

Putting **in**clusion at the heart of your brand communications

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Introduction

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At psLondon, we have always been audience focused – always putting ourselves in the shoes of our clients' customers. We've always understood that putting yourselves in the mindsets of others is fundamental to marketing. We've worked with a number of organisations to truly identify the nuances of their audiences beyond socio-demographic markers, such as the University of Bradford. We know that just 'putting yourselves in others' shoes is no longer enough.

We know a more considered and proactive approach to inclusion within branding and creativity is required, which is why we've created this whitepaper – to support our network to ensure that their communications are inclusive of all of their audiences, be that current customers or new, and reflective of the society in which they exist.

Throughout this report we never seek to whitesplain or mansplain anyone's lived experiences of brand communications. Rather, the author is a brand communications strategist with just over a decade of experience. As an individual who's incredibly passionate about diversity and inclusion (and a member of the LGBTQ+ community), he has spent his career trying to ensure brands communications are as representative as possible.

At psLondon, we truly believe that allyship from other oppressed groups is the only way in which we will see progress for all – which is why he's authored this report.

D&I is an ever-changing animal, with new methodologies, phraseology and terminology evolving all the time. Therefore we aim to keep language as inclusive as possible and recognise that it can be limiting to capture all lived experiences. We remain open to the ways language around D&I evolves.



Please get in contact with us alex@pslondon.co.uk, we'll be more than happy to debate and update this report.

What is brand inclusion?

The Oxford Dictionary defines inclusion as:

“the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups.”

So, what we mean by brand inclusion isn't necessarily brand purpose and brand activism. We're not here to teach you how to set up an awesome brand activism campaign, rather how to create, build and communicate your brand in an inclusive manner – one in which your brand and onward communications are representative of the society in which you operate.

You might be setting up a new brand, building an established one, or managing a brand that has been around since the word 'brand' was even a thing. Either way, there are ways and means to ensure your brand is on the right side of history in the 2020's.

Let's create brand communications in which none of your staff, stake-holders, customers, students or in fact, anyone who comes into contact with your brand feels 'othered'.



Why now?

Now, progress has been a thing for a while now, and has been going at quite a speed over the last century! With the women's rights movements spanning back to the turn of the 20th century, the anti-racism movement sparked by Rosa Parks, the LGBTQ+ movement that was set alight when a trans woman of colour threw a brick at the Stonewall Inn in 1969.

Unrelenting activists from these movements have paved the way for incredible progress that saw the start of the 2010's as a culmination of decades of hard work into a progressive society on both sides of the pond.

2016 was the year that saw much of this progress put on hold, with divisive conservative agendas allowed to stop much of this hard-earned progress in its tracks. Now in 2021, with the removal of Donald Trump and the airtime much of these hard right conservative agendas allied to his cause, it is more important than ever that your brand is open to all.

Why should I care?

There are many reasons for developing diverse and inclusive brand communications...

However, a box ticking exercise from your board is not one of them. If you, or your board still need reasons in 2021 as to why your brand should communicate inclusively:

The moral case

At its simplest – we're all humans.

We all deserve to feel acknowledged, represented and respected by the brands we spend our lives with.

Why wouldn't you want to lead a brand that serves all?

The business case

Companies with greater diversity are 21% more likely to experience above average profitability (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

Those with higher diversity connect with more consumers on deeper levels, who then spend more.

The people case

As of 2017, millennials are the largest generational workforce in the UK (The Actuary, 2017).

Demographically, they are much more likely to be diverse racially and socially, as well as to identify as LGBTQ+. By not representing them in your brand communications, you're alienating a serious amount of top talent.

