

LGBTQIA+ CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF BRAND REPRESENTATION: EXPLORING
THE TENSIONS BETWEEN STORYTELLING AND ACTION

by

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**LGBTQIA+ Consumer Perceptions of Brand Representation:
Exploring the Tensions Between Storytelling and Action**

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Representation matters.

- Detavious J. Hill

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Abstract

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LGBTQIA+ visibility in marketing and advertising has gained momentum since the late 1960s. Inspired by the increased visibility, this study explores the responses of Generation Z LGBTQIA+ self-identifying individuals through in-depth interviews to gain a better understanding from LGBTQIA+ communities including their reaction to representation in marketing and advertising. LGBTQIA+ individuals welcome its community's representation in brand strategy but is most supportive to the consumer brand relationship when done through storytelling paired with organizational action(s).

However, tensions present themselves for the Generation Z LGBTQIA+ consumer when brands contribute to controversial situations or are perceived to have misrepresentative brand strategy.

Given the embedded context of the consumer brand relationship, the proposed model presents identified factors to help formulate a supportive consumer brand relationship, but when support is weak, a tension between LGBTQIA+ consumers and perceived brand support is created.

Introduction

Given momentum in the wake of the 1969 Stonewall riots and from the gay rights movement of the late 1960s, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) representation in advertising moved from niche to mainstream (Tsai, 2010). For example, Tsai (2010) has documented the increase in “out of the closet” mainstream advertising, with greater visibility of LGBT communities, an important recognition in capitalist cultures. Further, the gay rights movement – or gay liberation front – has revealed ways in which LGBT communities use collective action and work within commercial systems to reward supportive brands or punish, such as through boycotting, those that are seen as misrepresentative or anti-LGBT (Leighton, 2019).

In recent years, numerous mainstream brands have advocated for more LGBT rights through various levels of commitment ranging from messaging campaigns, such as Burger King’s 2014 “Proud Whopper,” which reached more than 20% of the U.S. population, to Honey Maid’s “This is Wholesome” ad campaign featuring same sex parenting (Snyder, 2015). Such strategies may be inspired by research suggesting that three quarters or more of younger consumers (i.e., Generation Z and Millennials) believe it is important for brands to take a stand on social issues (Sprout Social, 2019). Yet, this visibility and advocacy, testing boundaries and confronting dominant views (Taylor, 2022), have brought challenges and opportunities, and raise questions about the ways in which these representations are received by LGBT consumers.

In calling for further research on the impacts of LGBT representations, Tsai (2010) argues, “In spite of gay advertising's explicit and prominent inclusion of LGBT subjectivities, it selectively represents the subgroups most akin to mainstream standards and accordingly constructs queerness around heteronormative ideologies. The radical and subversive potential of queerness is filtered out to perpetuate the capitalistic, racial, patriarchal, and heteronormative

hegemony.” This research responds to such concerns regarding the “washing” of mainstream messaging by examining responses of not just LGBT people, but including more communities within LGBT, such as queer, intersex, asexual, and others (LGBTQIA+). Broadly, the research calls upon LGBTQIA+ consumers to reflect and react to representations of gay culture in mainstream advertising. Gen Z is defined as the generation of people born between the late 1990s and early 2010s (Wong-Li, 20203). As the first generation of true digital natives (Gomez 2023), Gen Z is important to study because, as consumers, they look for new and creative ways to engage with brands that are affordable and trendy (Wong-Li, 2023). Partnered with larger disposable income (\$360 billion), businesses are on a mission to strategize how to market to Gen Z (Fromm, 2022).

For Gen Z consumers, they are more likely to boycott a product from a brand whose morals they disagree with (Fromm, 2022). Decades of unstable representation have led to obvious challenges and opportunities in communication strategies aimed at LGBTQIA+ communities. I will explore the avenues of struggle and success – staged on historical context and on Avery’s theory of support and Fournier’s typology of consumer-brand relationships as enabling theories – regarding LGBTQIA+ representations in advertising and their impact on LGBTQIA+ consumer brand perceptions.

First, I offer a brief overview of the history of LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, highlighting more recent emphases on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives in advertising. Given some of the LGBTQIA+ advertising strategies that emerge out of the historical record, including “gay vague” advertising, as well as criticisms such as “woke washing,” I next examine scholarship on these issues. More recently, brand response to years of sustained critique of absent or inaccurate representations and to consumers who seek brands that take stands, scholars have worked to conceptualize and understand the social and business

impacts of brand activism. Lastly, I'll examine the theoretical frameworks of Fournier (1998) and Avery (2011) and synthesize them to identify influential factors to Gen Z LGBTQIA+ perceptions of representation in brand strategy.

Literature Review

History of LGBTQIA+ Representation in Marketing and Advertising

Scholars have long researched stereotyping of gender roles from socially constructed beliefs and how those gender roles are represented through marketing and advertising (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Originally, the predominant focus was on the roles of men and women and how men tend to be portrayed as dominant and independent while women are placed in decorative and submissive roles (Grau & Zotos, 2016). As social climate changes, brands have worked to decrease gender role stereotyping and to expand the range of roles afforded to men and women to a wider range of gender representation (i.e., sexual orientation, gender identity, relationship status, etc.) with areas of ambiguity left for the consumer to interpret (Tsai, 2010; Grau & Zotos, 2016). For a better understanding of the changing social climate, I offer brief historical milestones in LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising.

Berstein et al. (2020, p. 396) define diversity as “the representation in one social system of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance.” As Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) have become a top priority for consumers and employees, it is important to highlight the overarching themes emerging from research on DEI. In the 1970s, Absolut Vodka became one of the first brands to market in regional queer news (Telford, 2023). Then, in 1994 IKEA ran a TV commercial that caught the attention of millions of people as a breakthrough for LGBTQIA+ representation in “mainstream” advertising (Tsai, 2010; Telford 2023). In 1999, President Clinton declared June Gay and Lesbian Pride Month, the presence of LGBTQIA+ marketing began to increase (Telford, 2023). More marketing meant more

representation of LGBTQIA+ communities. In the early 2000s-2010s, narratives of gay men as the “dream consumer” and hyperfeminized “lipstick lesbians” became the extent of LGBTQIA+ consumers representation (Nölke, 2018).

An important observation made by Nölke (2018) is that as gay men and hyperfeminized lesbians were included, other identities in LGBTQIA+ communities were made nonexistent (Nölke, 2018). Until the late 2010s, struggles between open support and “gay vague” advertising developed as brands grew fearful of how much integration of LGBTQIA+ representation would make them lose their straight supporters (Telford, 2023).

“Gay vague advertising” is described as using ambiguous cues and covertly targeting gay audiences – those “in the know” will get it – with messaging that sails over the heads of those who are not in LGBTQIA+ groups (Hicks, 2011; Puntoni, Vanhamme & Visscher, 2011). Gay vague advertising allows advertisers to use cues only LGBTQIA+ members would understand while simultaneously having a level of invisibility because of the symbols that are not easily identifiable by heterosexuals, depending on their level of cultural exposure (Puntoni, Vanhamme & Visscher, 2011).

