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LGBT Q+ Advertising: Who is it For?

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Abstract

Has the structure of capitalism worked to benefit or harm minority groups in the United States? Do capitalist practices impact the motives behind progressive advertising? Capitalism influences all aspects of life with the goal of maximizing profit by any means necessary. Under this concept, the production of goods is focused solely on the acquisition of more capital. This practice impacts minority groups in that the effects of focusing on profit and the rising wealth of the already wealthy Americans is detrimental to the less fortunate groups. An interesting minority group that will be examined in this project will be the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) movement. While they also face the oppression of capitalism, their visibility as a social movement may be transcended by the practices of it. Marketing for the LGBTQ+ movement has been a popular trend as it becomes a growing group in American culture. This may be a profitable market for companies to participate in regardless of their moral standpoints towards the movement. Whether these advertisements and proclamations of LGBTQ+ support are genuine, they advance the movement and social awareness about it.

This project attempts to look at the reasons why companies advertise with same sex couples and support the LGBTQ+ movement. Is it because they are supportive and care about this minority group or because they are trying to turn a profit? Either way, is this beneficial to the movement or have a minimal effect?

Introduction

As it functions in American society, capitalism is a far-reaching economic system that influences all aspects of life within the states operating under this system. As a

general construct, the goal of capitalists is “to maximize profit by producing and selling goods and services for as little cost as possible and selling them on to consumers for as much profit as possible” (Faulks, 2005, p. 29). Under this concept, the production of goods in capitalism is focused solely on the acquisition of more profit. This pertains to social justice movements in that capitalists will jump on certain wagons to follow popular culture and make a larger profit. In recent years, this can be seen in the LGBTQ+ community, the Breast Cancer “pink” movement, and the movement towards environmentally friendly practices. More and more companies have turned to advertisements with same sex couples and using popular LGBTQ+ celebrities in their commercials. This kind of visibility strengthens this social justice movements as progressive markets continues to grow. The underlying morals of this trend contribute to the idea of capitalist motives disguised as progressive support.

The rise of capitalism in the global sphere began in Europe during the Industrial revolution. The dividing socioeconomic tiers of feudalism gave way to a competitive and individualistic economic model that benefited the industrial capitalists while keeping the laborers at the bottom (Heller, 2011, p. 176). Capitalism boomed in the United States with the rise of the industrial age which paved the way for a competitive free market. This economic structure is highlighted by the power of businesses to go through any means to reach their maximum profit. Contemporary capitalism encompasses a new trend of consumption and its inevitable relationship to satisfaction and happiness (Presskorn-Thygesen & Bjorg, 2014, p.197). Consumers are using their purchasing power like never before and contributing to the growth of consumer capitalism. Capitalists use this trend to create advertisements and channel the need for material goods into profit.

A growing part of this consumer culture is the emphasis on advertising and marketing. Cunningham (2003) explains that “advertising is the mouthpiece of capitalism” (p. 229). Advertising has long been an influential force on many aspects of American life. A unique result of advertising is its tendency to reflect and reproduce popular trends and social norms. Progressive advertising has turned to a new marketing niche as the LGBTQ+ movement gains popularity in American society. This targeted group has a purchasing power of around \$1 trillion (Green, 2018, p. 18). Pride month in June has been a month of solidarity and support for the LGBTQ+ community through branding and marketing, but this support has become more widespread and mainstream through the rest of the year as well. Progressive marketing is not a new concept as it has been seen in through many other social movement. The LGBTQ+ marketing niche has been incorporated by many companies including Target, JCPenny, Cheerios, Wells Fargo, IKEA, Absolut, and many others.

This progressive marketing directly ties to the use of political consumerism as a form of political participation and ethical purchasing. Boycotting is a practice that has historically been used to protest a particular company or industry based on ethical reasoning. Buycotting is a more recent practice in which consumers purchase from certain companies that they feel align with their own beliefs. In this case, consumers may choose to purchase something from a company advertising to the LGBTQ+ community to show support for their progressive branding (Michelletti & Stolle, 2008, p. 750). Political consumerism is a form of political participation though many do not realize it as such. This idea plays largely into the ideas of progressive marketing and the LGBT+

community because these ads most likely would not continue to exist if consumers did not positively react to them.

