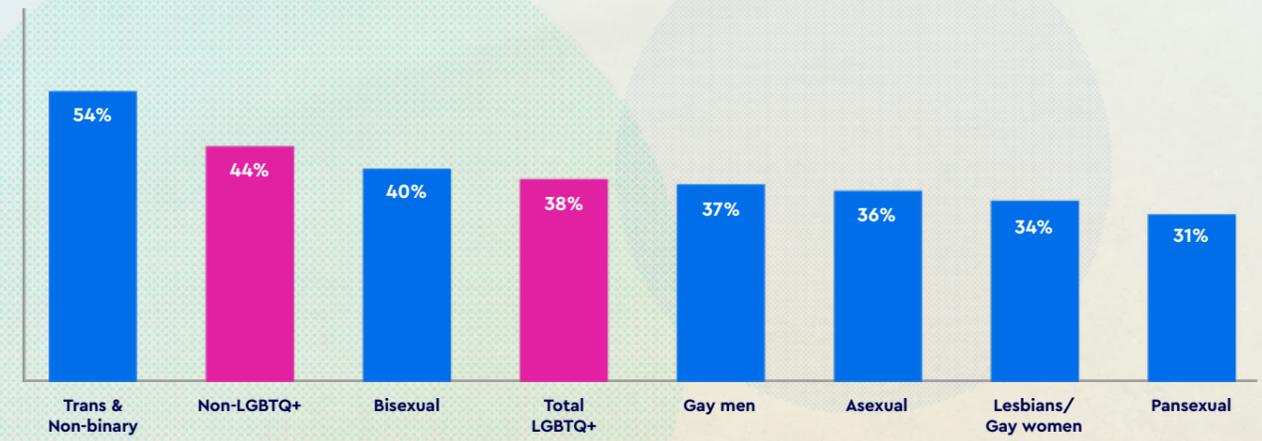
# THE OVERALL QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF QUEER MEDIA NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

## ONLY 38% OF LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ARE SATISFIED WITH THE WAY LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ARE REPRESENTED IN MEDIA

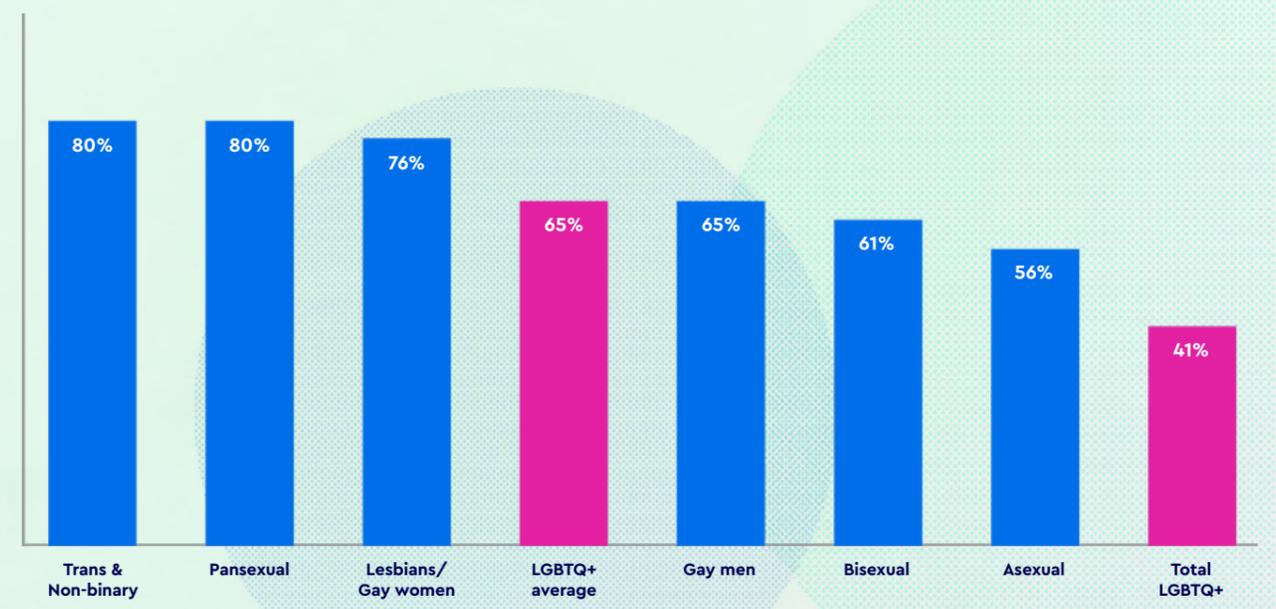
Despite a widespread desire for queer media and an explosion of available LGBTQ+ content in recent decades, fewer than half of people who consume it are satisfied with the way LGBTQ+ people are represented in media. What's more, **two-thirds** of LGBTQ+ people and

**41%** of non-LGBTQ+ people want to see **more** LGBTQ+ content. This varies significantly across identity groups, with trans and non-binary people, lesbians and LGBTQ+ people of colour the most likely to want more content.

% satisfied by the way LGBTQ+ people are represented in media



% who want to see more queer media



There is clearly work to be done in improving both the quality and quantity of LGBTQ+ media.

**JOHN BEARDSWORTH (HE/HIM), PARTNER, ESSENCEDIACOM**

*"Queer-specific/-owned media platforms are often discounted when a brief calls for reach. But we see with this data, particularly within younger demographics, the lines between straight and LGBTQ+ audiences continue to be blurred and/or questioned. This only increases the relevancy and appeal of queer platforms' audiences at a time when we've seen them grow considerably. To deliver authentic and relevant campaigns at scale, it's essential we start with the organisations who understand and know how to communicate with queer audiences."*

**LINDA RILEY (SHE/HER), EDITOR, DIVA MAGAZINE**

*"It's great to see that LGBTQIA+ representation in the media is on the rise but, all too often, brands default to the gay male market. What about the lesbians, bisexual women, trans and non-binary people, and those who identify as queer or asexual? More diversity and intersectionality in LGBTQIA+ media representation is a huge opportunity. Our research shows that **87%** of DIVA readers are more likely to buy from a company which actively reaches out to their communities. LGBTQIA+ women and non-binary people are an increasingly visible and economically powerful demographic. If you aren't including queer representation in your advertising, you're missing out."*