Depictions of gay men predominately exist in mass media through entertainment, fashion, and alcohol advertising, which have given LGBTQIA+ communities elevated economic and social status, making their presence in those markets appear more frequently (Tsai, 2010). Gay men and lesbians have been deemed as dream consumers with high levels of education, disposable income, luxurious lifestyles, and having sophisticated taste, thereby creating an avenue of marketing opportunity for brand strategy (Tsai, 2010). Yet, while it can suggest a form of acknowledgement for LGBTQIA+ consumers, researchers argue that gay vague advertising may increase invisibility and contribute to the erasure of LGBTQIA+ individuals, ultimately

prioritizing heterosexual authority and perceived organizational insincerity to LGBTQIA+ representation (Tsai, 2011; Cheng, Zhou, & Yao, 2023).

As time passed since gay vague advertising and homosexuality in advertising became more visible, brands are challenged to stay connected with LGBTQIA+ audiences while maintaining the heterosexual need to still be the priority (Gong, 2020). As advertisers continue to move past or in some cases through the window of gay vagueness, the challenge that remains is how to include gay culture effectively into mainstream marketing without feeding into misleading stigmas and stereotypes (p. 919).

Whereas LGBTQIA+ activists were calling for improved representation and recognition by mainstream advertisers, not all recognition would yield positive outcomes. For example, Emory et al. (2019) argue that the tobacco industry was directly targeting LGBTQIA+ consumers, resulting in higher tobacco use in LGBTQIA+ communities, while anti-tobacco messaging decreased. This disconnect meant that LGBTQIA+ consumers lacked sufficient knowledge and resources for tobacco control and prevention. From that criticism, some brands have been held to a higher standard to provide the same level of support to consumers, specifically those marginalized, through resources and information (Emory et al., 2019; Telford, 2023).

As visibility rises, there are still many areas of improvement for representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in marketing and advertising. For example, companies continue to lack representation of other LGBTQIA+ identities such as non-binary, bisexual, and asexual. In addition, the bulk of LGBTQIA+ marketing representation remains during one month of the year, Pride (Telford, 2023). Improved, normalized representation of LGBTQIA+ people is imperative in challenging and debunking long-form stereotypes and misconceptions to advance LGBTQIA+ communities (Tsai, 2010).

Inclusiveness in advertising

Organizational support for diversity is an opportunity for employees to feel heard, seen and ultimately welcome in the environment (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013). [The U.S. Office of Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission non-discrimination policy states](#) that every individual has equal opportunity in the position for hire and is subject to equal and fair consideration (EEOC, 2020). However, this section closely examines inclusion because inclusive strategy helps individuals feel part of a greater picture or connected to a cause (Eisend et al., 2022).

Underdeveloped inclusion practices are a global phenomenon; though there is no denying that some countries are more advanced than others, most of them continuously fail to understand the many ways to be inclusive and its benefits. There are many areas of inclusivity, from language and verbiage to preferred pronouns to representation in mainstream media. Excluding target audiences through under or misrepresentation can affect how consumers start to view the represented groups in real life, affecting their self-esteem and social status, and may lead to consumer backlash and the tarnishing of the brand (Eisend et al., 2022; Licsandru & Cui 2018).

Brands tend to place minorities in their advertisements but without understanding the causes of stereotypes and the cultures and the lived realities of diverse consumers, making the brand diverse but not inclusive (Eisend et al., 2022; Licsandru & Cui 2018). Throughout history, gender has been the target of a system that perpetuates stereotypes and stigmas for both men and women. Through advertising, consumers are presented with a lot of stereotyping depicting women as housewives or in the background performing in minor roles as opposed to men who were featured performing more “successful” or “bread winner” roles like CEOs, accountants, and engineers to name a few (Eisend et al., 2022). Ideal inclusive advertising would frame not just

men and women, but people across gender and sexual spectrums in equally depicted roles (Eisend et al., 2022). Gender stereotyping is an issue today because of the potential to cause harm, normalizing assumptions on adults and children who negatively do not identify with those stereotypes and express concerns on how the individual and others see themselves (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020).

LGBTQIA+ people have always been underrepresented in marketing and media. Strategies that are misrepresentative to members of the LGBTQIA+ communities create a false and limited narrative of the community members that threatens their senses of self (Hoffman & Delahanty, 2021). LGBTQIA+ community members represent themselves based on a spectrum of gender identity and expression (transgender, nonbinary, nonconforming, etc.), age, body type, race, and ethnicity; that very representation provides the true value for LGBTQIA+ individuals, which is what the community wants to see in advertising and multimedia, not the same cookie cutter stereotypical cisgender white gay man or woman (Hoffman & Delahanty, 2021).

One imperative aspect to consider when approaching an inclusive centric marketing strategy is the intersectionality of identities (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020). For example, stereotyping for a gay, Muslim, disabled person would be different than a transgender, Black woman. On these terms, for people with intersected identities, facets of their identity can be singled out and further stigmatized such as being seen as a gay man *and* Muslim, but not as a gay man who also happens to be Muslim (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020; Hazzouri et al., 2019). Having an inclusive marketing strategy is how companies show not just their target audiences but also disadvantaged communities that they are recognized, supported, and included (Lawrence, 2018). Yet to develop inclusive strategies, it is important to understand what helps diverse and marginalized consumers feel included. The next section outlines brand activism and woke washing as it relates to LGBTQIA+ representation. In which both have grown popular in

recent years (since around 2019) as we've seen more brands taking stands on sociopolitical issues (Vredenberg et al. 2020).

Brand Activism and Woke Washing

Following the tobacco industry's integration of LGBTQIA+ representation and its criticisms, some argue that the absence of brand activism on issues faced by its consumers reflects poorly on a brand's morals and integrity (Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020). Vredenberg et al. (2020) define brand activism as purpose and value driven strategy to make nonneutral stances on sociopolitical issues to result in social change and marketing success. There have been instances where brands have joined conversations through marketing and advertising like [H&M's 'Beyond the Rainbow'](#), a campaign spreading awareness about the Pride flag in all its colors and variations.

In 2021, H&M launched "Beyond the Rainbow" in open and public support of the LGBTQIA+ communities to encourage its audience to share their stories (H&M, 2021). *Beyond the Rainbow* is a new feature in H&M's web app that allows users to scan any Pride flag to use a filter to take a picture and share their own story in that area. Additionally, H&M donated \$100,000 to the United Nations Free & Equal campaign that leads equal rights and treatment worldwide for LGBTQIA+ communities (H&M, 2021). The advertisement featured a variety of famous actors and actresses within LGBTQIA+ communities from many different identities. One star in particular, MJ Rodriguez, a famous open trans actress, told *Paper Magazine*, "With H&M, it's been nothing but beautiful and uplifting. I'm glad I got to do this yet again in a moment to really highlight our campaign" (Escalante, 2021). H&M's *Beyond the Rainbow* campaign exemplifies brand activism given the open support to LGBTQIA+ individuals through the new app feature and its dedication to equality and fairness through a significant financial contribution to a leading international LGBTQIA+ rights organization.

