

Barriers to Representative Advertising

September 2021

FACEBOOK



In a recent survey of United States consumers, only 41% said they feel represented in the ads that they see.¹

Source: ¹ Underrepresentation and Misrepresentation Have No Place in Advertising Today—Insights from the Geena Davis Institute’s CEO, Ad Week, 2020

Note: Unless otherwise specified, all quantitative data comes from Facebook-commissioned study by Deloitte Consulting LLP, Business Equality Research Survey (n=381) Adults 18+ who self-identified as working Advertising, Marketing or Media, US, CA March 2021.

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising has the power to shape our world. When done well, it reflects our innermost desires, feeds our greatest aspirations, and fuels our feelings of hope and belonging. The stories we see in advertising shape how we see ourselves, and each other. But for too long, the sense of belonging was reserved for a very narrow audience, leaving only 41% of US consumers feeling represented in the ads they see.

Like the rest of society, the growing trend in advertising is to ensure our institutions are better representing and truly including the people we serve. In the past few years, the industry has witnessed an awakening: the status quo in advertising is leaving out or

misrepresenting people of varied backgrounds, shapes, shades, sizes, mindsets and abilities and holding businesses back from turning them into customers.

In short, the industry began to realize it was time for advertising to serve all people.

With this challenge set before us, many in the advertising industry started extensive conversations and initiatives to educate ourselves. The industry is not alone in this push towards inclusion: there is increased attention around representation in society, with more and more organizations (including our own) making public statements in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Companies have begun to find expertise in this area, and eighty five of the top 100 corporations in the US have a chief diversity officer. (LA Times, 2021)

And yet... the increased attention makes it easier for leaders and organizations to say they support representation and inclusion, but without actually doing the work of building them into their processes and content, making progress superficial or short-lived.

That's because without accountability, the responsibility for ensuring advertising is representative and inclusive is distributed across the marketing ecosystem—from agencies to clients to end consumers. Ultimately, if everyone “owns” representation and inclusion, then no one owns it.

The result is that despite extensive research and widespread acknowledgement of the lack of representation in advertising, there needs to be meaningful, system-wide progress towards creating more inclusive content.

At Facebook, we sought to answer the question; what is holding the industry back?

We commissioned Deloitte Consulting LLP to conduct research that captures the thoughts, fears and ideas of marketing and advertising professionals across the spectrum: ranging from in-house brand teams to agencies to

practitioner levels to CMOs. What we found might surprise you. It might make you angry. It might make you rethink your team.

We hope it will move you the way it moved us. We hope it will help you go back to your organizations and pick apart these barriers to enact real change. Most of all, we hope that we can all come together, as an industry, to dismantle these barriers and make real progress.



SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The research surfaced five key barriers to representation and inclusion in advertising in the United States and Canada



The industry itself is not diverse

The advertising industry—across the ecosystem and at all levels—is not representative, which is itself a barrier to creating representative and inclusive content.

Lack of leadership mandate

Some organizations lack a clear mandate and active support from their leadership to create representative and inclusive content.

Difficulty valuing long term benefits

Marketing organizations are better equipped to understand short-term costs and potential risks than they are to measure the positive impacts of representation and inclusion on long term business outcomes.

Agencies reacting to client direction

Without a mandate from their clients, agency leaders are not incentivized to invest in creating representative and inclusive content.

Lack of awareness of tools and resources

Individuals lack awareness of and access to the knowledge, skills, resources, and tools to create representative and inclusive content.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research aims to answer the question:

What are the barriers—within individuals, organizations, and across the marketing and advertising ecosystem—to more inclusive and representative advertising?

In addition to a literature review of 24 articles, the research comprised three channels to collect quantitative and qualitative data from marketing and advertising professionals within the United States and Canada: an industry survey, focus groups, and executive interviews.

The terms “representative” and “inclusive” are used in specific ways throughout this research:

- Content is **“representative”** if individuals with various facets of identity (including—but not limited to—race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, LGBTQ+ status, socioeconomic status, ability, body type, religion, and age) are present.
- Content is **“inclusive”** if it portrays individuals in ways that are authentic and non-stereotypical and promotes and embraces the unique facets of identity of all individuals so that all feel welcome, understood, and valued.

Barrier 1

The industry itself is not diverse



“It is important to have people on your team who have lived experiences. Training is not enough.”