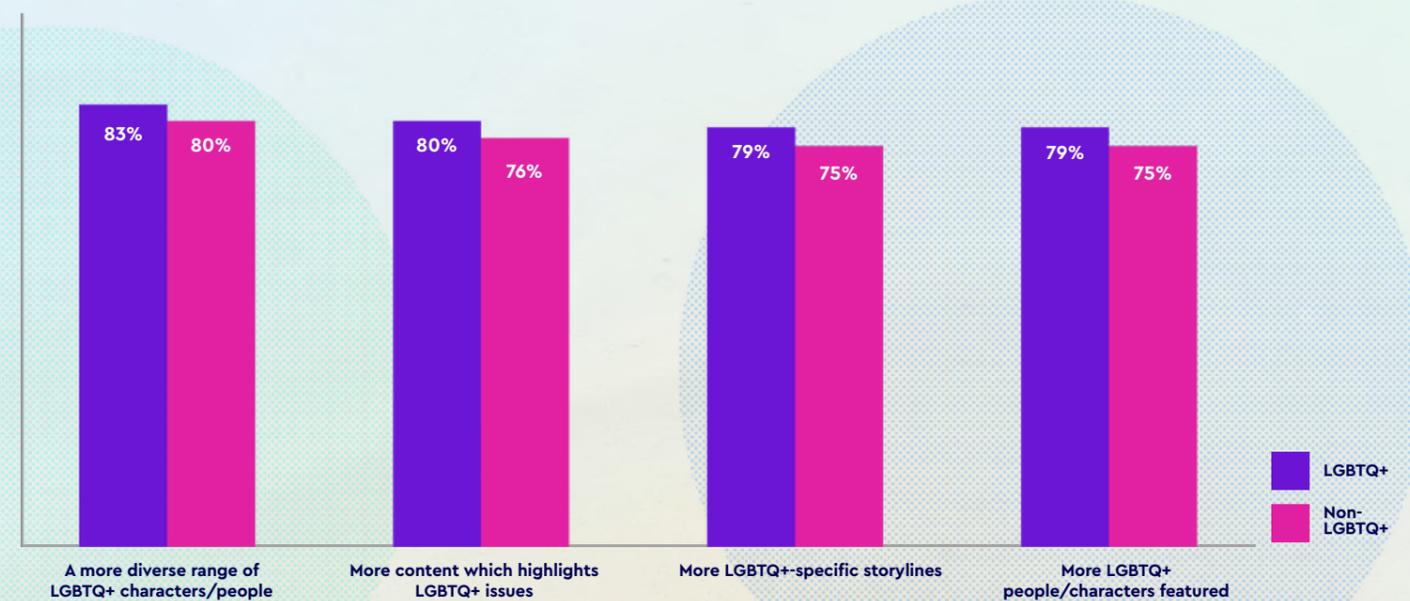
# PEOPLE WANT TO SEE A MORE DIVERSE RANGE OF LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS

We asked people how they think representation could be improved and found very similar results between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people. In the same way that queer media isn't just for LGBTQ+ people, neither are the improvements and evolutions people want to see.

**83%** of LGBTQ+ people and **80%** of non-LGBTQ+ people think representation would be improved by having a more diverse range of LGBTQ+ characters. This scores higher than those who think simply having more LGBTQ+ characters is enough, which suggests that casting needs to be thoughtful and representative.

## Ways to improve LGBTQ+ representation in media

% who agree LGBTQ+ representation in media would be improved in the following ways



# 83% WANT TO SEE A MORE DIVERSE RANGE OF LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS

# NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: PEOPLE WANT QUEER TEAMS BEHIND QUEER CONTENT

It's not just about on-screen casting and storylines, it's also about the teams creating the content. **79%** of LGBTQ+ people (and **75%** of non) want to see more content created by LGBTQ+ people.

*"It is important to make sure that creators who are minorities are also making media that is important to them and media that they just want to make."*

*"I don't want to just see every LGBT person being killed or in a big 'oh-no-I'm-gay' storyline, I want these characters and relationships treated the same as straight ones and to have a whole breadth to choose from."*

# 3 OUT OF 4 WANT TO SEE MORE CONTENT CREATED BY LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

# JAMIE JUNE HILL (THEY/THEM), CREATIVE INCLUSIVITY DIRECTOR, VMLY&R

"When we look at anything that depicts LGBTQIA+ experiences, you can immediately sense whether it was made by queer people or by people looking in from the outside. Often it's not obvious, but simply a sense of dissonance: a word that feels out of place, an outfit that feels all wrong, a stance, a home, a song...the minutia that is easy to overlook.

Why? Because when you exist in a world where you grow up being told your identity isn't 'the norm', these intangibles are EVERYTHING. They are our identifiers, our safety, our sign to those around us that we exist in our uniqueness. However, if you haven't ever needed to experience this, it's very hard to communicate.

I regularly talk about the fact that the queer community is inherently creative, because when something doesn't exist in the world that includes us, suits us, or represents us, we create a new thing that does.

That's why queer teams are so important when telling queer stories.

When WPP Unite set out to create the [All Our Pride](#) campaign for London Pride's 50th anniversary, we did it with the ambition of making it an entirely queer-led campaign. Every strategist, creative, cast member, runner, make-up artist, producer, writer,

media planner, designer, project manager, etc., was LGBTQIA+. The effect was astounding. Every single person involved felt safe, felt welcome, felt they could bring 100% of their queerness to the table - which meant the campaign could accurately represent ALL, because all were involved in making sure it did. The result was the biggest Pride event ever seen in London, supported by a campaign full of the widest spectrum of identities and sexualities imaginable.

In another project, members of WPP Unite created the [Reality Flag](#) campaign for the HRC to raise awareness of the fact that 29 US states still lack basic non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. WPP Unite met with representatives from the HRC to discuss how to elevate the voices of the communities most impacted by the lack of protection and draw attention to the unequal treatment of LGBTQ+ people in the United States.

So, the next time you are starting to make anything that features the LGBTQIA+ community, ask yourself, 'Is this truly authentic?' - and if you don't know, then look at the team around you. Lived experience isn't essential, but it does go a long way."



HELP PASS THE EQUALITY ACT AT REALITYFLAG.COM

# 03. COMMUNICATIONS

## PRIDE DOMINATES LGBTQ+ ADVERTISING

In recent years, many brands have put in place DE&I policies to ensure that fair representation is embedded into their everyday business activities, from hiring practices and employee benefits to how they market and advertise their products or services.