The LGBTQ+ community has gained popularity and support in society in recent decades, culminating to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015. Companies are in pursuit of the “gay dollar” and spend millions of dollars every year to advertise towards this target group (Oakenfull, 2013, p. 80). The motives of this advertising come into question when advertising as a practice of capitalism is considered. Popular support and visibility is increasing for the LGBTQ+ community and advertising serves to reflect popular culture, but the innate goal of advertising is solely to gain profit and attract customers. Whether or not these ads are politically targeted in support of the LGBTQ+ community or just an attempt to reach the gay dollar and the business of political consumers is an important question in this profit driven world.

Definition of Terms

Lesbian: Women who are romantically and sexually attracted to other women.

Gay: Men who are romantically and sexually attracted to other men.

Bisexual: Individuals who are romantically and sexually attracted to both men and women.

Transgender: Individuals who are transitioning from male to female or female to male or who identify outside of their assigned gender at birth.

Queer: General term for sexual and gender minorities who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender.

Cisgender: Individuals who identify as their gender assigned at birth.

Theory

Capitalism as a modern economic structure in the United States encourages competition and a free market. As the pursuit of profit is the primary focus of corporations in a capitalist economy, Marx explains, every aspect of life is commodified (Faulks, 2005, p. 37). There are private industries for everything imaginable. Time, space, ideas, individuals, and so many other things are placed into price points and commodified. Everything in a capitalist economy has a price. In this sense, the commodification of the LGBTQ+ community has played a large role in its expansion in the social world. Rainbows are plastered on billboards, t-shirts, and other merchandise to serve this growing niche market. This is profitable group with trillions of dollars in spending power (Um, 2012, p. 134). Advertising is a practice of consumer capitalism and the increase in LGBTQ+ ads begs the questions of who these advertisements are for. Under the tenets of capitalism, American corporations choose popular movements and ideas to tailor their advertisements to social trends. The LGBTQ+ community has increased visibility greatly over the last decade and the rise in progressive marketing towards this group is evident through Pride month campaigns and corporations like Target and JCPenny taking an active position on the LGBTQ+ movement. Under Marx's ideas of capitalism, this advertising is simply an attempt to reach out to a group with a significant spending power and increase profit by exploiting a cause they may or may not support.

Research Question

Public support of the LGBTQ+ community has grown exponentially in the last decade. This has been reflected in popular culture and the marketing industry. Is this increase in LGBTQ+ ads perceived positively by consumers? Do consumers believe that these ads are motivated by a moral stance or are used as a business tactic?

Hypothesis

There are many differing public opinions regarding capitalism and the nature of progressive marketing in the current economy. Although different companies have different values and reasons for marketing campaigns, consumers can understand that it is often used as a business tactic.

- I. Individuals who belong to the LGBTQ+ community will be more likely to believe that progressive marketing is a business tactic.
- II. The more an individual supports the LGBTQ+ community, the more likely they are to feel critical of progressive marketing
- III. The more supportive someone is of capitalism, the more likely they are to feel that progressive marketing is a moral stance.
- IV. The more conservative someone is, the more negatively they will feel about the LGBTQ+ movement and will not be as critical of the motives behind progressive advertising.
- V. Individuals from the democratic party are more likely to be critical of progressive advertising, whereas individuals from the republican party will not view this as a business tactic under the practices of capitalism.
- VI. Individuals who have a more positive view of capitalism will be more likely to view progressive advertising as a moral stance.

- VII. Individuals who feel that progressive advertising gives more visibility to the LGBTQ+ community are less likely to be critical of the motives behind it.
- VIII. Individuals who are guided by ethical purchasing are more likely to believe that progressive marketing is a moral stance.