When brands make strides like this, they take a nonneutral stance on a sociopolitical issue and lead initiatives to create social change.

As brands and other markets continue to enter the brand activism space, studies indicate that 65% of individuals want companies to take a stance on public issues (Vredenberg et al., 2020). However, as more brands take positions on sociopolitical issues, their authenticity is often questioned. Since 2019, 56% of consumers have indicated that brands are too active in sociopolitical issues, using it solely as a marketing ploy to sell more of their products to a specific audience (Vredenberg et al., 2020). Having high activism marketing messaging but low engagement with the actual sociopolitical issue itself, exemplifies inauthentic brand activism or “woke washing” which is a barrier to a lot of consumers in trusting a brand’s messaging and purpose (Vredenberg et al., 2020).

In fact, during the timeframe in which the current research study was conducted, two high profile brands – Target and Bud Light – were at the epicenter of controversy around brand activism. In April 2023, Bud Light partnered with transgender social media influencer, Dylan Mulvaney, promoting the company’s “Easy Carry Contest” campaign. Almost immediately following the post, Mulvaney was faced with constant and aggressive backlash from right-wing politicians and other Bud Light consumers calling for boycott and revolting of the brand.

As the right-wing backlash continued with videos of individuals hooting and dumping cans of Bud Light, the company received bomb threats and Mulvaney received death threats (Wu, 2023). In the midst of the controversy, Mulvaney spoke to *The Washington Post* criticizing Bud Light for not offering her any support or resources during that difficult time, “For a company to hire a trans person and then not publicly stand by them is worse in my opinion than not hiring a trans person at all” (Wu, 2023). Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Bud Light stated the

company remains dedicated to partnering with and supporting LGBTQIA+ communities however they can.

During Pride month, Target faced major stock drops and backlash directed at the company and its employees for its annual Pride merchandise with LGBTQIA+ collaborators for some of the items in the 2023 summer collection. In response to the backlash, the company removed the controversial items and stores frantically pushed the collection to less accessible places inside stores (Dattilo, 2023). Target has had this initiative for years, partnering with LGBTQIA+ creators and releasing Pride merchandise so this controversy ultimately resulted in feelings of anger, neglect, and deception from LGBTQIA+ consumers (Dattilo, 2023). Research in consumer psychology demonstrates that when companies include certain demographics or communities of individuals in their branding material, they allow a connection or relationship to grow between those represented and the brand (Reimann et al., 2012). Foundational work in consumer psychology provides reasoning for the attachments that evolve over time between a consumer and the brands they support.

Consumer Brand Relationship Theory

This connection is referred to as the consumer brand relationship, a combination of concepts that shape the way consumers interact with and feel about brands and companies they support (Fournier, 1998). At the beginning, consumer and brand go into a new relationship with their own expectations but as the consumer brand relationship grows, how each partner contributes to the ideal and real expectations influences the direction of the relationship (Alvarez, Burke, & Fournier, 2021).

In her seminal work on consumer brand relationships, Fournier (1998) examined depth in consumer brand relationships, claiming that brands have a responsibility to maintain a stable relationship with consumers (Fournier, 1998; Iglesias & Saleem, 2015; Alvarez, Burke, &

Fournier, 2021). As consumers continue to support a company and buy its products, the connection deepens and their lived experiences with the brand contribute to the evolution of the brand relationship quality (BRQ) (Fournier, 1998). BRQ is based on six categories of positive feelings: love/passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, and brand partner quality, all of which work together to strengthen or diminish consumer brand relationships over time (Fournier, 1998).

Fournier (1998) proposes a typology of 15 consumer-brand relationship forms, supported by conceptual foundations of: (1) brands as relationship partners and relationships as (2) dynamic, (3) providing meanings in psychological and socio-cultural contexts, and (4) as multiplex phenomena. That is, relationships are defined by an interdependence between partners, such that brands are active and contributing participants. Fournier claimed that “brands cohere into systems that consumers create not only to aid in living but also to give meaning to their lives” (1998, p. 367).

Iglesias and Saleem (2015) sought to explore how supportive corporate cultures can lead to positive consumer brand relationships. The authors declared brands as more than just vehicles of product identification, but also “strategic assets and relationship partners that lead to consumer loyalty and financial equity” (Iglesias & Saleem, 2015 p. 217). The authors examined Human Resource Management (HRM) from the employee perspective as it relates to consumer culture and how consumers see themselves represented in the brand internally and externally (Iglesias & Saleem, 2015).

Alvarez, Burke, & Fournier (2021) investigated paradoxes that exist between brands and consumers and how they deal with those same paradoxes over time. Their findings illustrated that consumers put in “relationship work” with brands in order to maintain a positive relationship with the brands, or when deciding to breakup (Alvarez, Burke, & Fournier, 2021).

Investing into the consumers communities can take on a variety of forms, from social media to word-of-mouth, having any interaction(s) with the target audience can and will impact the consumer brand relationship positively or negatively (Labrecque, 2014). Further, as social media usage develops, consumers have elevated their expectations of brands and wanting more, even to the extent of expecting responses or comments on social media (Labrecque, 2014). However, things get tricky as it pertains to the extent of consumer representation and what that looks like.

Automated messaging has created more ways to interact and engage with consumers, but there's no possible way to interact with each consumer on an individual basis beside asking for more from brands (Labrecque, 2014). So, in an effort to meet that request, brands started doing more and addressing public facing issues as a way to express their interest and show their support (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Cause-related marketing (CSM) or corporate social responsibility (CSR) have become expected more as companies comment on topics or donate money to funds like education or disaster relief (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

In the past, brands have not focused on issues faced by the public, but now because the social climate has changed, consumers are starting to expect more (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). When brands take a stand on social and/or political issues, it gives consumers grounds to re-evaluate their relationship with that brand to see if they will continue the relationship (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). These stances play a key role because it this has been a way for brands to show their support or unwillingness to support something that impacts its consumers. In the next section, one researcher in particular created a model that outlines support theory and how organizational support for diversity impacts the behavior of an organization's employees.

Avery's Theory of Support

Derek Avery created a typography for the theory of support for diversity amongst employees to capture the antecedents and consequences of employee support for diversity.

Consumers see direct representation from brands based on who works for that brand, and with a strong diversity climate, it then motivates employees to do their best to help others, especially minority communities (Iglesias & Saleem, 2015; Avery, 2011). Examining how personalities evolve from valued work behavior or trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003), Avery adds that the way a company promotes or denounces diversity impacts the individual and reflects in how they promote or contest diversity (Avery, 2011).

Avery (2011) lays out a 2x2 typology based on employees support for diversity that categorizes a company into a quadrant based on behaviors of endorsement (support or opposition) and activism (passive or active). Candidates seek out an employer that can contribute to their identities based on four variables: minority status, prejudice, diversity beliefs, and egalitarianism (Avery, 2011). Partnered with contextual factors (i.e., diversity climate, supervisor, coworker, and customer endorsement) of the organization, the structures of the environment dictate how an employee interacts with consumers (Avery, 2011).