Unconscious bias can affect your communications



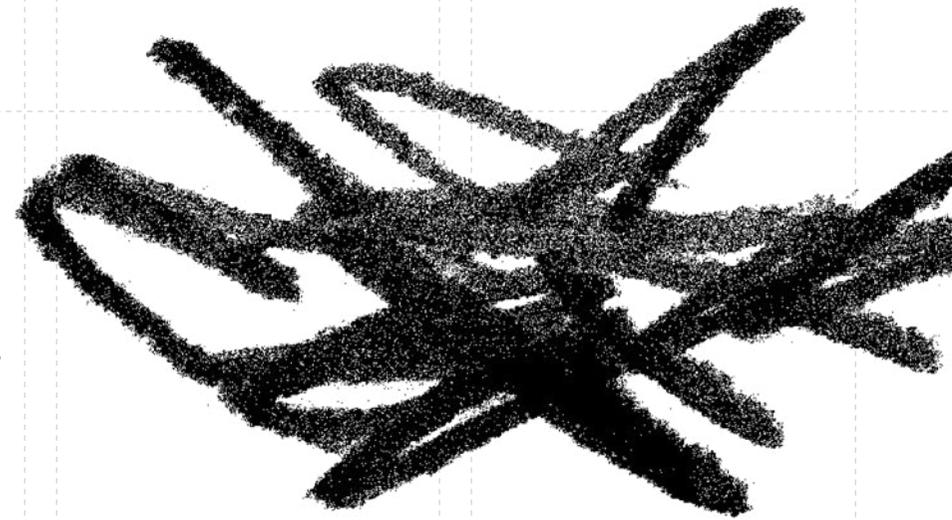
First off, what is unconscious bias?

Unconscious bias is where we as humans seek safety in those who look like us, sound like us and have similar lived experiences (such as upbringing, education or likes and dislikes).

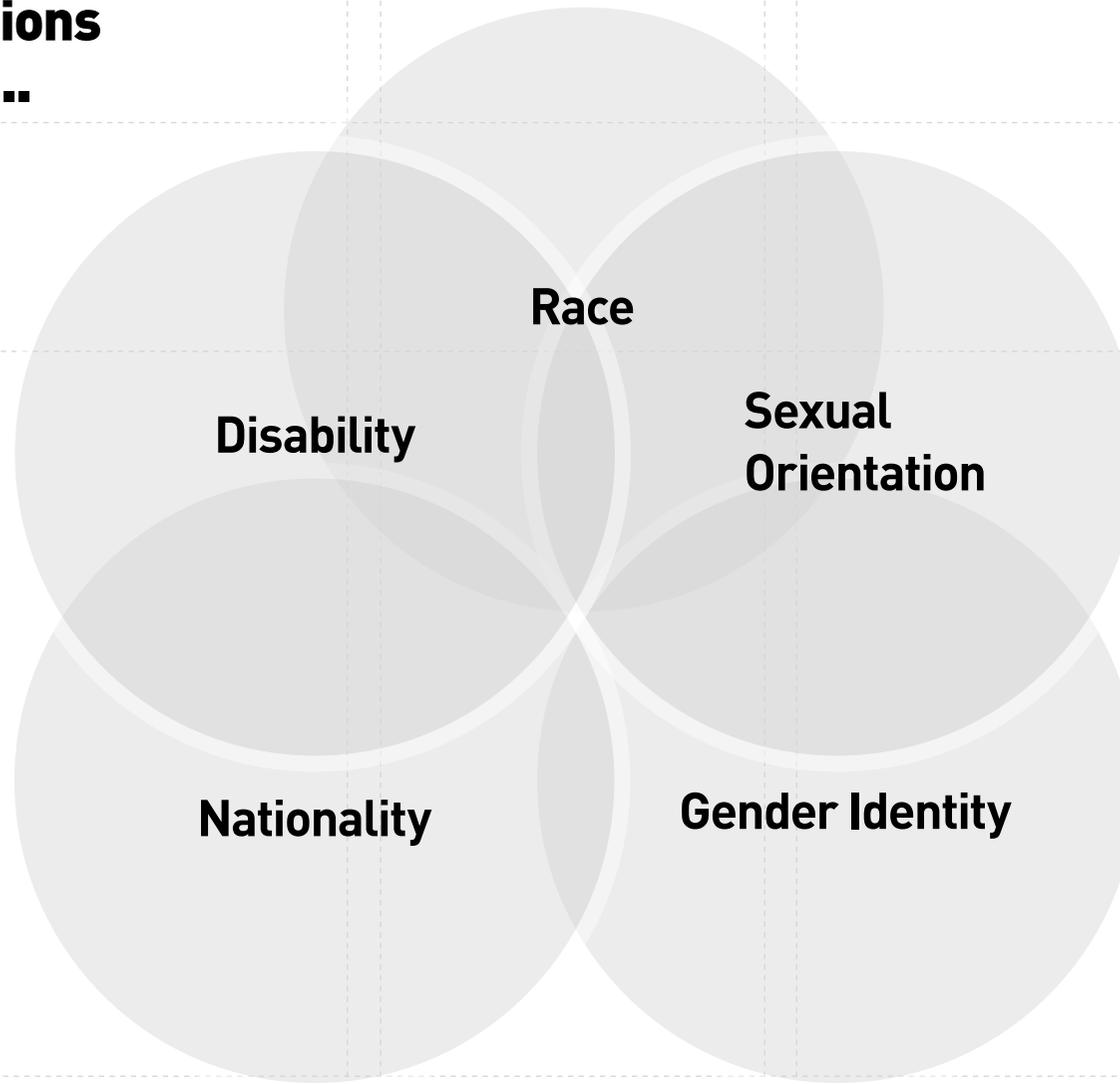
Therefore, in the same vein, primordially we see those who don't look like us as dangerous. In the modern world, rather than hiding in caves or attacking danger with rocks, we react slightly differently, and can mean we feel uncomfortable or look down on those who look or sound different to us. This can manifest in many ways when living our lives – especially for marketers in the workplace, where one's role is storytelling.