This commitment to battling social inequalities and championing DE&I also happens to be a gateway to growth.<sup>13</sup> This paradigm shift has been noticed in communications from brands: **74% of LGBTQ+ respondents agree that LGBTQ+ representation in advertising has improved in recent years.**

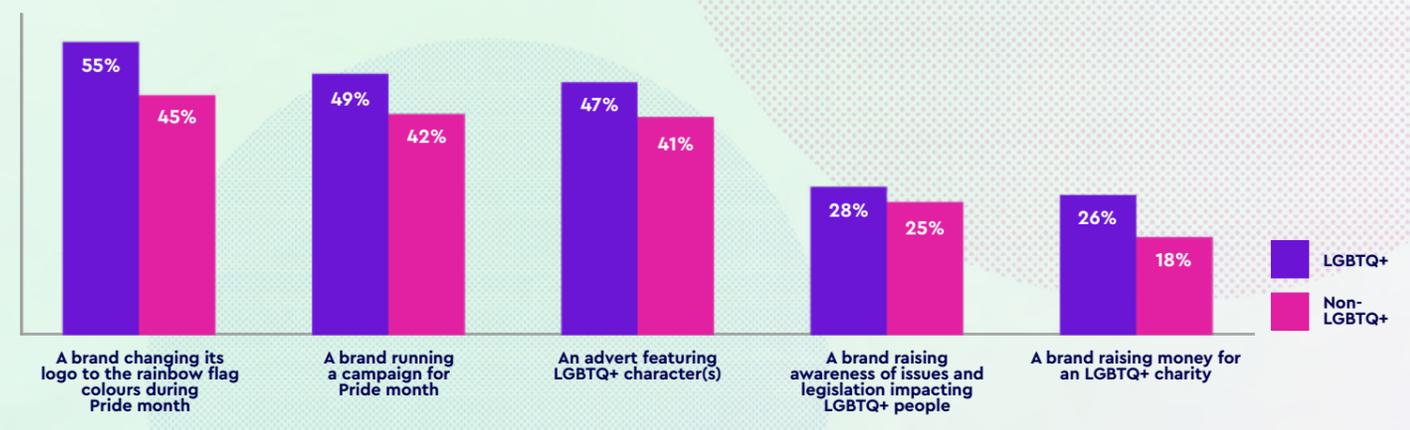
For many brands, running a Pride campaign or changing a logo to the rainbow flag colours during Pride has become the go-to way to show commitment to LGBTQ+ people.

However, this disproportionate focus on Pride has been noticed. In the last few years, there has been an increased awareness of 'rainbow-washing' – Google searches for the term were up tenfold in 2022 compared with 2020.<sup>14</sup>

Among both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ respondents, recall of LGBTQ+ brand activity is much higher for Pride than any other activity over the year. In fact, more people recall a brand changing its logo to the rainbow flag colours during Pride than an ad simply featuring an LGBTQ+ character.

**MORE PEOPLE RECALL A BRAND CHANGING ITS LOGO TO THE RAINBOW FLAG COLOURS DURING PRIDE MONTH THAN AN AD SIMPLY FEATURING AN LGBTQ+ CHARACTER**

Recall of LGBTQ+ brand activity



It is important to note that while this annual flurry to 'rainbowfy' logos is divisive, it isn't met with universal cynicism. In fact, **52% of LGBTQ+ people tell us they like it when brands change their logo to the rainbow flag colours during Pride month; 29% feel indifferent about it, while 16% dislike it.**

Pride can also bring an opportunity to discover new brands. In fact, **40% of LGBTQ+ people say they engaged with new brands during Pride month, and this number is higher among trans and non-binary people (50%) and queer people of colour (49%).**



<sup>13</sup> Deloitte, Global Marketing Trends Executive Survey, 2021  
<sup>14</sup> Google Keyword Planner, global searches for "rainbow-washing", June 2022 vs. June 2020

## DAN FLECKER (HE/HIM), BRAND DIRECTOR, ABSOLUT CANADA

*"Brands supporting the LGBTQ+ community over Pride month is an important first step to show their allyship – but this is table stakes. Building true brand credibility within this community needs a perspective that is beyond four weeks a year. The credibility comes from switching the brand objective from 'driving positive brand perceptions or associations during Pride' to*

*'giving the community a voice to drive progress and inclusivity'. Brands have an opportunity to leverage their resources throughout the year to raise and amplify the voices of LGBTQ+ individuals, not for the objective of driving sales, but for the objective of driving progress and positive change for a marginalised community."*

# THINKING BEYOND THE RAINBOW

When asked to name an example of a specific brand which had changed its logo to the rainbow flag colours during Pride month, there were no common answers, and some respondents expressed cynicism at the number of brands doing so.

*"Who isn't changing their logo to be LGBTQ+-inclusive for June?"*

*"Lots of companies do this, but I feel it's a token gesture for some."*

*"They change their logos back as soon as Pride month is over."*

*"So many brands change their logos on social media. Almost all major brands do at this point."*

Quotes from Beyond The Rainbow survey respondents

It's important to note that our research alone can't measure the effectiveness of Pride activity. However, it's clear that brands are not going to differentiate themselves or connect with their LGBTQ+ audiences simply through a temporary change of logo.

People want to see a move away from Pride in favour of more year-round representation. **74%** of LGBTQ+ people (and **50%** of non-LGBTQ+ people) think brands

should do more to support LGBTQ+ people outside of Pride season.

Around **two-thirds** of both LGBTQ+ people (**67%**) and non (**65%**) would like to see more advertising reflecting LGBTQ+ people. Rarely do people say they want to see **more** advertising (generally, people say the opposite!) so this really demonstrates a desire for the future of advertising to be increasingly LGBTQ+-focused.