Avery's model has been used to build on other areas within LGBTQIA+ communities' representation, one being organizational transgender allyship. Fletcher & Marvell (2022) claim that when employees have a strong organizational diversity work environment, they are more likely to shift their own negative intentions to positive intentions concerning transgender allyship. Using Avery's 2x2 typology of organizational support for diversity as a model and adding psychological theories of safety and authenticity, they were able to establish multiple benefits to organizational support for diversity including increased life satisfaction for transgender people (Fletcher & Marvell, 2022).

Avery's support typology is important because it outlines organizational diversity and the significance it holds for individuals when companies enforce support for diversity (Avery, 2011; Fletcher & Marvell, 2022). Avery's work relates to this research because pulling from that

typology on the organizational to employee perspective, this model solidifies the importance of the concept of having a supportive consumer brand relationship and can be taken a step further to be applied to the context of LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising.

Method

To investigate LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions of brands that incorporate LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, I conducted 12 semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews on zoom between June and September 2023. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Participant interviews were transcribed, yielding a total of 247 pages. Interviews allow researchers to understand participants' lived experiences and the significance of those experiences to them, as well as to identify commonalities and differences within and across participants. Hoffman and Delahanty (2021) conducted 34 focus groups with a total of 140 LGBTQIA+ participants from various identities across race, gender, and sexual identity to explore the implications of misrepresentations, that justify a qualitative approach for the current research. Participants often brought up unique factors and concepts pertaining to the research, so utilizing individual interviews allowed for probing to capture the entirety of the participants' stories for data analysis.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit 18–26-year-old Gen Z (born between 1997-2013) individuals who self-identify as LGBTQIA+. Specifically, I reached out to nonprofit organizations, college LGBTQIA+ offices and student organizations, and social networking sites such as Instagram and LinkedIn using a recruitment flyer that outlined what the research was for, who to contact, and the qualifications to participate. Participation was completely voluntary, and no incentives were offered. Each participant was given an introduction that the research is to understand their perception(s) of LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising. The

interview process was divided into four sections focusing on brand awareness, the state of gay representation, perception, and ad-based questions (see Appendix A).

Notably, during the course of this study, two high-profile events occurred regarding LGBTQIA+ consumers and brands which emerged as salient through participants' responses. Specifically, Bud Light's lack of support to transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney and Target's repression of its summer 2023 Pride Month collection. The controversies surrounding Bud Light and Target in 2023 have served as examples of woke washing when brands are active in a sociopolitical conversation for marketing, but provide no values driven strategy for how they help causes or communities. These situations and reputational dilemmas all impact the way consumers relate to a brand and how they see themselves interacting with a brand.

Brand awareness is structured to ask participants to think about brands they support and why they support them while also questioning whether they perceive that the brand reciprocates that loyalty. State of representation and perception encourages participants to think about and share their general feelings and responses to LGBTQIA+ communities' representation in organizational marketing strategy.

Four advertisements from different brands were used in this study, with corresponding questions to gauge what support looks like to the Gen Z LGBTQIA+ consumer. Using AdForum, an online case study library for advertising campaigns, I conducted a filtered search for advertisements to show participants. Specifically, I sought recent ads (2019-2023) that included elements of queer representation, and that had won an award for diversity, resulting in 79 advertisements. The four advertisements used in prompts during the interviews were chosen from among these 79 ads: [*Google Pixel's 'Young Love'*](#), [*Doritos' 'Día De Los Muertos'*](#), [*Mixwell's 'A Big Gay Gorilla and a Street Takeover'*](#), and [*Calvin Klein's Pride Anthem*](#). Each participant was shown one of the 4 ads. Using a rotation process between 12 interviews, each ad

was viewed a total of three times. The participants had an opportunity to gather their thoughts and then we proceeded to talk about their observations and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ representation in the ad they just viewed.

To analyze the data from participant responses, I used the process of open, axial, and selective coding to categorize and identify factors that impact an already contextualized consumer brand relationship. Like Chang & Wang (2021), the study followed the steps of phenomenological research to first listen and re-listen to identify open codes or phrases to compare participant responses and experiences. Then, using axial and selective coding to identify themes and subthemes based on participant responses to analyze and explain and categorize their perceptions and levels of support for brand strategy involving LGBTQIA+ representation. I did an initial listen to the recordings to gather phrases or concepts the participants made (open coding), then went back to compare responses amongst all participants (axial and selective coding) to look for bigger themes and concepts that emerged in the data.

The analysis revealed the salience of tensions that emerge between brand storytelling and perceived brand action, which informed participants' perceptions of brand support. Next, I elaborate the findings with attention to the embedded contexts, which informed participants' relationships with certain brands, and examine how they perceived support from brands based on LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising.

Findings

This research investigates how Gen Z LGBTQIA+ consumers perceive brands that include representation of LGBTQIA+ communities. Perceived brand support emerges at the intersection of tensions between brand storytelling (i.e. accurate and appropriate LGBTQIA+ representation) and organizational action (i.e. presence and impact of strategy) in the embedded context of the relationship. From a consumer brand relationship perspective, according to

Fournier (1998, p. 345), “marketing actions conducted under the rubric of interactive and addressable communications qualify the brand as a reciprocating partner,” such as through the execution of marketing strategies and tactics. Taking the participants consumer brand relationship in its dynamic context, I propose factors that may cause tension within the established relationship, ultimately boosting or deteriorating the consumers’ perception of LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising.

The findings are influenced by Avery’s (2011) theoretical model of support, which focused on organizational factors that influence an employee's support for diversity. Avery (2011) demonstrates that employees want to work for an organization that contributes to their identities and proposes levels of organizational action and employee reaction as factors influencing employees’ experiences of support. Inspired by Avery’s proposed dimensions of support in organizational contexts, the current research seeks to extend understanding of support to consumer brand relationships. Avery’s support model (2011) and Fournier’s understanding of consumer brand relationships (1998) activate the data discovered from Generation Z LGBTQIA+ consumers and how they view representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities in advertising. Drawing from the interview data, I propose factors of supportive representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in brand marketing strategy (see Figure 1), which involve aspects of (1) brand storytelling and (2) organizational actions. Taken together, participants’ perceptions of brand support are conceptualized based on the four factors between brand storytelling and organizational action. As the accuracy and appropriateness of brand storytelling and the proactive versus reactive nature of organizational actions interact, the consumer is determining the level of support from the brand in the consumer brand relationship.

The following section elaborates what Gen Z LGBTQIA+ individuals pay attention to when analyzing marketing and advertising material. Participants want their representation in

brand strategy to be accurate and appropriate to their communities. Supportive representation from an organization is influenced by its actions (presence and impact of strategy) that contributes to LGBTQIA+ communities. These findings provide a foundation of factors to consider when considering incorporating LGBTQIA+ people into brand marketing and advertising strategy.