In-House Digital Marketer, Focus Group

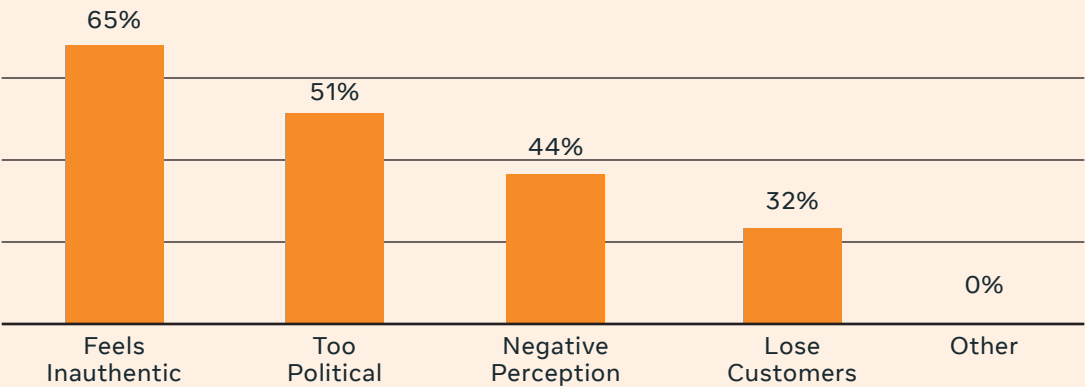
The advertising industry—across the ecosystem and at all levels—is not representative, which is itself a barrier to creating representative and inclusive content. Authenticity is a key component of representative and inclusive content, and diverse teams are required to create truly authentic content.

65%

of survey respondents said a **risk to creating more representative and inclusive content is that it can be perceived as inauthentic**— the most of any category



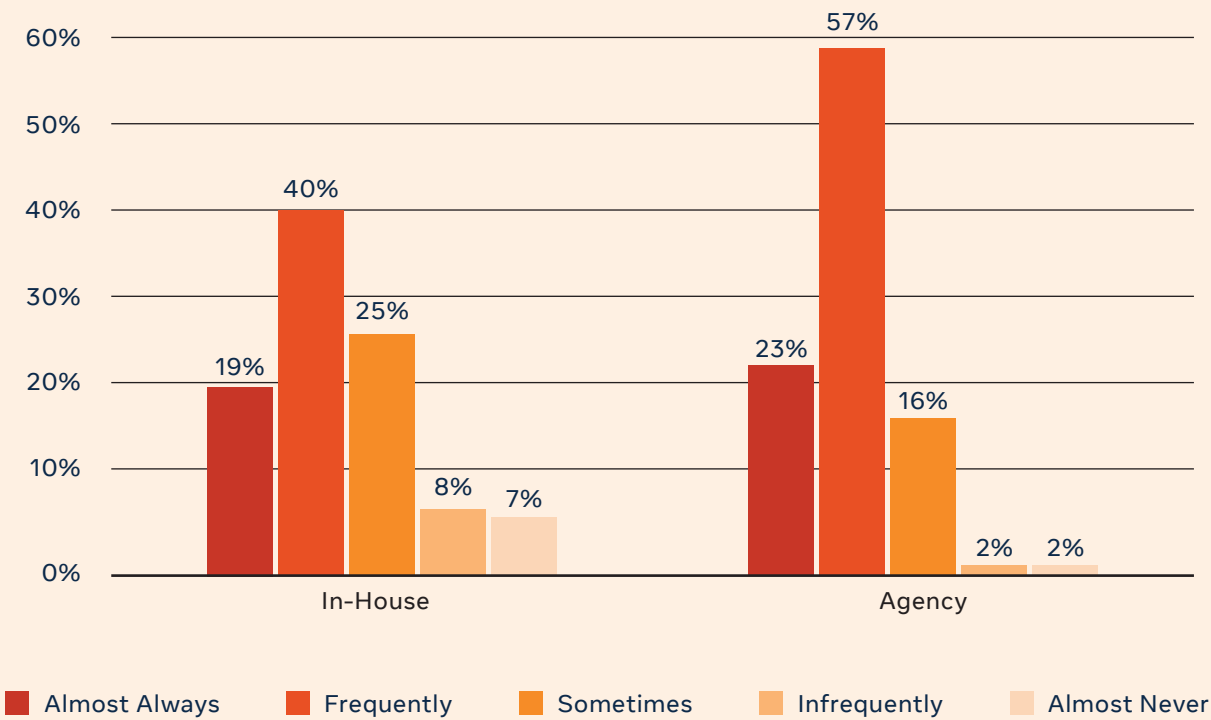
How does creating more representative and inclusive advertising content pose a risk to your company’s or clients’ brand(s)? (n=170)



Our research revealed that the biggest risk to not creating representative and inclusive content is not appealing to a diverse population.

While 100% of executives interviewed said that diverse teams are important to creating representative and inclusive content, only 19% of in-house and 23% of agency survey respondents reported that their leader almost always considers the demographic diversity of their team when developing content.