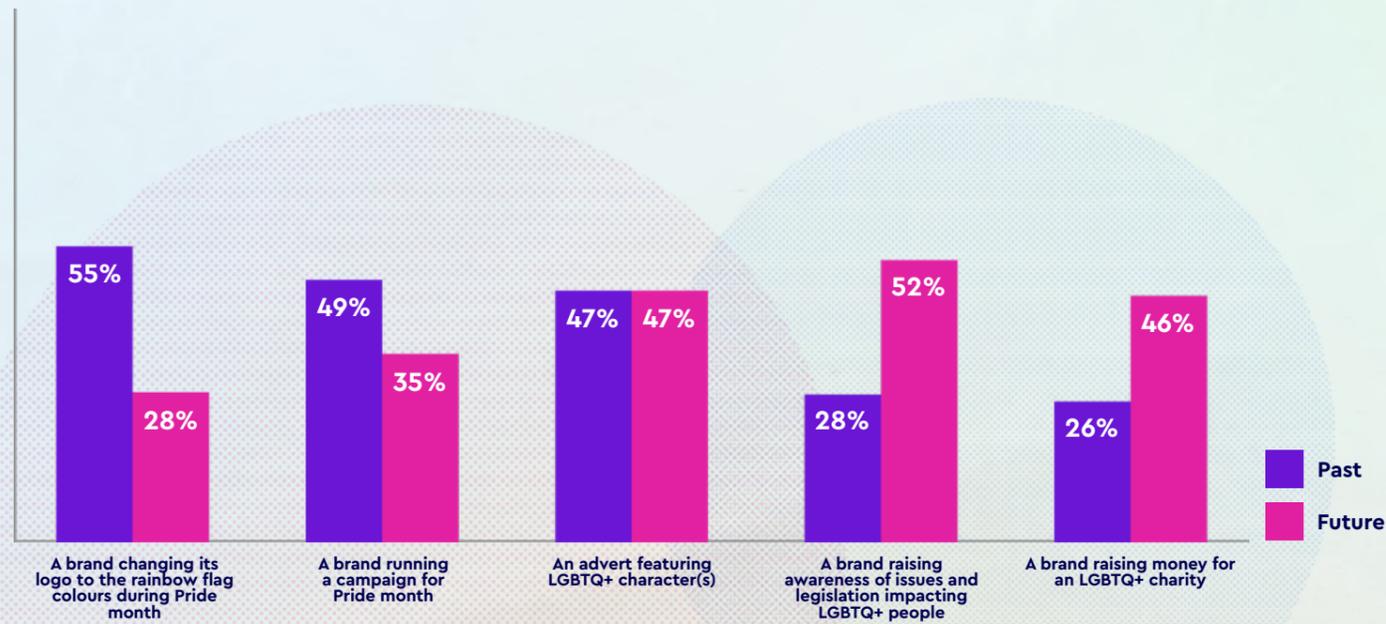
# 2 OUT OF 3 PEOPLE WANT TO SEE MORE ADVERTISING REFLECTING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

Of course, every brand's future approach to LGBTQ+ marketing will be unique to its own requirements. It needs to be informed by, among many other factors, what they're offering, who they're offering it to, and where they're offering it.

To provide a general guide, after asking people about the types of LGBTQ+ advertising they'd seen in the past, we asked them what

they'd like to see more of in the future. Comparing these sets of results, it's clear there is a mismatch between the activities that LGBTQ+ people want to see and what companies are actually doing. This highlights an opportunity for brands to drive greater distinction and relevance by moving beyond an annual focus on Pride towards more ongoing positive social impact.

Types of ads seen in the past vs. what respondents would like to see in future among LGBTQ+ people



52% of LGBTQ+ people want to see brands raising awareness of issues impacting LGBTQ+ people, but only 28% can think of examples of brands doing so in the past. This is followed by a wish to see brands featuring more LGBTQ+ characters in their advertising (47%) and initiatives that aid LGBTQ+ charities (46%).



**52% OF LGBTQ+ PEOPLE WANT TO SEE MORE BRANDS RAISING AWARENESS OF ISSUES IMPACTING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE, BUT JUST 28% HAVE SEEN EXAMPLES OF IT IN THE PAST**

The following are examples of communications from brands that have embraced the approaches outlined in this report.

# RAISING AWARENESS OF ISSUES AFFECTING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

According to Kantar Monitor, **68%** of consumers expect brands to be clear about their values, with Millennials and Gen Z having the highest expectations of all age groups.<sup>15</sup> Whether a consumer would disregard price, quality and distribution to buy into a product or service purely on social justice issues alone is subject to

debate, but addressing social justice issues *can* drive distinctiveness and relevance if it is handled with authenticity off the back of established values and a clear role for a brand.

Two ways in which this can be done are by **speaking out** and **storytelling**.

<sup>15</sup> Kantar Monitor, 2021

## SPEAKING OUT

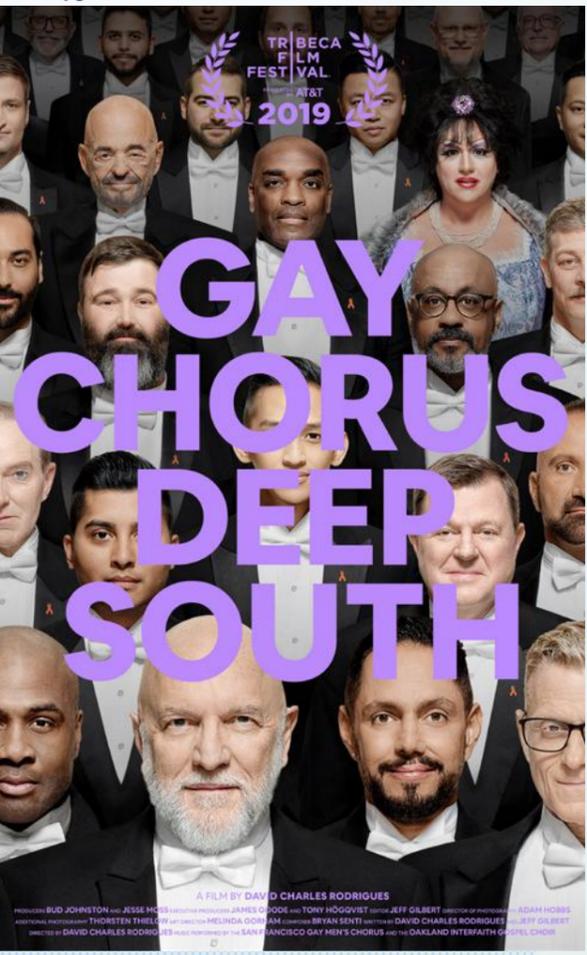
Examples of brands addressing issues impacting LGBTQ+ people head-on by using their platform and clout to create awareness.



### CHANNEL 4 MARKING A GLOBAL MOMENT THROUGH AN LGBTQ+ LENS

UK TV station Channel 4 released the song and video [Gay Mountain](#) in 2014 to mark the start of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Channel 4 has a long history of provoking debate, representing lesser-heard voices and challenging the status quo through its content, so it aired

its cheeky, colourful, in-your-face good-luck message to all athletes (LGBTQ+ and non) on the opening night of the Games as a response to Russian laws which restrict the rights of LGBTQ+ people.



## AIRBNB EXPLORING ISSUES AND REINFORCING LONG-TERM BRAND COMMITMENTS

Safety when travelling is an issue for many LGBTQ+ people. Airbnb has consistently communicated its belief that LGBTQ+ people should not only be treated with dignity and respect, but be welcomed and celebrated. Its initiatives have included the long-running [#HostWithPride](#) campaign with stories about LGBTQ+ travellers, the brand throwing its weight behind marriage equality in Australia with the [Until We All Belong](#) campaign, being a founding member of the Human Rights Campaign Global Business Coalition in the US, and developing the financing and production of the documentary film [Gay Chorus Deep South](#) in response to a wave of discriminatory anti-LGBTQ+ laws in the southern states of the US.