Brand Storytelling

Brand storytelling refers to narratives that help consumers get a better understanding of a brand through its messaging (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, et al., 2013). Further, Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, et al. (2013) presented research-based evidence of the direct, long-lasting, positive association brand storytelling has on consumers who support that brand. In the axial coding process of analyzing, participants signified the necessity of accurate and appropriate messaging, pertaining to LGBTQIA+ communities. The resonance of brand storytelling, as felt through the (1) accuracy and (2) appropriateness is a key mechanism for perceptions of support, as it attests to the intention behind strategy and showcases the narrative in a way that reflects LGBTQIA+ people.

Accuracy

To the participants, being knowledgeable of community happenings is a way of showing genuineness and seriousness in positively representing LGBTQIA+ people (See Table 1). Further, to build that knowledge, having LGBTQIA+ identifying individuals to add to the conversation is an imperative step to fact checking on the ins and outs of the communities. To boost accuracy, to Generation Z LGBTQIA+ consumers is by seeking out members of the communities to partner with on crafting and casting marketing and advertising strategy. Participant data acknowledges the ongoing nature of support, pointing to the importance of involving LGBTQIA+ individuals in the process and developing stories that demonstrate

support. A direct quote from one participant outlines the extent of which LGBTQIA+ members should be involved:

“Using members of the community to create the marketing and then to act within the marketing in the commercial, or to write the article or something like that is showing that that you care enough to get involved in the [communities]. Because the acceptance of the LGBT community is an ongoing situation” (Participant 6).

Participants further outlined a benefit of having acquired knowledge that shows through a brands marketing and how that could give enhance a supportive consumer brand relationship:

“I think it is important to have the knowledge and the facts about [LGBTQIA+ communities] in marketing, attracting individuals [through] ads. For me, it's probably [a top priority] because I want to know that you are an establishment [that makes me] feel safe.” (Participant 12).

Rooted in lived experiences as LGBTQIA+ identifying individuals, each participant had a level of understanding pertaining to what positive representation of their community looks like in marketing and advertising. LGBTQIA+ communities want to be represented in relevant and accurate ways that maintain visibility and build their communities in positive directions. To Gen Z LGBTQIA+ consumers, when a brand represents them accurately in its marketing strategy, that brand is then making intentional involvement in LGBTQIA+ communities.

Appropriateness

Appropriateness in LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising is measured by the presentation of narratives based on relatability and realism (see Table 1). Participants want to see in marketing and advertising LGBTQIA+ representation as something that is not glorified, sexualized, or maligning, but is familiar and reflective of their communities.

Due to the size of advertisers' platforms and audience reach, LGBTQIA+ individuals want to be represented in ways that offer positive representations of their lifestyle and demonstrate why members value their communities.

Storytelling and visualizing the lifestyle of LGBTQIA+ doing everyday activities that a heterosexual person or couple would do is an important factor in positively representing the communities. Participants provided context on the significance of storytelling and visuals in marketing strategy as a way to represent LGBTQIA+ communities appropriately:

“I think positive is showing you're elevating queer voices. And you are showing we are people just like you. We go to these restaurants; we do these things. And we're just trying to live our lives just like you.” (Participant 7)

These communities do not see themselves the same way that conservative or anti-LGBTQIA+ people see them. Rather, they place major emphasis on whether a brand includes elements of LGBTQIA+ representation and debunks negative narratives and connotations that dominate impressions and ideologies of LGBTQIA+ communities that may not be true. The data presented information that expresses though visibility has tremendously increased, LGBTQIA+ individuals still crave the acceptance and solitude from brands, without a solid relationship, the representation becomes insufficient:

“A positive representation shows representation in some way that's deeper than just basic stereotypes. Like I was thinking about it the other day how, like, in a lot of, like standard Western media, there might be a gay character here or there. But they rely a whole lot on [stereotypical] tropes.” (Participant 3)

Figure 1 outlines the definitions and more quotes that endorse accuracy and appropriateness.

The distinct difference between accuracy and appropriateness lies between the crafting and presentation of brand strategy. The first is about hearing from LGBTQIA+ communities and seeking out community members to add to conversations regarding LGBTQIA+ individuals. Then, the second is about how that message is portrayed, looking at the narrative and if it creates a sense of relation and is realistic to LGBTQIA+ community members. These two factors are interdependent insofar as the strength of one affects the strength of the other; it is noticeable in the brand strategy when one is weak and often will lead to LGBTQIA+ consumers questioning the authenticity or calling out lack of support to the communities.

Table 1-- Brand Storytelling Factors: Accuracy and Appropriateness

Factor	Definition	Sample Participant Quotes
Accuracy	Being knowledgeable of relevant happenings in LGBTQIA+ communities and seek out LGBTQIA+ identifying individuals to add to conversations by partnering with them on [crafting and casting] marketing and advertising strategy.	<p>Participant 6: “Expressing genuine concern about the topic is important. Using members of the community in your marketing campaign. People who write the script, people who work on the visuals, doing your research, so that you understand what you're talking about, and you don't wind up looking crazy.”</p> <p>Participant 3: "Make sure that you hire people from queer communities, like make sure you have people that but like, don't just have a bunch of straight white guys trying to build representation, because you're not going to get it right."</p> <p>Participant 5: “I think it would get my attention if the brands knew more about the history of the LGBT community and more about like, their icons and the people and things like that, instead of just slapping the rainbow on everything in the month of June and calling it pride.”</p> <p>Participant 2: “Getting to the source and like asking people from the community and like interviewing like this, and like putting people's stories out there.</p>

		And just asking them what they need is really helpful."
Appropriateness	The presentation of narratives based on relatability and realism. Represented in ways that showcase the best aspects of LGBTQIA+ lifestyles and why members value their communities.	<p>Participant 11: “Subaru has had kind of like, like a very chill, low-key kind of approach, which I don't think is like good or bad. I just think it feels normal, which is nice. Having like one advertisement for a brand that includes a queer couple, is great. But I think actually doing a good job to, like, represent or support the queer community goes beyond just that.”</p> <p>Participant 3: “A positive representation shows representation in some way that's deeper than just basic stereotypes. Like I was thinking about it the other day how, like, in a lot of, like standard Western media, there might be a gay character here or there. But they rely a whole lot on [stereotypical] tropes.”</p> <p>Participant 2: “I think [representation] does play a big role. I think just like seeing myself and people that look like me, look like my friends makes me want to be a part of [the brands] mission more. But if they don't have [representation], it doesn't completely determine [my decision], but it definitely helps. I think, especially during like Pride Month or Black History Month, or Hispanic Heritage Month, representing everybody is really important.”</p> <p>Participant 10: “When you see that representation, it just, it makes you happy. Because you're like, that's me. That's who I am.”</p> <p>Participant 1: “I'm more likely to go to places that I see myself being represented or I see people in the community are being represented because it makes me it makes me know that like okay, like if I go shopping here, you know, it's not going to be like a hate crime if you're looking at like something that's not like necessarily like masculine or something like that.”</p>

Organizational Action(s)

In addition to storytelling, there's an active component to LGBTQIA+ representation in brand strategy that involves a direct "hands-on" impact to these communities. Organizational action involves brands that have a direct presence and voice in LGBTQIA+ spaces. This typically involves a set goal behind creative strategy that includes LGBTQIA+ representation. Throughout the axial coding process, the ways in which an organization contributed to LGBTQIA+ communities were prevalent, viewing organizational actions as present and impactful to LGBTQIA+ communities. Depending on the already established relationship, these factors can drastically boost or diminish the perception of support and ultimately the consumer brand relationship.