How frequently does your leader consider the demographic composition and diversity of your team when developing advertising content? (Agency n=196, In-House n=178)



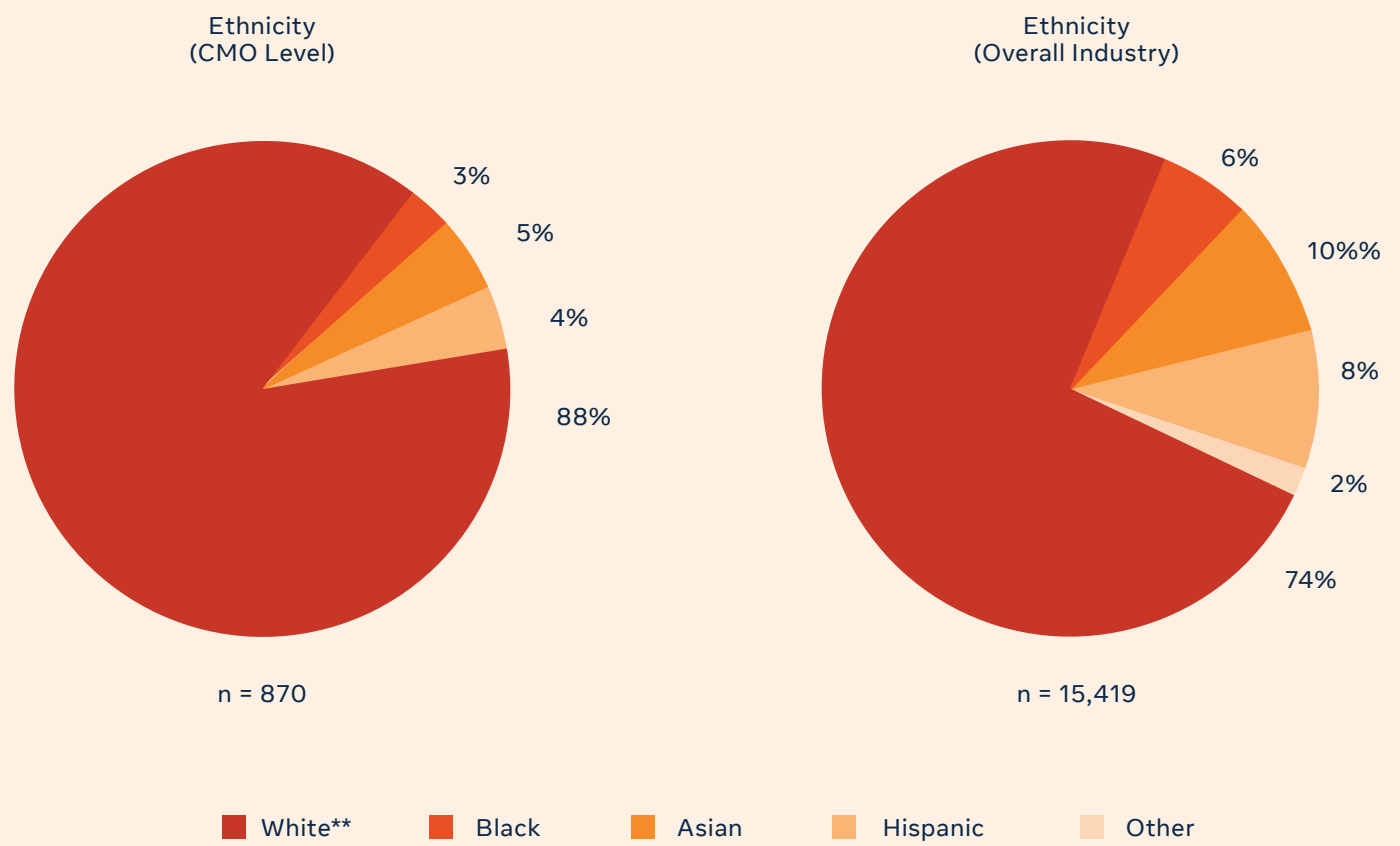
“The network-driven nature of this industry perpetuates the status quo.”

CEO of Marketing and Research Firm, Interview

There is a perception that current hiring practices, coupled with competition for diverse talent, make it difficult to increase representation. Focus group and interview participants said they rely heavily on networks or go back to the same target schools for prospective candidates.

Sample Industry Demographic Data

For the past three years, the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) has published a [diversity report](#) for the industry, quantifying the demographic breakdown of its client-side members. The below charts show the ethnic* breakdown of ANA members in 2020. Almost no progress towards diversifying the industry has been made, as the data for 2019 and 2018 is nearly identical.



* Ethnicity is the term used in the ANA report to describe the data shown above.
** The ANA report uses the term "Caucasian," but has been updated here to reflect leading practices.

“Competition for talent is fierce, and marketing and advertising are not always the most popular amongst potential applicants.”

Industry Body Executive, Interview



TAKEAWAY

Leaders agree that diverse teams are required to create representative and inclusive content, but the current lack of diversity within the industry makes it challenging to do so. A sustained, industry-wide effort to attract and retain diverse talent, especially in key leadership and decision-making roles, is needed to enable representation and inclusion in content.