Until we  all belong.

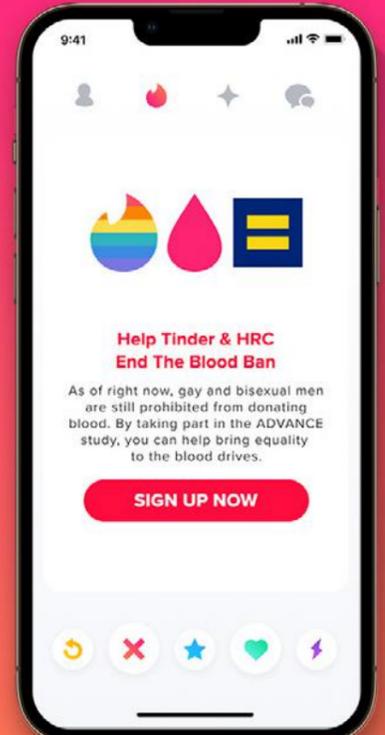


## VERY GAY RAPTOR: REDEFINING TOUGH

### BOTH TINDER AND FORD TAKING A CAMPAIGNING APPROACH TO LGBTQ+ COMMUNICATIONS

Other examples of brands addressing LGBTQ+ issues head-on include [Tinder partnering with the HRC](#) (2022) to call on the US government to lift the ban that prevents men who have sex with men from donating blood. Ford's [Very Gay Raptor](#)

started as a social clapback against a homophobic YouTube comment but quickly became a mission-based beacon of allyship, challenging toxic stereotypes in order to redefine 'tough' and drive out discrimination within car culture.



# STORYTELLING

Examples of brands driving empathy for LGBTQ+ people and the issues they face by crafting it into the narrative of campaigns.

A person's name is their greatest connection to their own individuality and personality. For trans and non-binary people, their chosen names which align with their gender identity carry a deeper meaning. Starbucks' [What's Your Name?](#) campaign (2019) brought this to life in a sensitive, accessible way by showing the emotional knockbacks experienced by young trans man James and his daily experience of being addressed by his dead name, 'Jemma'. The campaign came with a clear role for Starbucks through

its universal welcome of asking a customer for their name, writing it on their cup and calling it out when ready. Gillette's [First Shave](#) (2019) shared the moment when a young trans man is taught how to shave by his father. His emotions are the focus of the story, and the campaign helps viewers to feel the anticipation and excitement that so many transitioning men feel during a significant step in their journey, while associating Gillette with the father figure, providing guidance, wisdom and unconditional support.



# FEATURING LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS

Most LGBTQ+ people (69%) want to see more LGBTQ+ people featured in advertising, but when brands do feature LGBTQ+ people, 59% think it comes across as tokenistic (this figure is higher among trans/non-binary respondents at 70%, and 67% among LGBTQ+ people of colour).

This well-intended, but potentially insincere portrayal of LGBTQ+ people is something that can cause some creative anxiety when developing a campaign, with the creative conversation often boiling down to how to signify that a character is LGBTQ+ without making their sexuality or relationship the entire focus of the work.

In forms of advertising that are more product- and service-focused, the role of all characters (non-LGBTQ+ or otherwise) is more likely to be contextual and less of an ingredient for driving narrative. As an example, if the objective of a 30-second TV spot is to sell a fridge, then there

is a question of how deep to go in portraying the lives of the people (LGBTQ+ or non) in whose kitchen the fridge is located before that becomes a distraction to the product messages the ad is trying to land.

When LGBTQ+ people feature in advertising where the role of all characters is more likely to be contextual, portraying them tends to default to quick reads that will establish to the viewer that they are *not* heterosexual, such as hand-holding, kissing, or overt gender-swapping in recognisable heteronormative situations (such as two men raising a baby).

This is where LGBTQ+ portrayal can come across as mere box-ticking, because characters have been deliberately created to 'look gay' and be noticed for it quickly.

This is one of the reasons why deeper and more nuanced portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters tend to be found in the realm of brand-building advertising, where there is more scope for emotion and storytelling.

In analysing the portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters within campaigns, their

appearances could be categorised in four general areas: **incidental** (where LGBTQ+ characters appear briefly in the narrative alongside a sequence of other characters), **essential** (where LGBTQ+ characters drive the narrative), **normalisation** (where the experience of LGBTQ+ characters is presented as no different to anyone else) and **representation** (where the characters' unique LGBTQ+ experiences are the key focus).



## INCIDENTAL REPRESENTATION

Examples of **incidental representation** include Nike's [The Land Of Football](#) (2021), where a footballer kisses his partner on the pitch, and Virgin Atlantic's [See the World Differently](#) (2022), where an array of characters, including a glittering flight attendant, features proudly to the soundtrack of the gay anthem *I Am What I Am*. Virgin Atlantic's campaign was further supported by a policy change which allows staff to choose the uniform that best aligns with their gender identity.