Planned Engagement

Participants found a greater appreciation for marketing and advertising with LGBTQIA+ representation when it was paired with action. For example, most participants used financial allocations as a way to justify a brand's supportive behavior in addition to having LGBTQIA+ representation in brand strategy. Others indicated that brand engagement with LGBTQIA+ communities through symbolic actions, such as having Pride floats at parades, hanging a Pride flag in offices, buildings, and storefronts, or through partnerships and collaborations with LGBTQIA+ creators (i.e., fashion, food, drink, travel, etc.) exemplify support.

In this research, the extent of planned engagement in LGBTQIA+ communities either financially, physically, or symbolically is labeled as a component of organizational action(s). From the consumer standpoint, this reflects and contextualizes the brand's efforts to offer open, proactive involvement that contributes to LGBTQIA+ communities. Based on the emergence

from participant responses, measurable and verifiable financial contributions from marketing and advertising are a significant way to maintaining support with LGBTQIA+ consumers through representation. Another example would be financing specific nonprofit organizations that aid LGBTQIA+ people with necessities like housing, mental health resources, and pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP, a HIV preventative medication). Participants offered some specific examples of the types of actions that could demonstrate support, for example:

“Putting their money where their mouth is. If brands were more willing to not just donate a portion of profits from certain items but give big chunks of donations to mutual aid groups, you know, like abortion funds, like places that give queer and trans people housing, rather than just giving it to charities that say they're going to help, but sometimes don't. I'd rather see action taken” (Participant 9).

Others offered examples of brands that offer good examples of support:

“I will say Apple does a pretty good job. [They've had the \[\(PRODUCT\)RED\] initiative for decades to end HIV](#) or donate percentages of funds. But again, it hides behind a marketing scheme that unless you do the research on as a private citizen, you're not going to know” (Participant 4).

When it comes to the physical and symbolic forms of representation, rainbow flags during Pride Month incorporated into a brands storefront, logos, profile pictures, and messaging is a common acknowledgement of support. However, to Gen Z LGBTQIA+ consumers, this appeared to fall anywhere between sufficient and not enough because of the consumers' own expectations on what brands should do to show support.

“[Brands that] don't support the community all year round. It's just for June, and then, how they take away the pride logos, like immediately July 1, and don't continue that support and [have] representation all year round. I think that is upsetting.” (Participant 2)

Figure 2 provides the definition along with quotes of action along with quotes from participants to serve as a guide to what action looks like from Gen Z LGBTQIA+ consumers.

(Un)wavering

The way a brand maintains its perceived intentions behind creative direction and strategy related to LGBTQIA+ representation is important to LGBTQIA+ communities as it shows the brands support as (un)wavering the communities. Participant data brought attention to brands interaction with LGBTQIA+ community members as influential to fostering a supportive brand relationship. The (un)wavering factor is either presented to (by the consumer) or delivered by the brand (to the consumer) through LGBTQIA+ consumers inspired by marketing strategy as it relates to public opinion. Participants frequently alluded to either Target, Bud Light, or Chick-Fil-A as tension-inducing, (un)wavering brands that created conflicting opinions about LGBTQIA+ representation and whether these communities are being showcased with the right intention.

During the course of data collection, two brands (Target & Bud Light) were in the midst of real-time controversial press coverage regarding their marketing strategies related to LGBTQIA+ consumers, and one brand (Chick-Fil-A) has a notorious history of financially supporting anti-LGBT and conversion therapy organizations. Target and Bud Light in the context of building a supportive consumer brand relationship reenforce how the (un)wavering of brand strategy are important to the consumer in distinguishing brand support versus nonsupport. A brand that has had a stable (unwavering) relationship with LGBTQIA+ consumers can still be subjected to perpetuating tension in the consumer brand relationship. The participants made it clear that in order to keep the relationship (un)wavering, there must be a follow through action that is measurable and verifiable to positively represent LGBTQIA+ communities.

“If I started to [dislike a brand], I would not support them, like Bud Light. Specifically, because they didn't support [Dylan Mulvaney] who was actively getting attacked. I don't drink so like, it's not like a big deal in my life. But it's still something that I like. It dissuades me from future purchases, and Target as well. They're like, removing of the pride section that dissuades me from wanting to go there in the future.” (Participant 9)

Target typically has an (un)wavering relationship with LGBTQIA+ consumers through its advocacy, predominately during Pride month. When Target faced the controversy over its June 2023 Pride merchandise, resulting in tucking away the merchandise in stores and removing certain items, it left LGBTQIA+ communities feeling the relationship as wavering. As one participant explained,

“Having [Target’s Pride 2023 merchandise] be really shoved back into the back of this store and like not being in the front as usual and taking it off the website not being able to purchase it anymore. I think that was extremely upsetting and made me not want to buy from its private collection and stuff anymore. Because it just, it just makes me feel like they are like afraid of like, representing these communities.” (Participant 2)

Figure 2 includes the definition with participant quotes that show impactful action as influential to maintaining the support in a consumer brand relationship.

Bud Light and Target specifically had what was perceived as proactive intentions given their collaboration with LGBTQIA+ influencers and community members. However, the brands later faced negative LGBTQIA+ consumer reactions for not being mutually supportive. Meanwhile Chick-Fil-A's support of conversion therapy and other anti-LGBT organizations was perceived as a direct impact that negatively influenced the consumer’s perception of brand support. Organizational action or activity is the overarching theme that represents the importance

of what a brand does externally through marketing strategy to have a supportive presence and influence in the LGBTQIA+ consumer experience.

Table 2 -- Organizational Action(s): Proactive and Reactive

Factor	Definition	Sample Participant Quotes
Planned engagement	Refers to the levels of (1) planned engagement around and (2) direct, tangible contributions to LGBTQIA+ communities, which together attest to the brand's intentions in supporting LGBTQIA+ communities. Planned engagement suggests the level of proactive participation in efforts that positively impact LGBTQIA+ communities.	<p>Participant 12: “Reading about [Disney’s] most recent situation, you know, with their governor, he was [saying something negative] about gay people and he was trying to make some changes at the park and [Disney] weren't having it. And so, you know, I think [the governor] even threatened to move the park just because like people are coming for [LGBTQIA+ people] specifically. So, I feel like <u>[Disney taking a supportive stand]</u>, for LGBTQ people definitely said a lot for about who they are and the direction that they're trying to go in.”</p> <p>Participant 5: “Positive marketing to me is, when it feels like they're not just doing it for Pride Month, like they're actually doing it for the community and that they care about the community. I also really like when they do the things and it's like \$1 goes to the Trevor Project, they're making a difference, as well.”</p> <p>Participant 10: “[Absolut Vodka] puts their money where their mouth is. They're actively assisting the community and not just throwing a bottle of vodka at a bar or whatever. But they're actually investing in the community, investing in initiatives, for the homelessness and food insecurity for the queer community, and I think that's awesome.”</p> <p>Participant 6:</p>