SOLUTIONS THOUGHT STARTERS FROM DELOITTE

- Develop industry-wide networks and guidelines to help identify and attract diverse talent
- Create programming for students around careers in marketing and advertising, with a particular emphasis on schools that serve historically underrepresented communities
- Release transparency reports by company with disaggregated representation data by level, and then set quantitative aspirational goals for increasing representation, driving advancement and retention—across the industry to drive conversation and accountability
- Assess the workforce experience of different identity groups and review talent processes for equitable outcomes

Barrier 2

Lack of leadership mandate



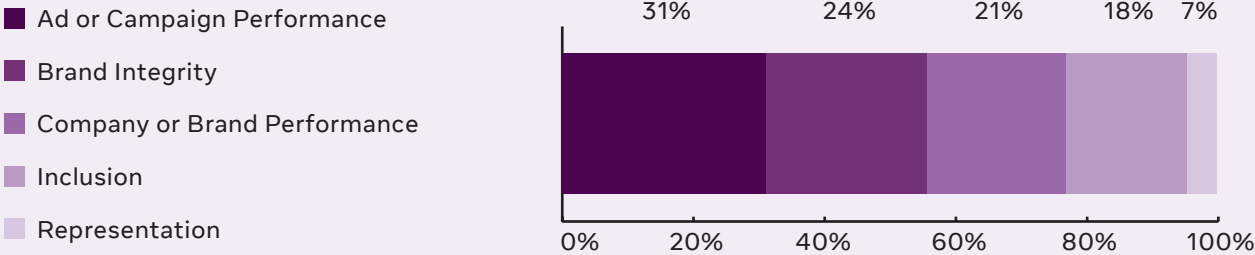
“The conversation has to start at the very top and work its way down. It has to be a part of every aspect of the business.”

In-House Digital Marketing Executive, Interview

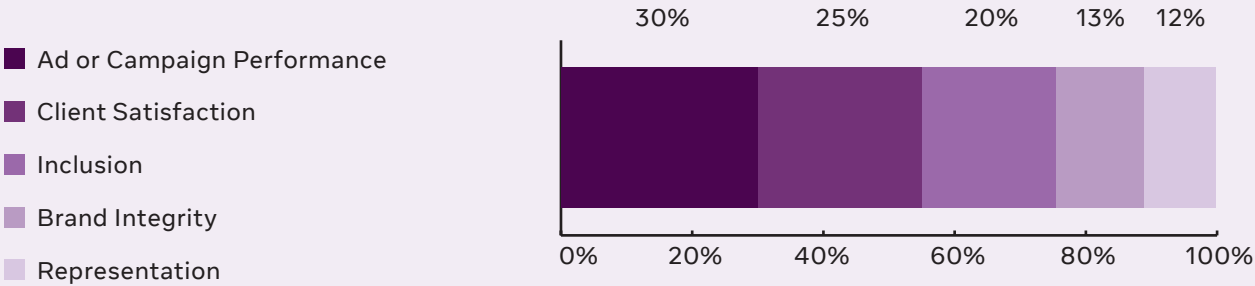
Many organizations lack a clear mandate and active support from their leadership to create representative and inclusive content. To enable the creation of representative and inclusive advertising, organizational leaders need to set the tone and direction.

Representation and inclusion are not the top priorities for organizations when creating advertising content. When asked to rank their organizations’ priorities when it comes to creating advertising content, 75% of in-house survey respondents ranked other priorities higher than representation and inclusion.

In-House - Rank the priorities by level of importance for your organization when creating advertising content (n = 178)



Agency - Rank the priorities by level of importance for your agency when creating advertising content (n = 214)



“We are motivated by our end consumer, so if it’s not a priority to them, it is unlikely that we will prioritize it.”