Literature Review

Advertising is seen in every corner of American society. Social media, television, magazines, newspapers, street corners, road signs, and even word of mouth spread the messages of the companies that run the American economy. Advertising is a key component of capitalist success in the modern consumer era. Advertisements are targeted towards specific niche groups to attract that consumer base. The LGBTQ+ community has been on the rise in American society for decades and this newly discovered niche group has been adopted by many corporations' marketing tactics. The motives behind this new trend are questionable as they operate under the goal of profit. While they could be moral stances in support of the LGBTQ+ community, the economic system of America and the history of capitalist economic practices lead to the uncertainty behind the motive that guide these politically based ads.

Capitalism

Capitalism emerged on a large scale around 1850 when it was added to the Oxford dictionary. Pure capitalism is characterized by (1) capitalists owning the goods that society needs to survive, (2) the primary goal of profit, (3) capital is gained through the exploitation of the working class, and (4) an unrestrained free market. The ideas of pure capitalism have been changed and updated to fit in the modern American sphere

through government regulation, but nonetheless this system is seen as the dominating economic ideology in many Western Cultures (Faulks, 2005, p. 28). One of the main tenants of capitalism is the pursuit of profit by any means necessary. Greenberg (1988) explains that "The market is impersonal, it is concerned with the balance sheet alone" (p. 356). This lack of compassion is one of the largest problems with this free market economy that contributes to the uncertainty behind the motives of politically based advertisements. The Marxist critique of this ideology lies in the reality that income inequality is inevitable in a system where the owners of the means of production search for profit through exploiting the working class. Workers are alienated by the ruling class of capitalists and lose their sense of self. Faulks explains that individualism is not encouraged in a capitalist model and the oppression of wage laborers keeps the classes divided (p. 37). This oppression is spread through many minority classes across the country. For the purpose of this research, modern American consumer capitalism is most relevant to the discussion of progressive advertising in the 21st century.

Faulks explains the stages of capitalism as it has evolved in our modern times. The emergence of the Reagan and Thatcher era style neoliberalism in the 1970's has led to this phase of 'depoliticized capitalism.' This form of capitalism guides America's current economic system and emphasizes private ownership, little government intervention, and a capitalist system controlled by the owners of the means of production. Miliband (1969) describes the Marxist idea of the "ruling class" as a group of capitalist elites that have the power to "use the state as its instrument for the domination of society" (p. 23). Under this idea, capitalists have a hold on every aspect of American life. They have the economic power to influence both government action, consumer culture, and

societal ideas as whole. Cunningham (2003) explains the power that capitalists have over the consumer market in modern capitalism. America has gravitated towards a culture of consumer capitalism in which individuals seek happiness and fulfillment through material goods. Through advertising, companies persuade consumers to buy certain products by attempting to convince them they cannot be happy without them (p. 234). In a highly competitive world in search of profit, corporations must make themselves stand out through their marketing in order to be successful and attract a large consumer base.

Throughout development and socialization, citizens are taught to embrace the spirit of capitalism and revere it as the only system that allows hard workers to prevail (Soules, 2015, p. 78). It is simply thought of as a way of life that is rarely questioned by the general public. Oppressed classes continue to believe that working hard will save them despite the reality that they are struggling because of an elite class of capitalists that keeps them at the bottom. Modern Capitalism contains many elements of the industrial revolution but has made a shift to consumer capitalism. Presskorn-Thygesen and Bjerg (2014) identify the shift in capitalist focus from the means of production to a focus on consumers (p. 200). The consumer culture has become a way of life for many Americans. Advertising convinces the public that they need certain things to be happy. Soules claims that although advertisements cannot create a desire, they can channel it towards a certain product. In the age of consumer capitalism, the desire is constantly there because of the emphasis placed on material wealth. A different form of advertising that companies use to sell their products is the idea of creating a brand. Branding can allow people to easily recognize a company and understand what they stand for and what kind of business they are running (Soules, 2015, p. 89). Branding is the ultimate culmination of capitalist ideas

and practices because the brand is created in order to be an easily recognizable company that people want to buy from. Brands create meaning behind the products being purchased. For example, many companies brand themselves as a 'green' company that supports eco-friendly practices and aims to help the environment. Whether this is a legitimate claim or not, the brand helps promote the products they sell to consumers who are interested in being environmentally conscious.