		<p>“I like to see where they're donating their money and follow what they're putting their money towards and what they're supporting.”</p> <p>Participant 1: “I like to see where they're donating their money and follow what they're putting their money towards and what they're supporting. That kind of distinguishes, you know, a positive and negative reaction because, you know, if they're donating to like the NRA or something like that, you can obviously assume that they're not really for the community.”</p>
(Un)wavering	<p>Refers to the steadfastness a brand is perceived to exhibit in the face of challenge, controversy, or over time.</p>	<p>Participant 9: “Bud Light, giving Dylan Mulvaney a can with her face on it, but then not supporting her at all when she was getting death threats and was getting followed around. And she literally just posted TikTok in Peru saying like, I had to escape, I had to escape my home country. Because, like, I wasn't feeling safe.”</p> <p>Participant 3: "One prominent example that comes to mind is the Diablo franchise. They had changed their Twitter icon to a rainbow. And then a few days later, they changed it to like the Diablo five emblem really quickly. And so, it was like they're gay for a few days, and now they're not. So that's like the example that comes into my mind immediately."</p> <p>Participant 2: “Having [Target’s Summer 2023 Pride collection] be like really shoved back into the back of the store and not being in the front as usual. And then taking it down, taking it off the website and not being able to purchase it anymore. I think that was extremely upsetting, and made me not want to, buy from their</p>

		private collection anymore. Because it just, it just makes me feel like they are afraid of representing [LGBTQIA+] communities. If you are really supporting someone, you won't be afraid to continue that support, even when you get backlash, I think is what makes it upsetting.”
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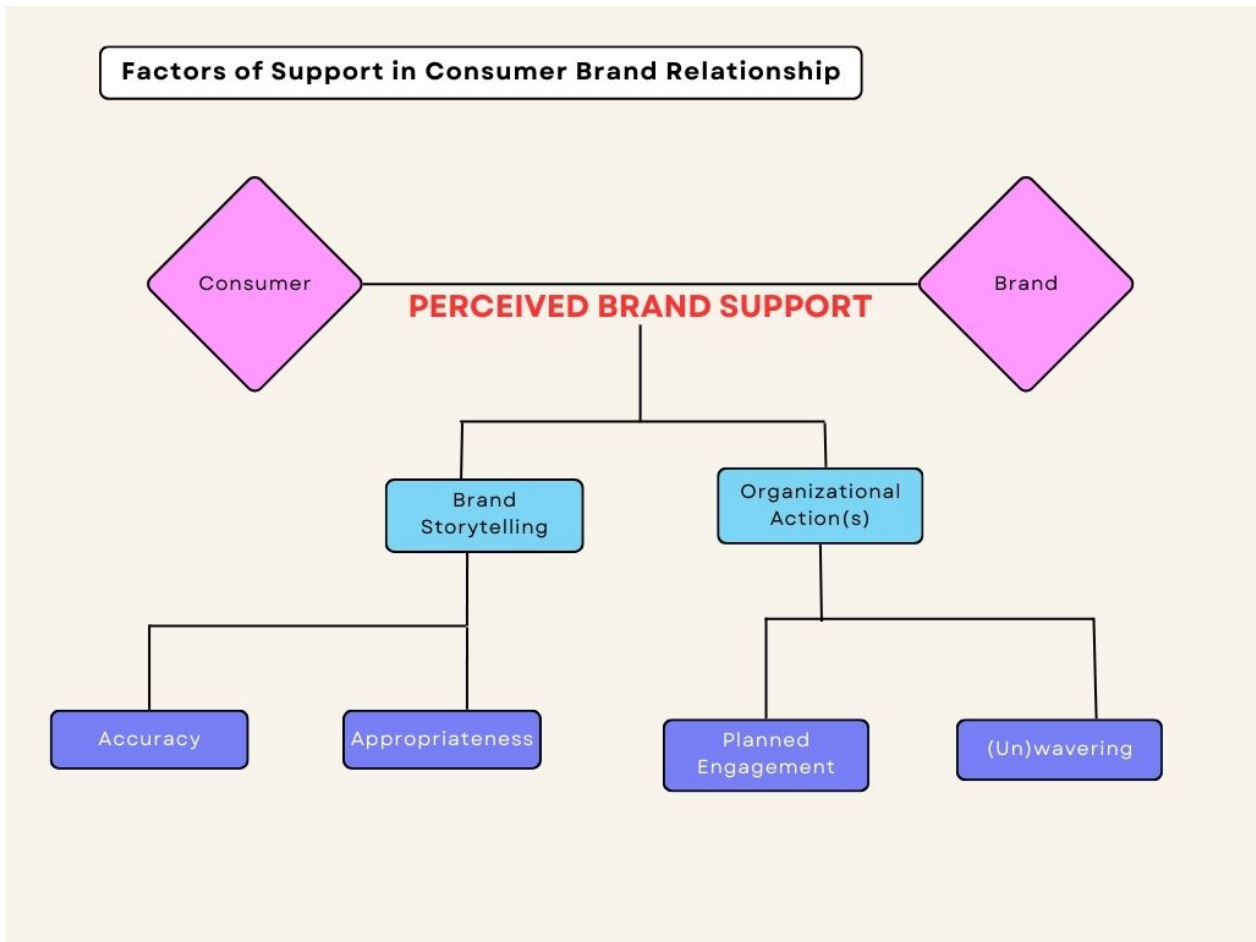


Figure 1-- Factors of Support in Consumer Brand Relationships

Figure 1 serves as a model to what was found in the data and applied to what brands should do to be supportive when having LGBTQIA+ representation in brand strategy. Brand storytelling is based on the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, so it is important these elements are accurate (coming from LGBTQIA+ people, for LGBTQIA+ people) and

appropriate (LGBTQIA+ people execute brand strategy and play a role in campaign strategy). Then, with organizational action(s), a brand must have a component of what they actually contribute or add to the representation of LGBTQIA+ communities (proactive vs. reactive).

Discussion

In response to the research question and how LGBTQIA+ individuals perceive their representation in brand strategy, the data outlines what factors are key in maintaining a stable and supportive relationship. Researched stereotyping of gender roles from socially constructed beliefs in marketing and advertising with the window of gay vagueness has allowed brand strategy to keep LGBTQIA+ representation at a certain exposure without off balancing representation of heterosexual audiences (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Puntoni, Vanhamme & Visscher, 2011). Whatsoever, now that LGBTQIA+ communities have become more visible in marketing strategies and advertisements, community members and researchers have brought attention to the nature of LGBTQIA+ representation (Tsai, 2010). Brands have attempted gay vagueness and brand activism or woke washing, but these strategies have still been left to criticism for being not enough or misrepresentative to LGBTQIA+ communities (Licsandru & Cui 2018; Vredenberg et al., 2020; Eisend et al., 2022).