In-House Marketer, Focus Group

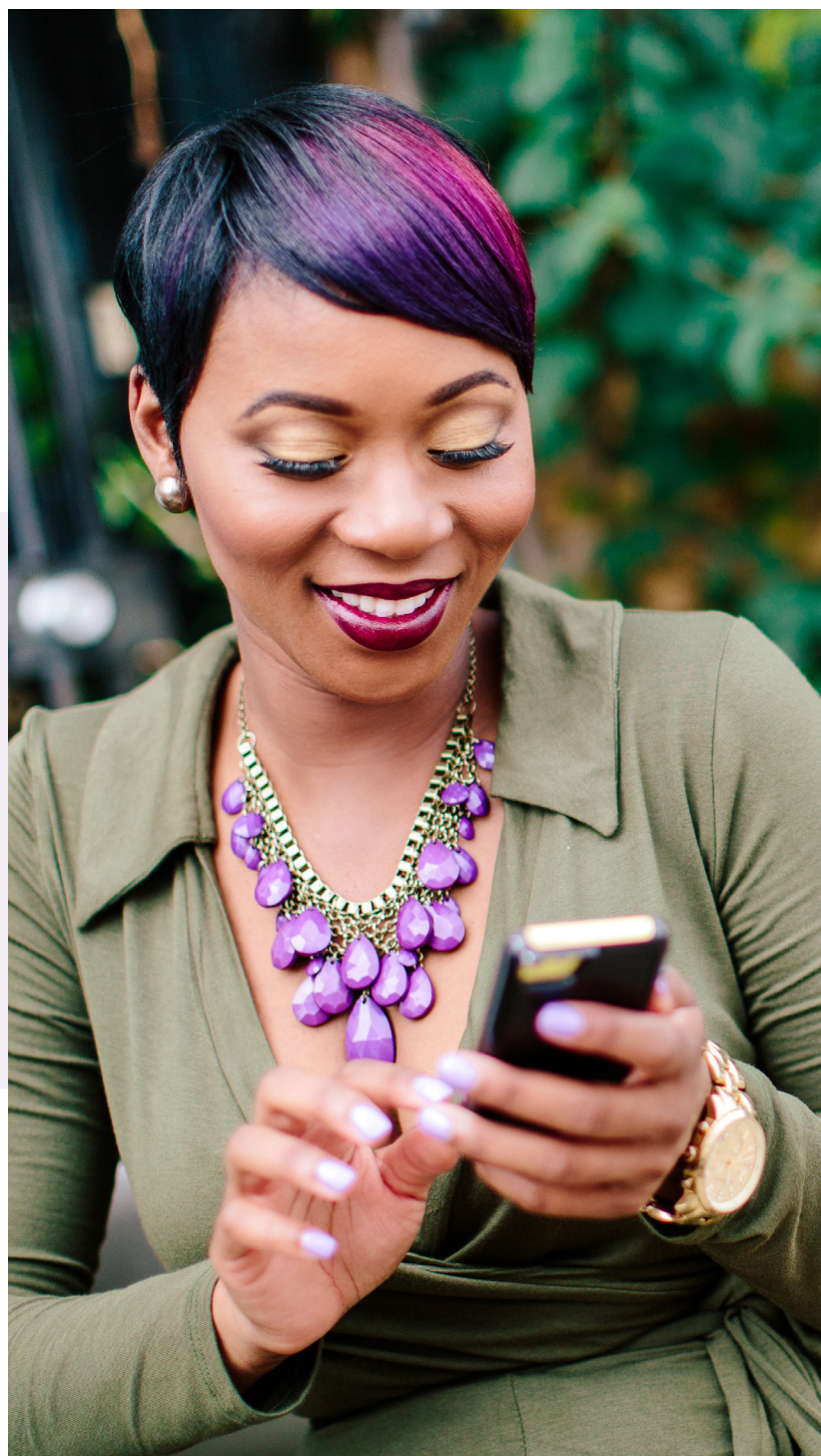
For both in-house and agency respondents, “representation” was ranked as the least important priority.

Organizations need more specific guidance from leadership as to how to create representative and inclusive advertising.

Just

27%

of survey respondents said they can tell representation and inclusion are important to leadership at their organization because they **have a formal process or mechanism in place** to make sure content is representative



“While most leaders have great talking points about why this conversation is important, very few know exactly how to influence change. We need tools and frameworks, not just sentiment.”

Agency Chief Strategy Officer, Interview



TAKEAWAY

Organizations and professionals need more specificity from their leaders around creating representative and inclusive content, including why it is important for advertising content and guidance around how to execute representative and inclusive content.



SOLUTIONS THOUGHT STARTERS FROM DELOITTE

- Compile best practices for enabling representation and inclusion and adapt them to specifically address advertising and media content
- Educate marketing and advertising leaders and equip them with tools to effectively communicate the importance of representative and inclusive content
- Host targeted training around representation and inclusion for marketing and advertising professionals specifically
- Build a diverse network of industry experts who can provide expertise to leaders looking to implement processes that promote representation and inclusion in advertising at their organizations

Barrier 3

Difficulty Valuing Long Term Benefits



“The vast majority of my clients don’t even have the capability to track the performance of their ads by demographic group.”

CEO of a Marketing Consultancy, Interview

Marketing organizations are better equipped to understand short-term costs and potential risks than they are to measure the positive impact of representation and inclusion on long-term business outcomes. Many organizations do not have the capabilities nor infrastructure required to measure the impact of representation and inclusion on business outcomes.

INCREASED, MEASURABLE SHORT-TERM COSTS

Interview and focus group participants listed several short-term costs.

- The financial cost of developing, implementing, and maintaining trainings
- Staff time to participate in trainings
- The financial and opportunity cost of finding, vetting, testing, and implementing new methods and tools
- The switching costs of using a different, more inclusive agency (including sourcing, interviewing, and onboarding, as well as any financial incentives associated with incumbent relationships)

54%

of survey respondents **indicated their leaders do not draw a connection** between creating representative and inclusive content and company performance.



“It takes time and money to find the right tools that promote representative and inclusive ads.”