Progressive Marketing

Marketing to niche groups has been a popular trend throughout the history of consumer capitalism. This can be seen through targeted ads towards African Americans, women, the youth, and so many other groups (Sender, 2005, p. 125). This kind of marketing can be very profitable for corporations who target large groups with a large amount of spending power. As the LGBTQ+ group becomes more accepted and popular in modern society, they become a popular group for markets to target. A well-known progressive marketing campaign that has taken hold of the marketing sector is "greenwashing." Scales (2014) explains this tactic as a way to show consumers that a particular company uses environmentally friendly practices and products (p. 478). In today's society, the environment has become a hot topic and many people have become vested in protecting it. Capitalist motives hide behind this positive message and people are willing to buy it. These advertisements focus on the non-economic factors that would persuade a consumer even though the motive behind it is profit-oriented. Many large corporations are pushing to lower the standards of labeling products as green in order to pay less for more profit (Scales, 2014, p. 479). This is a prime example of progressive marketing and how it operates under a capitalist structure. Taking a political and

controversial issue and plastering it across products in order to gain profit and attract a niche consumer base is a well-known practice in American advertising, but this is just one key example that has gained popularity in recent years.

The LGBTQ+ niche, Sender (2005) says, is “now considered a sufficiently large and profitable group to warrant marketers’ attention” (p. 1). In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled that gay-related materials were no longer considered obscene, which led to a boom in print media towards the LGBTQ+ community. The number of LGBTQ+ individuals in media and advertising has dramatically increased in the past decade (Nölke, 2018, p. 225). This marketing has been redirected towards television and social media advertisements (Um, 2012, p. 134). Popular companies that have engaged in progressive marketing directed towards the LGBTQ+ community are Coors, Miller, Orbit, Macy’s, Wells Fargo, Travelocity, and IKEA. Although there have been many more in recent years, these are some of the first examples. IKEA was the first company to run an LGBTQ+ television advertisement in 1994 (Um, 2012, p. 136). The typical ad targeting the LGBTQ+ community is similar to all other ads, but instead of a straight couple, the company uses a same-sex couple. This simple change has the power to make a large statement about a company and can have a large impact on consumers. Additionally, LGBTQ+ celebrities will often be used in targeted ads. Many companies have turned toward progressive marketing towards this community in recent years, but whether they are just hopping on a lucrative bandwagon or are showing real support is uncertain.

Sender (2005) discusses an interview with one company, Naya Water, that has marketed towards the LGBTQ+ community and the representative stated that “This is not a political decision to go after the LGBTQ+ niche, it was a business decision” (p. 2). In

this case, the decision to market towards the LGBTQ+ community was simply an exploitation of a popular political movement. Most businesses will not disclose the intentions behind this political marketing, but this example is telling about how corporations feel about this niche consumer group. Sender (2015) also notes that many members of the LGBTQ+ community are discouraging consumers from buying products from Urban Outfitters due to their donations to homophobic Pennsylvanian senator Rick Santorum (p. 4). However, in recent pride months, Urban Outfitters has come out with LGBTQ+ merchandise covered in rainbows and popular slogans for LGBTQ+ solidarity. This illuminates the nature of their “support” as it is evident that they are not committed to LGBTQ+ rights. The popular boom of this niche market began, and many people followed suit.

Progressive advertising seems simple and effective, but there are many caveats that create obstacles for these companies. While wanting to show support for LGBTQ+ individuals, companies must also be aware of the alienation or distaste that heterosexual individuals or homophobic customers may feel towards the ad. The struggle then lies in the balance between giving visibility to the LGBTQ+ community but not enough to receive negative reactions from individuals with dissenting opinions. Cunningham and Melton (2014) explain a tactic that has been adopted by many marketing campaigns, the signaling theory (p. 38). The signaling theory uses underlying signals, cues, and messages to appeal to the LGBTQ+ community. The signal must be enough to let the targeted group of consumers know that it is in support of them but not too much that opposing groups find is offensive. This theory allows companies to be supportive of the community, but not supportive enough to be controversial. A popular method for this

theory is that of a rainbow. Before the rainbow became an almost unanimous symbol of LGBTQ+ solidarity, it was as normal as anything else you would see in an advertisement. To the LGBTQ+ community, however, they saw this rainbow and understood that support and visibility was attached. This allows companies to show their support and gain the patronage of this target consumer group while remaining neutral with the rest of America's consumer base. While it is not as controversial anymore, LGBTQ+ advertising used to be a very taboo stance to take and many companies did not want to be too extreme or take too clear of a position on the issue (Cunningham & Melton, 2014, p. 38).