## ESSENTIAL REPRESENTATION

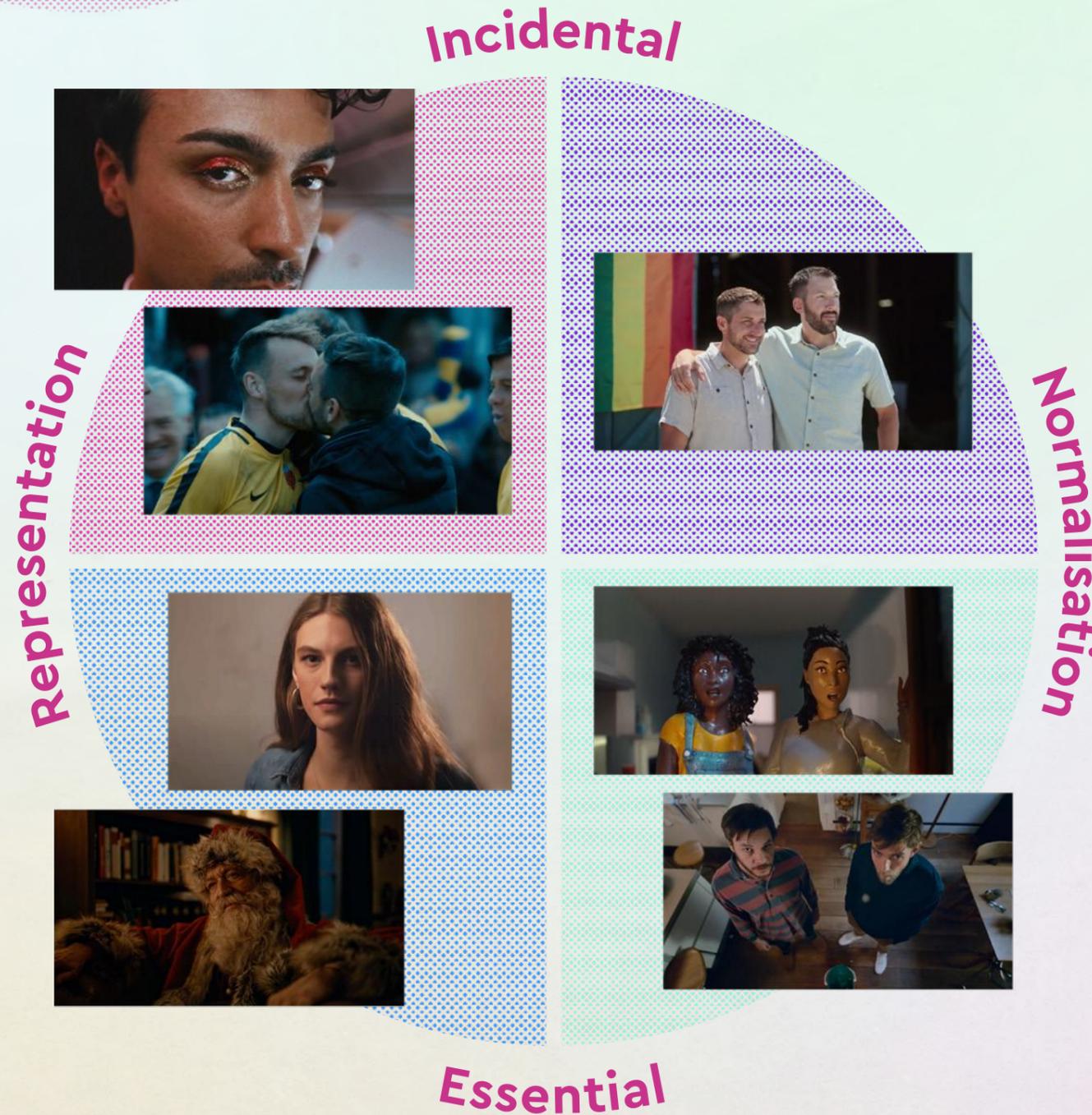
Examples of **essential representation** include Diesel's [Francesca](#) (2020), where Diesel is a constant in the wardrobe of a young woman during her transition, Renault's [French Exchange](#) (2019), which follows the love story of a lesbian couple and the role of Renault in keeping them together, and Posten's [When Harry Met Santa](#) (2021), where Santa uses the Norwegian postal service Posten to give himself a Christmas Eve off so he can enjoy it with his boyfriend Harry. In each example, the uniquely LGBTQ+ experience is what drives the narrative.

## INCIDENTAL NORMALISATION

Examples of **incidental normalisation** include Honey Maid's [This Is Wholesome](#) (2014) and Chase Bank's [Banking With Chase Feels Good](#) (2021). Another example can be found in Corteva Agriscience's [The Heart Of The Farm](#) series (2021), where one episode focuses on the working life of a farm that just happens to be owned by a gay couple. While the story touches on their life together, its focus is on their work growing food, like so many other farms across the US.

## ESSENTIAL NORMALISATION

Examples of **essential normalisation** include British Gas' [Here To Solve](#) (2020) Maltesers' [Accountant](#) (2018) and Beagle Street's [First Night](#) (2021). In these examples, the narratives are built around LGBTQ+ characters but focus on everyday aspects of life that could be experienced by anyone and where the brand has a role, such as fixing a leak, sharing chocolate while talking about dating struggles, and buying insurance.

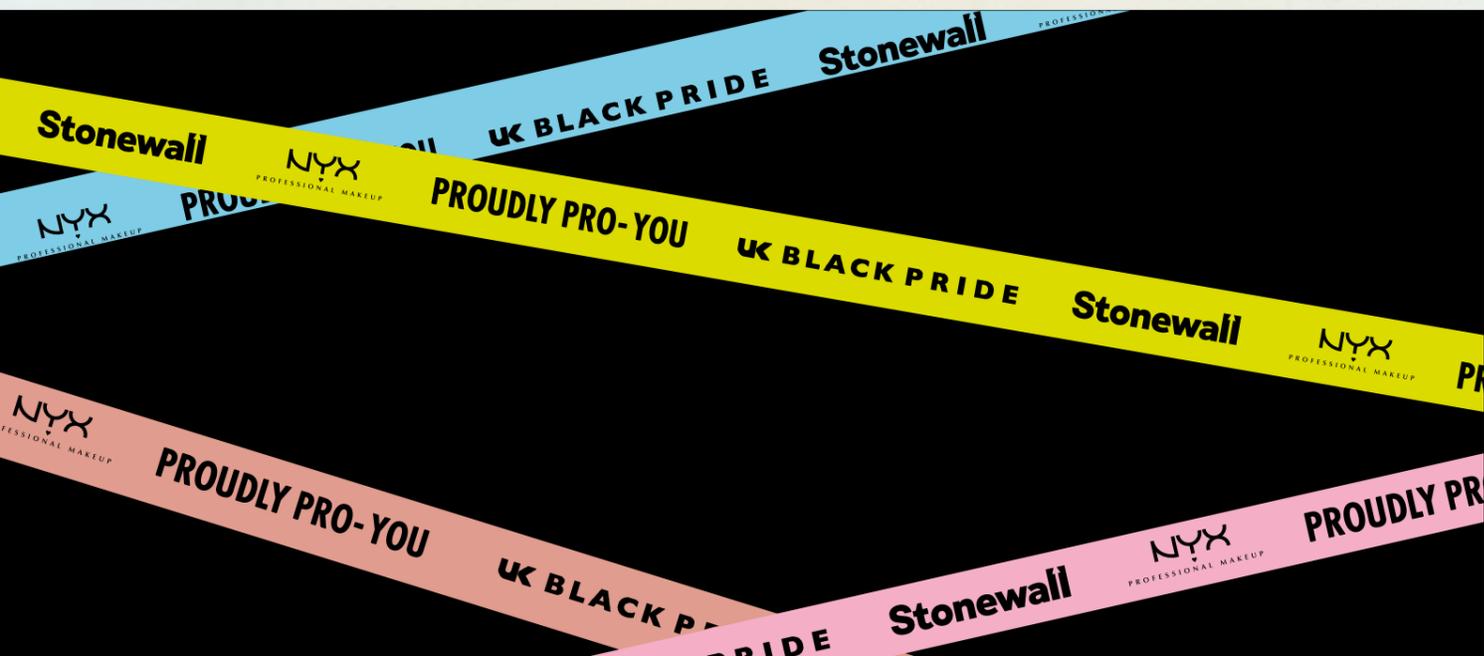


# SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ CHARITIES

Aligning a brand with a charity or organisation can come under scrutiny if the activity is seen as short-termist. [Apple and \(RED\)](#) is an example of a long-term partnership which has remained consistent over 15 years, with US\$270 million in sales from the brand's exclusive (RED) line of products going to support critical work in combating HIV and Aids.