In our personal life this could mean all of your friends and close circle look and sound like you. This is not to say that you should now go out and make new friends to show you're not insular, rather understanding that your life and perceptions might be skewed to the life you live, which could affect your creative outputs or storytelling as a marketer.

In the workplace, this may mean that a hiring manager is more likely to recruit new team members based on characteristics that they resonate with. 'Team Fit' is often used as a way to justify this unconscious bias. However, it is incredibly important for a business to recruit and retain those who have different life experiences. This is even more important when building marketing and creative teams, where different lenses are needed to develop creativity that reaches many audience segments.



**Recognising
'Intersectionality'
will also ensure your
brand communications
are truly inclusive...**



**What is
intersectionality?**

Simply put, intersectionality is the concept that all oppression and marginalisation is linked.

The Oxford Dictionary defines it as:

“the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”

Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability etc.

For example,
a British man of Nigerian descent who is gay is going to have lived a very different life and have incredibly different social drivers to an American woman of Bangladeshi descent who is dyslexic. They could both be living in London and working in marketing – but what they bring to ‘the table’ will be incredibly different.

With this in mind, businesses need to go well beyond the BPOC tick box exercise currently employed as part of the D&I agenda.



What do unconscious bias and a lack of understanding of intersectionality mean for the creative sector?

Check yourself before you wreck yourself (or your brand).

When developing brand communications, it's incredibly important to understand the limitations of you and your team when it comes to putting a diverse lens over your creativity. Naturally creatives will develop stories that they understand, and as a marketer you will be drawn to creativity that moves you. But if you or your creative team are not fully representative of your target audience, it doesn't matter how much you and your board love it, it will most likely fall flat.

When layered with intersectionality, one must acknowledge that any team you put together is never going to be fully representative, but it's a good start. We cannot seek to represent every single intersection, but we can recognise that they exist by testing our work with a wide range of people.

How to implement inclusive brand communications

Ten ways to make a difference



01. Understand your audiences

It seems so simple to say, but as marketers in 2021 we must truly understand who our audiences are and the lives they live – keeping inclusivity front of mind. Now, this doesn't mean a new endless supply of customer personas or pen portraits. It means going beyond the norm with your CRM segmentation and onward audience research. If you'd like to discuss what this might look like, drop us a line.

If one of your products sells well in ultra-urban areas such as London, it's not enough to simply target 'young BPOC' consumers. Because there are so many different lived experiences and intersectional considerations within that audience segment.

02. Listen to them!

Once you've been able to identify your audiences for a particular product, campaign or communication, it's time to talk to them!

And no, asking Barry from HR what he thinks of a copy line because he's the only out gay guy on your floor is not good enough.

If you can't identify these audiences within your own databases by the innate fact that they are protected characteristics, then look elsewhere.