On the other hand, some consumers are more likely to be supportive of companies who show support for the LGBTQ+ community because it provides the illusion that their workforce reflects the diversity and inclusivity of their advertisements. People often believe that LGBTQ+ inclusivity in advertisements also represents the inclusivity of racial, sexual, and other minorities within the company (Cunningham & Melton, 2014, p. 42). This inclusivity in the workplace is another indication of whether these companies are actually supportive of the community (Cunningham & Melton, 2014, p. 38). The reality is that their workforce is not reflective of their advertisement demographic.

Marketing towards the LGBTQ+ community has been negatively perceived by a portion of the community because of the ways in which popular media and advertisements portray homosexuality. In agreeance with Cunningham and Melton's ideas about the signaling theory, Sender notes that many companies play it safe with affluent, white, male representations of homosexuality. While this group has a large spending force within the LGBTQ+ community, companies are often criticized for the exclusive nature of their representation. The white gay male demographic is the least

offensive under the ideologies of a patriarchal society. Gay men are more normalized in society and are often used as sexual eye candy for straight women in popular media. This is less offensive in advertising because it is a well-known trope that people are more comfortable with (Sender, 2004, p. 8). Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgender individuals receive much less attention from popular media because they are less accepted by the general public. A majority of the research done on LGBTQ+ advertising is solely focused on gay and lesbian individuals and there is almost none about the bisexual and transgender side of this popular acronym. Their visibility in society is much more limited than traditional American understandings of homosexuality. Companies that target the LGBTQ+ consumer base must be aware of alienation of other queer groups. Lastly, companies must focus on portraying LGBTQ+ individuals with realistic acting. The advertisements become alienating when heterosexual actors are portraying LGBTQ+ individuals based on problematic stereotypes and bad acting. The use of “fake” gay actors is offensive to many LGBTQ+ consumers (Sender, 2004, p. 12). This is problematic because it is a misrepresentation of the community and there are many qualified LGBTQ+ celebrities who could fit the role.

Much of the research on progressive marketing lends to the assumption that while a profitable market for corporations, there are a lot of sensitive areas that must be paid attention to in order to get a positive response from the community. Progressive marketing has been used for decades and is an effective method of social change regardless of the motives behind it (Soules, 2015, p. 78).

Political Consumerism

Stolle & Michelletti (2005) define political consumerism as “a consumer choice of producers and products based on political or ethical considerations” (p. 246). Companies advertise in ways that may or may not align with the views of the consumers and political consumerism is the reaction to this advertising (Rand, 2015, p. 4). Consumers make decisions and judgements about the practices of a company and purchase products accordingly. Michelletti & Stole (2005) explain that political consumerism can come in three different forms: boycotts, buycotts, and discursive political consumerism. Boycotts are the most well-known and historically popular form of political consumerism and are defined by the refusal to buy a certain product because of one’s opinions about the business. Boycotting is a relatively new term that encompasses politically motivated purchases from companies that align with one’s personal views. In terms of the capitalist model, boycotting is problematic because it removes the consumer from the market entirely. Buycotting, however, encourages companies to compete for customers through politically motivated branding and advertising (p. 751). The third method is discursive political consumerism. This is defined by “the expression of opinions about corporate policy and practice in communicative efforts directed at business, the public at large, family and friends, and various political institutions” (Michelletti & Stole, 2005, p. 752). Word of mouth is a powerful tool and sharing opinions about certain companies can have a large effect on their business as these opinions go from one person to another. Social media exacerbates this practice through online reviews and posts on an online platform.