Partnering with UK Black Pride, NYX Cosmetics launched the [Proudly Pro-You](#) campaign with

the ambition of driving long-term change for LGBTQ+ people of colour in the UK. The brand set out to do this by giving its backing to UK Black Pride's 'We Will Be Heard' survey which aimed to increase understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people of colour in the UK, distributing community grants to organisations working to support LGBTQ+ people of colour, and showcasing diverse LGBTQ+ talent within the marketing.

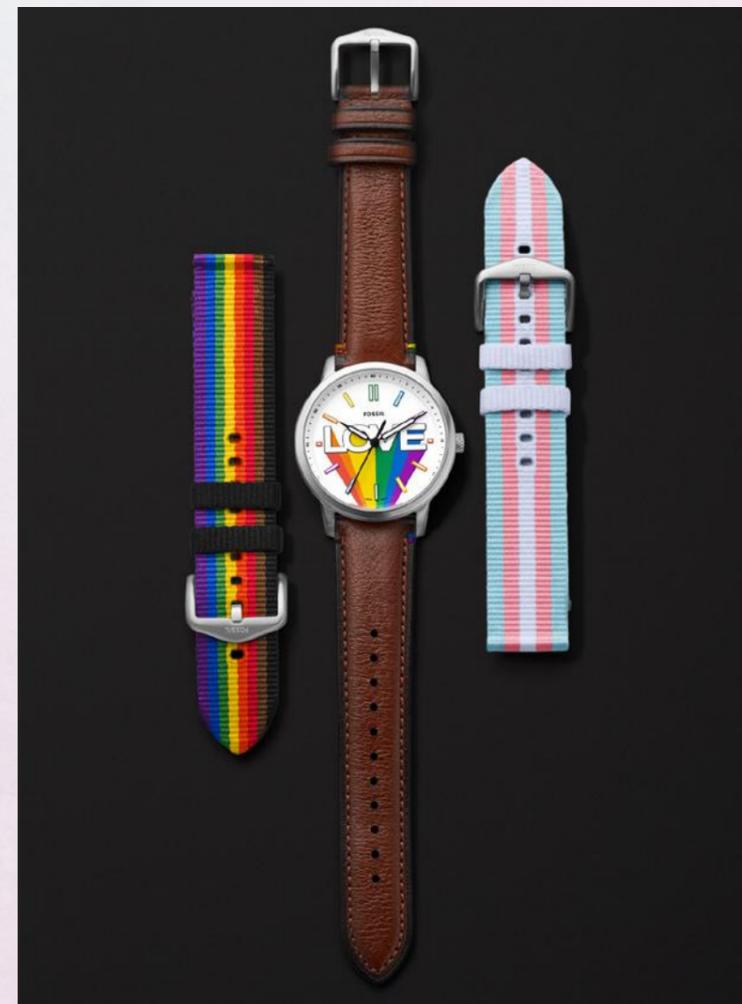


Also in the UK, the [English Premier League's support of Stonewall's Rainbow Laces campaign](#) is an ongoing long-term partnership to promote allyship in football (soccer) through fundraising, education and drawing attention to the need to stop homophobia and make the game welcoming to everyone.

However, there are plenty of examples of brands supporting charities over shorter periods of time (such as Pride month) and bringing charity initiatives to the heart of their communications for a limited period of fundraising time. This is particularly prevalent among fashion and beauty brands which often create specific Pride-themed SKUs.

As an example of this, watch and accessory brand Fossil launched a capsule collection of Pride-themed watches and straps in the US, UK and Canada, with 100% of the proceeds going to [The Trevor Project](#) (the world's largest suicide-prevention charity for LGBTQ+ people). Going beyond the launch of the collection, Fossil

pledged a US\$100,000 donation to the charity and launched a social media campaign with the hashtag [#TakeAMinute](#), where it handed its social profile over to voices across the LGBTQ+ community.



# THINKING BEYOND THE RAINBOW ALL YEAR ROUND

To make LGBTQ+ marketing really work, brands need to think strategically about the long term. 75% of LGBTQ+ people and 51% of non-LGBTQ+ people tell us they'd feel more positively about a brand which supports LGBTQ+ people throughout the whole year.

Here are three prominent examples of brands taking this approach on board and planning for it.

## MASTERCARD

[Mastercard's True Name](#) scheme had the credit card company overhauling its policy to allow trans and non-binary people have a credit card showing their chosen name rather than the name issued on their birth certificate.



## P&G

P&G established the role of [Global LGBTQ+ Equality Program Leader](#) in 2021, focusing on ensuring that LGBTQ+ audiences are accurately reflected by the largest advertiser in the world and strategically catered for as a core consumer group rather than just 'bolted on'. In addition to this, P&G launched [The Visibility Project](#) in partnership with GLAAD to drive and sustain LGBTQ+ inclusion in marketing and advertising.

## SAVAGE X FENTY

[Savage X Fenty](#), the gender and size-inclusive lingerie brand founded by entrepreneur and music icon Rihanna, partners with LGBTQ+ creators, artists and musicians to promote its ranges and gives sizable donations to LGBTQ+ charities such as GLAAD and the HRC.

# CONCLUSIONS

*Beyond The Rainbow* goes beyond what has been surfaced in this report. For WPP Unite, this study is a snapshot into LGBTQ+ identities, media and communications to equip members of our community, our clients and our allies to positively and meaningfully influence the future of LGBTQ+ marketing.

Here is a summary of the predictions and advice laid out in this report to help you start thinking about how to navigate LGBTQ+ marketing successfully.

- **Audiences will continue to get queerer and more fluid.** Reflect that in the way you represent and engage with them.
- **LGBTQ+ media will become an established part of mainstream media.** As a key part of the media ecosystem, ensure that LGBTQ+ content, channels and platforms also become an established part of your media planning.
- **Brands will continue to have an impact on attitudes in society at large.** Take the time to understand attitudes today and consider the role you want to play in influencing them.
- **Technological developments will impact the way people can explore their own identities.** Consider the role you have in facilitating this exploration.
- **Brands at Pride will be challenged on what they do during the rest of the year.** Join a collective effort to reinvent Pride by making your related activity a celebration of what you do all year round to support the LGBTQ+ community.
- **The future of LGBTQ+ marketing will be more informed and relevance will be more crucial than ever.** In your campaigns, find an angle which is genuinely relevant to your brand. In your decision-making, be conscious of normalising or representing LGBTQ+ issues if you're doing it through narratives where LGBTQ+ visibility is essential or incidental.
- **The most successful brands will foster a truly inclusive space for LGBTQ+ employees.** Ensure that you understand how your workplace fares today and implement a long-term strategy to improve DE&I tomorrow.