Speak to your market intelligence partners about any specialists in this field. At this point your sample sizes only need to be small, as qualitative is key to understanding the lived experience of your current and potential audiences.

02

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03. Build representative creative teams

Say for example you're working on a campaign for a local police force to help them recruit more BPOC police officers, your audiences are BPOC people in your local area who have a driver for justice and serving their community. Obviously as per step 2, you'll already be speaking to a number of intersections of these communities...

But, think about it. Who's going to be placed to understand the drivers of the local BPOC community to apply for the police force? They are. As a creative leader, you are well within your jurisdiction to select a representative creative team. And if you don't already have them within your permanent team, hire in freelancers best suited for the job (and pay them properly for it!).

Note:
positive action
vs.
positive discrimination

Reaching out to recruit representative creative teams is done under the guise of 'Positive Action' – a process in which it is identified that an employee (regardless of freelancer, temp or perm) is selected on the basis of protected characteristics (such as sexual orientation, race or gender) due to the needs of the role and the business (such as searching for a queer copywriter to work on a campaign targeting the LGBTQ+ community). This became legal due to a 2011 amendment to the Equality Act 2010 under UK law.

This is very clearly different to 'Positive Discrimination', whereby a candidate is selected based on a protected characteristic, rather than on qualifications or merit. This is illegal under the Equality Act 2010 (such as hiring a woman with lower qualifications than male candidates purely based on her gender where no specific requirement is outlined in the job role).

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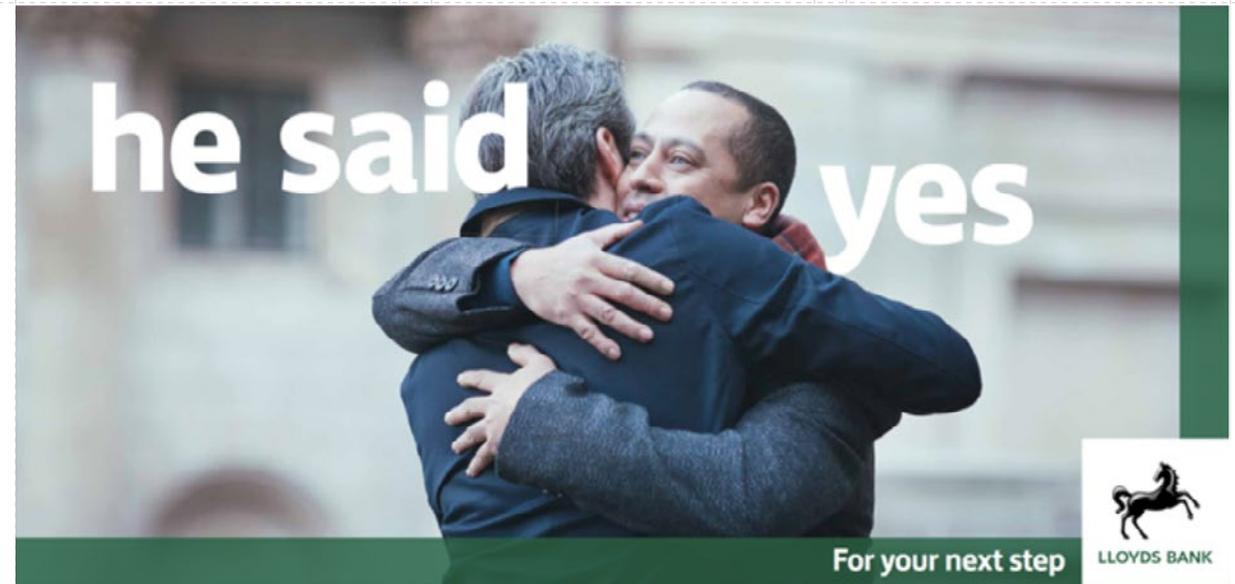
04. Be sensitive to cultures you don't understand

It's not a failure to admit that there are cultures that you just 'don't get'. But don't make that mean you shy away from trying to represent them within your brand communications.

Take time to understand them, but don't fall to stereotypes.

Speak to representative groups if you need support on how to communicate with certain audiences. They'll be much more open to an honest conversation at the outset, than after a poorly executed campaign that further marginalises them.