Weber, Joireman, & Sprott (2016) outline the goals of politically charged marketing in attracting political consumerism with likeminded opinions. However, they

explain that research has shown that most consumers are turned away from businesses with dissenting opinions to theirs but are not more attracted to businesses with similar views. This may not be true for the LGBTQ+ niche market, but it follows societies trend of criticizing the bad and not paying attention to the good (p. 75).

Though not commonly recognized as such, political consumerism is the second most widespread form of political participation behind voting (Copeland, 2014, p.172). However, voter turnout has been decreasing and political consumerism is noted to be on the rise in recent decades (Stole & Micheletti, 2005, p. 247). While consumerism is different, less organized, and less structured than conventional political participation, it is still extremely relevant and important to the current political system. Corporations play a significant role in the cultural, political, and economic sphere and consumer responses to their positions play a large role in their success (Stole & Micheletti, 2005, p. 252).

Capitalism is fueled by consumers and by created a platform of social justice, “capitalism helps capitalism to develop a face of social justice” (Micheletti & Stole, 2008, p.750). While boycotting has been seen for centuries in movements such as abolition, unions, environmental, and other minorities, buycotting is now a more popular trend. Michelletti & Stole (2008) explain that “Shopping has become an established part of social justice activism” (p. 749). Through their purchasing power, consumers make a statement about their values.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Community

The LGBTQ+ community has faced a long road to equality and has begun to see justice in the 21st century. LGBTQ+ liberation was sparked by the Stonewall riots in 1969

(Armstrong & Cragg, 2006, p. 724). These riots provided visibility about an underserved group and sparked a movement towards equality. LGBTQ+ visibility in advertising began with the Supreme Court decision that LGBTQ+ content was not vulgar. Oakenfull (2013) explains the stages that LGBTQ+ marketing has gone through since the 1970's "(1) shunning in the 1980s, (2) curiosity and fear in the 1990s, and (3) pursuit in the 2000s" (p. 80). Popular media is currently in the pursuit stage in which companies are consistently producing pro-LGBTQ+ advertisements to earn the "gay dollar." Oakenfull describes the "gay dollar" as the consumer power that accompanies the LGBTQ+ community. This purchasing power of over \$1 trillion is a major factor in the emergence of Pride month in June as an advertising holiday (Green, 2018, p. 18).

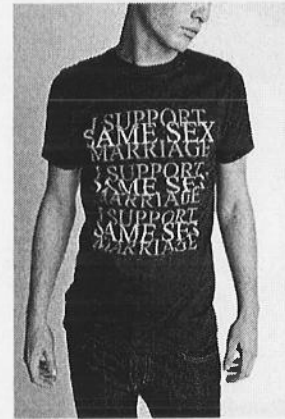
The reclamation of the word "Pride" is often used in the marketing of LGBTQ+ goods following the ideals of Pride parades, which are beacons of LGBTQ+ visibility. Using the word pride, similarly to rainbow colors, now has a cultural meaning of LGBTQ+ acceptance and is seen in many advertisements and merchandise that companies produce in support of the community (Chasin, 2000, p. 155). The impact of this advertising is that it provides visibility and cultural acceptance of this minority group. For members of the LGBTQ+ community, it is validating to see individuals like them portrayed in mainstream media. These ads provide visibility and solidarity for a movement and reproduce the idea of acceptance as a cultural norm (Ginder & Byun, 2015, p. 825). Advertisements and popular media dictate social norms and showing support of LGBTQ+ individuals can rub off on society and allow this minority group to transition into a widely accepted group in society.