In-House Senior Marketing Director, Focus Group



POLARIZATION AND HEIGHTENED SCRUTINY

There are perceived risks to being more representative and inclusive in general, especially in a moment of such polarization and heightened scrutiny. Respondents fear the risks of being viewed as political and of negative public perception, especially in today's climate.

57%

of senior leader and 53% of C-Suite respondents to the survey said that creating representative and inclusive content is a **risk to their company's or clients' brands**

51%

of survey respondents said a risk to creating representative and inclusive content is that it **might be viewed as too political**

44%

of respondents said **it could be perceived negatively by the public**

“Our core customer base is the bread and butter of our business and we can’t afford to push them away.”

In-House CRM Manager, Focus Group



ALIENATING CORE CUSTOMERS

Discussions centered around the fear of losing customers and ultimately damaging the business results. Many focus group discussions highlighted the risk of losing customers as a risk to creating more representative and inclusive content.



4/5

focus group discussions **highlighted the risk of losing customers** as a risk to creating more representative and inclusive content



TAKEAWAY

While marketing organizations learn how to best measure the impact of representation and inclusion, the more easily quantified short-term costs and high perceived risks may act as a deterrent to creating more representative and inclusive content.



SOLUTIONS THOUGHT STARTERS FROM DELOITTE

- Amplify existing research that articulates the long-term business impacts of representative and inclusive advertising
- Leverage data and analytics to make measurement easier and develop tools that lower short-term costs
- Amplify quantifiable “success stories” around representation and inclusion to lower perceived risks and educate end-consumers
- Develop custom surveys for brands to measure customer sentiment around representation and inclusion
- Publish an annual report with aggregate demographic data of customers to help demonstrate the diversity of end-consumers
- Develop campaigns to highlight the awareness of the importance of representation and inclusion for end-consumers and encourage them to demand more representation and inclusion and hold the industry accountable

Barrier 4

Agencies reacting to client direction



“Client satisfaction is the most important objective. So, it can be hard to prioritize diversity and inclusion if it isn’t important to the client.”

Agency Professional, Focus Group

Without a mandate from their clients, agency leaders are not incentivized to invest in creating representative and inclusive content. Agencies are reactive to clients' needs, and while they are willing to create representative and inclusive content, clients are not explicitly demanding it.

AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

32%

of agency survey respondents said almost all their clients are asking about **representation**

38%

said almost all their clients are asking about **inclusion**

CLIENT PERSPECTIVE

37%

of client survey respondents said they ask their agencies about **representation** for almost every campaign

43%

said they ask their agencies about **inclusion** for almost every campaign

93%

of agency survey respondents said they would be very receptive or receptive to additional guidance or tools around how to address representation and inclusion in advertising, which suggests they **would be willing to create more representative and inclusive content should the ask come from their clients**

“The in-house marketing teams have to push the conversation when they want representative content.”

Industry Body Executive, Interview



TAKEAWAY

The “business case” for agencies is around meeting their client’s needs. If clients are not explicitly asking for representative and inclusive content, agencies will not prioritize it, even if they would be otherwise willing.