# GLOSSARY

Partially sourced from the HRC's glossary of terms.

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

**Asexual:** Often referred to as 'ace', asexual is a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

**Bisexual:** A person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. See also **pansexual**.

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

**Gay:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender (see also **homosexual**).

**Gender binary:** Where gender is classified in two strict categories of 'male' or 'female' and **gender identity** (see below) 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** (see below), not all gender non-conforming people do so.

**Heterosexual:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex (see also **straight**).

**Homosexual:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender (see also **gay**, **lesbian** and **queer**).

**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.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women. Women and **non-binary** (see below) people may use this term to describe themselves.

**LGBTQ+:** As used throughout this report, an acronym for 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning'. This acronym can also be expanded to **LGBTQIA+**, to include the above, plus 'Intersex' and 'Asexual/Agender'. In both acronyms, the '+' symbol recognises the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by **queer** people.

**Non-binary:** An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman (see also **agender**). 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** (see below), 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.

**Pansexual:** Someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender (though not necessarily simultaneously) in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with **bisexual** (see above).

**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 (see **non-binary**). This word has historically been used as a slur, but is increasingly being reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement.

**Rainbow-washing:** The act of using the colours of the rainbow flag and/or imagery in logos, advertising, apparel, accessories, landmarks, etc. to indicate support for LGBTQ+ equality and earn consumer credibility, but with a minimum of effort or a meaningful result.

**Sexual/Gender fluidity:** Where one's **sexuality** (see below) or **gender identity** (see above) isn't permanently fixed.

**Sexual orientation:** An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. An individual's sexuality is independent of their gender identity.

**Straight:** A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex (see also **heterosexual**).

**Transgender/Trans:** An umbrella term for people whose **gender identity** (see above) 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.

**Virtue-signalling:** The action or practice of publicly expressing opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one's good character or the moral correctness of one's position on a particular issue.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**ZOE BOWEN-JONES, (SHE/HER),  
SENIOR INSIGHTS DIRECTOR, WAVEMAKER GLOBAL,  
COMMITTEE MEMBER, WPP UNITE (UK)**

*"I have worked in media research since 2016 and am fascinated by the power of media and advertising to both reflect and influence the world around us. In this report, we talk a lot about queer media and how it can shape our understanding of ourselves and others. That really resonated with me, because programmes like Drag Race and Orange Is the New Black played an important role in my understanding of sexuality and gender identity when I was in my late teens and early twenties. More recently, I've become a fan of the comedian Megan Stalter, who touches on some of the issues around LGBTQ+ brand communications that we're trying to address through this research (go and watch ['HIIIII GAYYYY!'](#) if you haven't already).*

*I hope that Beyond The Rainbow encourages people to think more deeply about LGBTQ+ representation and that, collectively, we can use that thinking to make our work more LGBTQ+ inclusive!"*



**DEVON ESPER, (HE/HIM),  
STRATEGY MANAGER, WAVEMAKER USA,  
COMMITTEE MEMBER, WPP UNITE (NORTH AMERICA)**

*"Growing up in rural Canada, I wasn't exposed to many queer people, let alone having any idea where to find queer characters in media. Starting my career in music and entertainment, and eventually moving into media and advertising, I've witnessed first hand the potential when people are given a platform to express every dimension of their identity. When organisations create space for people to bring their authentic selves and experiences into the work they produce, the results are nothing short of amazing. While I can only operate based on my personal experiences, my hope with this study is for a wider audience to have a better understanding of some shared experiences that exist within the LGBTQ+ community and how to connect with them in a more meaningful way. Visibility is critical to progress and if I can play the slightest role in reaching queer audiences with stories they can see themselves in, I've done my job."*



# ABOUT WPP

WPP is a creative transformation company which uses the power of creativity to build better futures for our people, planet, clients and communities. For more information, visit [wpp.com](http://wpp.com)

# ABOUT WPP UNITE

WPP Unite is the LGBTQ+ community living across WPP's network of 100,000+ people worldwide. You can find us working in WPP businesses everywhere as creatives, strategists, client managers, planners, media buyers, comms experts, office managers, technologists and everything else. WPP Unite is focused on driving insightful and authentic representation of LGBTQ+ people within media and promoting greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ people within the work and workplaces of the marketing and communications industry.

# CONTACT

If you're interested in learning more about Beyond The Rainbow or want to discuss our findings further, email us at [unite@wpp.com](mailto:unite@wpp.com)

## LJ LOUIS, CHIEF TALENT AND INCLUSION OFFICER, WPP

*"It's so important that employees can come to work in an environment that allows them to be their authentic selves and put their passion into their work. The craft, skill and expertise that has gone into the Beyond The Rainbow study by our LGBTQ+ employees and their allies is, I hope, a reflection of the ambition we have at WPP to nurture a culture where all LGBTQ+ people feel they belong.*

*There are many steps that an organisation can take to join us on our journey of continuous*

*improvement. Some examples include, but are not limited to, active education on bias, microaggressions and allyship, encouraging the verbal and non-verbal use of pronouns, providing gender-inclusive restrooms, ensuring equitable benefits for same-sex couples, as well as benefits that can help trans employees to transition more easily and providing a platform and funding for LGBTQ+ ERGs. Don't know where to start? That's OK! Pick something and begin there."*

**Image sources:**

Channel 4 - *Gay Mountain*  
Airbnb - *Gay Chorus Deep South*  
Airbnb - *Until We All Belong*  
Ford - *Very Gay Raptor*: VMLY&R and H+K (WPP)  
Starbucks - *What's Your Name?*: Iris  
Gillette - *First Shave*: Grey (WPP)  
Virgin Atlantic - *See the World Differently*: Lucky Generals  
British Gas - *Here To Solve*: The&Partnership (WPP)  
Nike - *The Land of Football*: W+K Amsterdam  
Beagle Street - *First Night*: Creature

Corteva Agriscience - *The Heart Of The Farm*: Ogilvy (WPP)  
Diesel - *Francesca*: Publicis Italy  
Renault - *French Exchange*: Publicis Poke  
Posten - *When Harry Met Santa*: POL, Oslo  
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