Like Fournier explains the responsibility brands have to maintaining a stable relationship with consumers, (Fournier, 1998; Iglesias & Saleem, 2015; Alvarez, Burke, & Fournier, 2021) the model identifies brand storytelling and organizational action(s) as influential factors to stabilize consumer brand relationships. The prior literature identifies a variety of consumer brand relationships and how companies' presence influences perception amongst individuals (Fournier, 1998; Avery, 2011). Fournier and Avery's work activate the data in highlighting how support impacts the consumers sense of self and the potential organizational support has to adjust negative perceptions of LGBTQIA+ people to other communities as the

brand does have a role to fulfill in supporting the consumer brand relationship (Fournier, 1998; Avery, 2011; Fletcher & Marvell, 2022).

For Gen Z consumers, without brand storytelling, companies wouldn't contribute to positive representation of LGBTQIA+ people, ultimately perpetuating limited and false narratives that are unacceptable to LGBTQIA+ communities. With my proposed model serving as a guide, communications professionals can be aware of the tensions that exist and do their best to work on contributing to productive representation and maintaining a supportive consumer brand relationship. LGBTQIA+ representation matters from a business perspective because it offers a potential pathway for a brand to increase revenue and build a positive relationship with LGBTQIA+ consumers. Meanwhile, support and represent a brand that they feel confident about as included members of that brand's audience.

Taking Target's summer 2023 Pride collection crisis as an example, this model could be used to identify where in the consumer brand relationship did Target disconnect with its audience. Further, there's an opportunity to apply this model to future brand strategies that could reconnect Target with its LGBTQIA+ audiences. Guided by a critical analysis of consumer brand relationships and theory of support, the present research is identifying what aspects matter to LGBTQIA+ consumers that is imperative to upholding a supportive consumer brand relationship for both brand and consumer.

Marketing and advertising material is intentionally crafted for audiences; elements such as casting, storytelling, and what exact narrative is being promoted are imperative to building a mutually supportive relationship with the Generation Z LGBTQIA+ consumer. Involving LGBTQIA+ community representations indicate a direct perceived intention to connect with those communities. Communications professionals need to be aware of brand activist strategy and woke washing as avenues of involvement and intention from brand

messaging on public facing issues, in this case, LGBTQIA+ issues that could impact them negatively. The showcased Figure 1 is a guide for professionals that could aid them in likely outcomes or ideas for supportive behavior to connect with Gen Z LGBTQIA+ communities.

Conclusion

This research examined Generation Z LGBTQIA+ individuals' perception on brands that include representation of LGBTQIA+ communities. Findings indicate that LGBTQIA+ representation in brand strategy is welcome but should be executed with storytelling and action to uphold a relationship that is mutually supportive. Based on the findings, I propose a conceptual chart which presents identified factors of supportive consumer brand relationships. Based on the level of strength or weakness of each factor, a tension between LGBTQIA+ consumers and perceived brand support is created. At the height of this research, several controversies, political agendas, and topics of discussion revolving around LGBTQIA+ communities arose. In 2023, LGBTQIA+ communities were targeted with confining political and social climates.

This research offers important insights for the ways in which brands might seek to create relationships of support with Gen Z LGBTQIA+ consumers. However, there are several limitations of this study. Specifically, future scholarship could explore how Generation Z LGBTQIA+ individuals navigate tension within the level of support between consumer and brand and the impact it has on their values and beliefs. Examining how the consumer continues their support or severs their ties with the brand would further help the conceptual chart as well as potentially give direct action items for brand strategy.

Although consumer brand relationships are not a new concept, with the presented conceptual chart, brands can create strategy to LGBTQIA+ consumers specifically designed for a

supportive consumer brand relationship. For current brands, this chart could be used for instances of crisis to evaluate the executed strategy, identify issues, and further strategy to maintain support with consumers.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction (5-10 minutes)

INTRO

Welcome and thank you for graciously participating in this interview! My name is Detavious, and the interview is a part of ongoing research for my master's thesis on LGBTQIA+ communities representation in advertising.

DISCLOSURES

The interview will be recorded via voice memos on my phone and Zoom (if applicable) so I will be able to listen to it at a later date to ensure we don't miss anything. I want to be focused and engage in our conversations instead of taking notes.

PERMISSIONS

At any given time, you may excuse yourself for the restroom or to get a snack or anything, I just ask that you let me know in advance.

We have four main topics to cover today, and we may have to skip questions for the interest of time, but I want to make sure you have the opportunity to share your thoughts and provide input on any of the given topics.

- Let's first start off with a general introduction with your name, a little bit about you, and a fun fact.

Now that we're acquainted with each other, I'm going to dive into our questions for today and formally start the interview process.

I will be starting the audio and Zoom recording now.

Task I: Brand Awareness

1. When you think of LGBTQIA+ friendly brands, what brands come to mind?
 - a. Follow-up: How did you discover those brands?
2. How would you describe the brand(s) that came to mind?
3. What would you like to see in marketing efforts for a brand to get your support?
4. How could a brand capture the attention of the LGBTQIA+ communities?

Task II: State of Gay Representation

1. What are your general feelings toward LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising efforts (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral)?
2. What brand(s) would you consider to be active in representing LGBTQIA+ communities?
3. What brands would you consider having a positive or negative representation?
4. In your words, what distinguishes a positive versus negative representation?
5. Have you purchased from and/or recommended any of those brands?

Task III: Perception

1. How important is LGBTQIA+ representation in marketing and advertising to you?

2. Has your view of any brand(s) changed because you didn't agree with the representation in its marketing efforts?
3. Are there any brands that you've stopped supporting due to lack of representation?
4. What would be key factors in correctly representing LGBTQIA+ communities?

Task IV: Ad Based Questions

There are a total of four brands being used in this study as examples. However, each interview will feature only one of those brands for the sake of time and for variety in examples of ads with LGBTQIA+ representation. First, we will watch the brand advertisement then you will answer a few questions about what you observed.

1. How familiar are you with [insert brand name]?
2. What are your thoughts on LGBTQIA+ representation?
 - a. What did they do well?
 - b. Where could they improve?
3. Having an LGBTQIA+ identity, do you feel support from this brand?
 - a. If yes, what makes you feel supported?
 - b. If no, what makes you feel unsupported?

CONCLUSION

This marks the end of the interview session. Thank you for taking the time out of your day to talk with me about the pros and cons of LGBTQIA+ representation. I hope you found value in our conversation!

VITA

Detavious Hill (he/they) was born on August 31, 1999, in Saginaw, MI, moving to Texas in 2013. A 2017 graduate of Byron Nelson High School, they received their Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations from the University of North Texas. He enrolled in the strategic communication graduate program at Texas Christian University in January 2022 while working full-time in Public Relations for a non-profit health organization.

He will receive a Master of Science in Strategic Communication in December of 2023. While working on their degree, Detavious volunteers with a Fort Worth based LGBTQ youth non-profit organization and serves as a member in the Greater Fort Worth Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America.