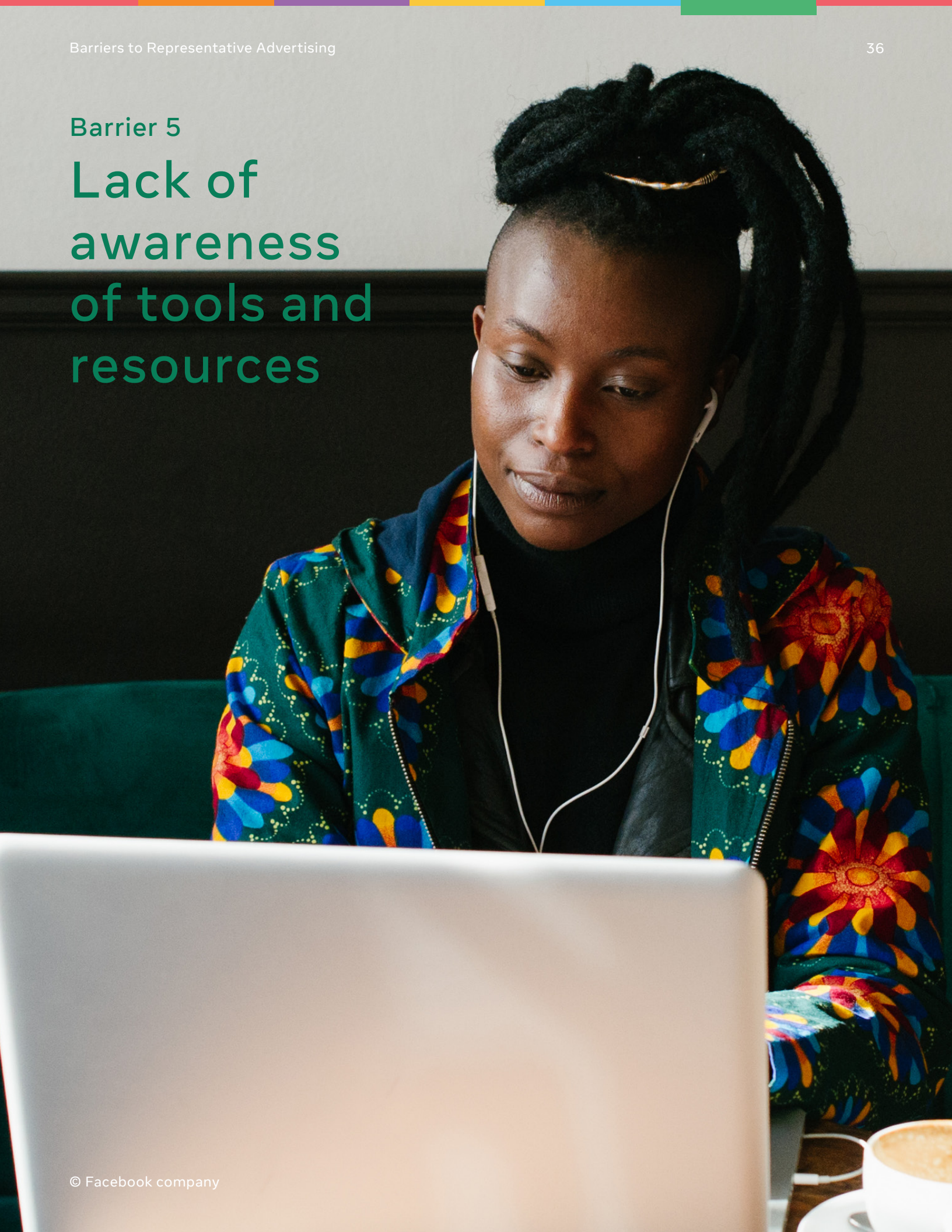


SOLUTIONS THOUGHT STARTERS FROM DELOITTE

- Develop tools to facilitate the potentially uncomfortable conversations between in-house marketers and agencies around representation and inclusion
- Develop resources and trainings for agencies to lower the cost of staying informed of leading practices regardless of whether clients are demanding it

Barrier 5

Lack of awareness of tools and resources



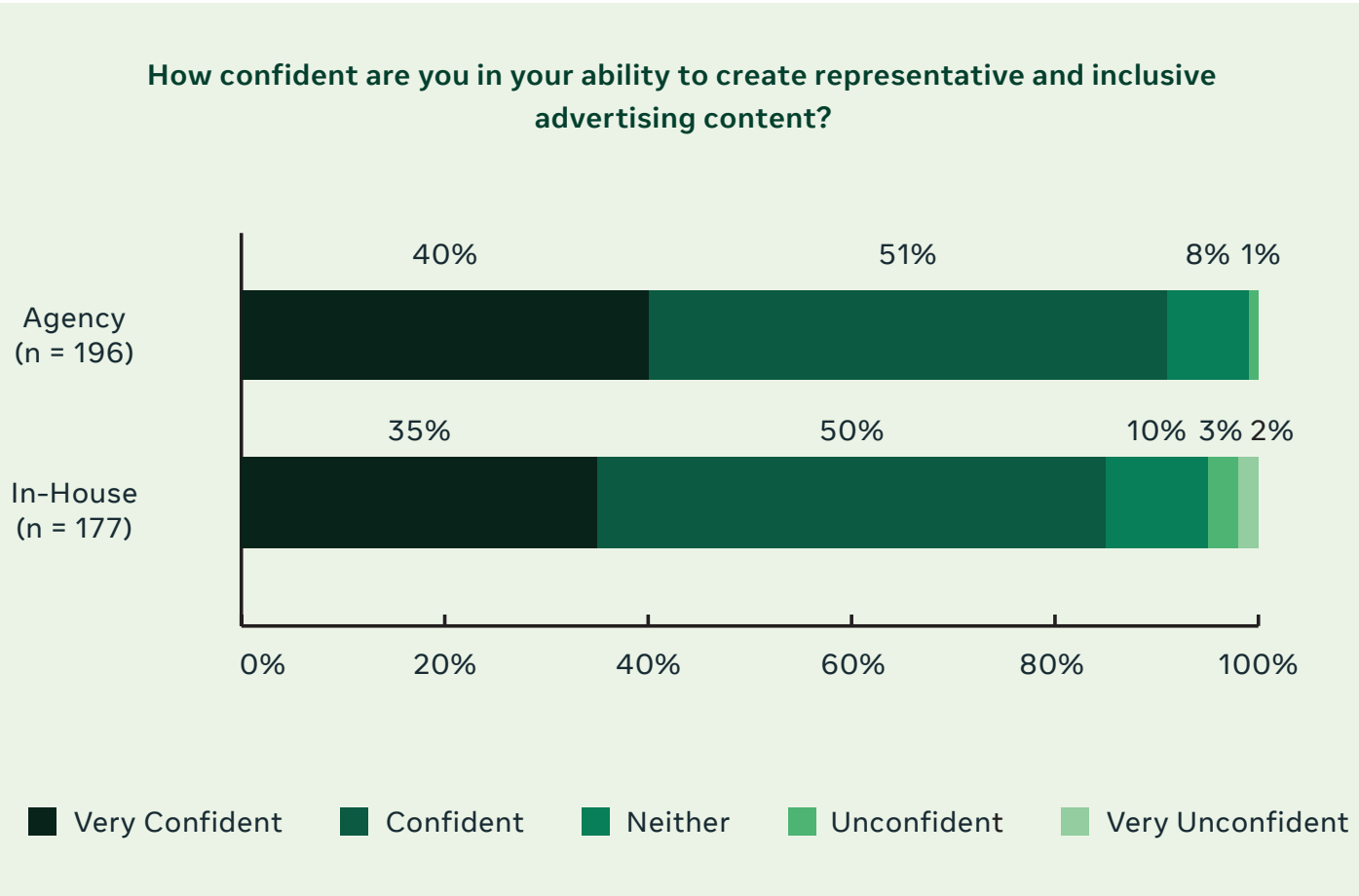
“If given the proper time and resources, we could implement the steps necessary to make more inclusive and representative content.”