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05. Make inclusivity ordinary

Whilst there are situations in which highlighting diversity is a key part of your brand strategy, such as a brand activism campaign or highlighting your brand purpose (if appropriate and authentic), there is nothing more powerful for progress than normalising it.

For example, Lloyds Bank recognised that we all go through key life events for which they can support their customers. Just by having one of a series of posters featuring a same sex couple, they did so much more for inclusivity than painting a logo with on a sandwich (sorry M&S).



06. Keep it authentic – live your brand

You will no doubt have heard terms such as pink washing, rainbow washing, or virtue signalling over the past few years. To avoid being labelled with one of these terms, it is important that your communications are authentic to your brand.

In this 'Glassbox' era, brand managers can no longer control what parts of an organisation their audiences can see. From Glassdoor to Twitter, the actions your brand takes are laid out bare and plain for all to see.

Posting a black tile on your Instagram to support BLM, but not driving forward positive action within your business for people of colour will go down like a lead balloon and you may be accused of tokenism.

Now that's not to say that you have to be the perfect organisation in the world to be able to have diverse and reflective communications, but you must be honest with where you are in your journey as a business. Be clear about the fact that diverse brand communications are just one strand in a programme of transformation for your business.

07. Check it, test it, review it, and test it again

Hopefully by the time you reach point 6, you've already built up a number of people that you can have open conversations with – not just as a final testing point, but throughout the creative process.

Just because as a creative director or a brand manager you don't quite like it, doesn't mean it's not the right approach. Speak to those people from the representative communities you've already engaged – invite them into the creative process, feeding back regularly. And don't be afraid to go back to the drawing board if you've got it wrong.

08. Don't be afraid to get it wrong

Truth be told, you can do all the audience testing in the world, but you may still not get it right. People can be forgiving, as long as your intentions are honourable. If something doesn't quite go to plan, listen to those who've called it out. Invite them to converse with you about what they felt wasn't right. And acknowledge publicly if you've got it wrong – your audiences will forgive you.

Brands that have truly been 'cancelled' because of their communications have often been targeted because they didn't engage with the communities beforehand, went so far off course it was truly offensive, or, (more often) refused to take responsibility for their actions.

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06

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09. Forget the haters and hold your ground

As we've said, this report is not to help you develop a brand activism campaign, rather about creating inclusive communications that you deliver day to day. Whilst delivering these communications, there might well be some trolls lying out there in the depths of the internet, waiting to pounce when they see people that don't look like them or stories they don't immediately identify with. Don't let the haters hate and stick to your ground. The worst thing you can do is back track and apologise to those people who've challenged genuine inclusive brand communications.

In 2020, when Sainsbury's released a set of adverts depicting Christmas for different families, many responded shockingly to the 'Gravy Boat Song' video, which featured a black family celebrating Christmas and a telephone call between a father and daughter who express their excitement for the big day.

The father sings the "Gravy Boat Song" during a heart-warming



montage of home video footage as they share festive memories of past Christmases.

Some took offense to this, and showed the rest of the country that racism was still alive and well in the UK:



But, rather than back down (or conversely aggressively engage the haters on social media), Sainsbury's released this statement:

"At Sainsbury's, we want to be the most inclusive retailer. That's why, throughout all our advertising we aim to represent a modern Britain, which has a diverse range of communities. We have three stories of three different families in our advertising."

"What Christmas will look like is uncertain for everyone at the moment, but we wanted to focus on how food can connect people, whether they're physically together or not. These ads aim to evoke memories of Christmas food, which can transport you home, wherever you are."

No apologies because they knew they were doing the right thing, on the right side of history.

10. Keep pushing forward

We will only enter a world of inclusive brand communications when people like YOU keep pushing forward. Before representation can become the norm in communications and society more widely, we must continue to ensure that marginalised communities are seen, not only by themselves, but by others too.

The world is changing, and it is with people such as yourselves (as members of a certain community or a powerful ally) that we can ensure that brands are truly representational.



If you'd like to
discuss how psLondon
can help you make the
shift to more inclusive
communications, email:
alex@pslondon.co.uk