Creative Director, Focus Group

Individuals lack awareness of and access to the knowledge, skills, resources, and tools to create representative and inclusive content. Individuals are confident in their ability to create representative and inclusive content, but only if provided with adequate tools and resources.

91%

of agency survey respondents and 85% of in-house respondents **are very confident or confident in their ability to create advertising content that is representative and inclusive**



“Even for me, as a Latina woman in marketing, it can be hard to develop content that resonates without furthering stereotypes or other harmful outcomes.”

SVP Strategy, Multicultural Agency, Interview

TOOLS RESEARCH

An additional stream of research was conducted specifically around the resources marketers and advertisers are using to make their content more representative and inclusive. That work uncovered 22 tools across five categories that can be used throughout the content creation process that offer feedback to a brand on the progress made on inclusive representation on the creative assets they've sought to have reviewed. The categories are tools, checklists, style guides, frameworks and networks. Example resources include:

- Last 5 Ads (Facebook)
- The Heat Test Toolkit (Deloitte Digital)
- Content Creators' STEM toolkit (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media)
- Cultural Insights Impact Measure™ - CIIM™
- ANA SeeHer, GEM®, Gender Equality Measure



AWARENESS, ADOPTION AND SIMPLICITY

When assessing the tools and resources, there is room for growth in awareness and adoption, as well as an opportunity to evolve the tools themselves.

CLIENT RESPONDENTS

33%

of client respondents
are aware of existing tools

30%

of client respondents
regularly use these tools

AGENCY RESPONDENTS

59%

of client respondents
are aware of existing tools

53%

of client respondents
regularly use these tools



Both in-house and agency survey respondents said they most frequently engage in conversations about representation and inclusion while identifying the target audience for their campaigns. Only 4 tools are designed to be used during this step in the content creation process.

68%

of tools **are designed to be used during production or later, when it may be too late** to make meaningful changes to content

18%

are used after the campaign is already live



TAKEAWAY

Marketing and advertising professionals are either unaware of existing tools or do not have the resources they need in the most impactful moments in the content creation process.



SOLUTIONS THOUGHT STARTERS FROM DELOITTE

- Develop a hub and programming to amplify existing effective tools to increase awareness
- Develop a tool or set of tools that can be leveraged earlier in the content creation process, especially in early moments where conversations around representation and inclusion are already taking place
- Articulate a definition for what successful representative and inclusive content looks like

Solving the Problems



The scope of our research was to uncover the barriers to more inclusive and representative advertising, but understanding the problems is just the first step. Now, it's up to us - the marketers, advertisers, agencies, and even consumers in the industry - to work collectively to overcome them. While no individual or organization can do it alone, we each have a responsibility to move towards a more inclusive industry. We need progress, not perfection - doing nothing is not an option.

Now it's up to you: we encourage you to share these findings with your organization, and as you do, leverage these solution thought starters to help overcome the barriers and strive for more inclusive and representative advertising.



THE INDUSTRY ITSELF IS NOT DIVERSE

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LACK OF LEADERSHIP MANDATE

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VALUING LONG TERM BENEFITS

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AGENCIES REACTING TO CLIENT DIRECTION

- Develop tools to facilitate the potentially uncomfortable conversations between in-house marketers and agencies around representation and inclusion
- Develop resources and trainings for agencies to lower the cost of staying informed of leading practices regardless of whether clients are demanding it



LACK OF AWARENESS OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES

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