Human Rights Campaign LGBTQ+ Corporate Equality Index

Pride month is the pinnacle month of LGBTQ+ targeted ads. Some of these companies are donating sizable portions of their profits from this merchandise to LGBTQ+ foundations like the Trevor Project, the It Gets Better Project, the Human Rights Campaign, local pride organizations, or local LGBTQ+ centers (bustle.com). The HRC has developed an LGBTQ+ Corporate Equality Index (CEI) in which companies are given a score out of 100 based on their commitment to providing equality in the workplace for LGBTQ+ employees through “Non-discrimination policies across business entities; Equitable benefits for LGBTQ+ workers and their families; Internal education and accountability metrics to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion competency; and, Public commitment to LGBTQ+ equality” (Human Rights Campaign, 2018, p. 4). They gather this information from “The HRC Foundation’s CEI survey; Internal Revenue Service 990 tax filings reviewed for any business foundation’s gifts to anti-LGBTQ groups; Case law and news accounts regarding findings of discrimination and corporate responsibility and the LGBTQ community at-large; and Individuals that report information to HRC Foundation” (p. 9). Corporations like Walmart, Apple, CVS, Ford, General Electric, and Verizon all received a 100 rating on the CEI. However, not every corporation files an application to be rated by the HRC. Over 2,000 companies were invited to participate, but only 947 were included in this year’s report. 609 of these companies received a 100 rating. Whether this is indicative of workplace inclusion as a whole cannot be certain because so many companies did not participate.

The 2018 CEI shows a growth both in participating companies and companies who are implementing inclusive policies for all members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Many of these corporations who received a 100 on the CEI also make LGBTQ+ merchandise and have donated a portion of their profits towards the foundations listed above. Abercrombie and Fitch, for example, donates \$250,000 and 100% of proceeds for merchandise (up to \$20,000) to the Trevor Project. On the other hand, some corporations are producing merchandise in support of the LGBTQ+ community but are known for anti-LGBTQ+ opinions and do not donate proceeds from that merchandise to LGBTQ+ foundations. Urban Outfitters, for example, produced a line of pro-LGBTQ+ shirts that read “I support same sex marriage,” while also donating over \$13,000 to Republican Rick Santorum’s campaign even though he was openly homophobic (groudswell.org).



The CEI gives a large amount of insight into this debate between moral commitment to the LGBTQ+ community and those who follow the trend for profit. While many companies have adopted non-discrimination policies, a larger point of concern in recent years has been transgender-inclusive healthcare. Currently only 58% of fortune 500 companies on the CEI offer comprehensive healthcare for transgender individuals (Human Rights Campaign, 2018, p.5). The major factor that influence the evaluation of transgender-inclusive healthcare is allowing transgender individuals any

procedure or coverage that a cisgender individual would receive. This includes short term leave, hormones, mental health care, and surgical procedures.

The CEI shows that many of the fortune 500 companies are inclusive in their benefits for LGBTQ+ community and that their advertisements are shown in congruence with a dedication to the equality of LGBTQ+ individuals. This report is available to the public and could be a helpful tool for consumers who are interested in using their purchasing power for good.

Data and Methods

The data for this project was collected from a survey given to individuals of all age groups, with a large percentage of the young participants as students of Salisbury University. (Appendix A) The survey consisted of 22 questions regarding demographics, feelings about capitalism, feelings about the LGBTQ+ community and progressive advertising, and opinions about political consumerism. Responses were taken from May 2018 until September 2018. There were no potential risks to this study due to its anonymous nature. The survey did not have an option for the name of the participant, maintaining the anonymity of all subjects. The potential benefit of this survey is the mere exposure of these kinds of ideas. Political marketing is not a concept many people consider and getting people to think about these kinds of things is important. The data was stored in my google account and I am the only individual allowed to view it. The Institutional Review Board granted exempt review approval of this project on 2 May 2018.

The target N for this survey was 100, but at the end of the survey period, 131 individuals had taken it. The survey was created through Google Forms and was distributed via email and Facebook for any age group to participate in. The student participants come from various majors and departments across the campus. The survey was distributed to HONR 111 classes via Dr. Kock, through the Salisbury University Class of 2019, 2020, and 2021 Facebook pages, and on my personal Facebook. They were from a wide range of majors, allowing the sample to be more representative of the SU student body. The survey was also posted on my personal Facebook page to expand the age range of participants. As I am simply seeking to discover aspects of consumer behavior, and we are all consumers, there were not any specific characteristics I was looking for in the subjects.

The independent variables used in this model are sexuality, political ideology, political party, what capitalism means to the participant, level of support for capitalism, support of the LGBTQ+ movement, political consumerism, and feelings about the visibility of the LGBTQ+ community. These variables came from eight questions asked in the survey responses and were used as independent variables in a model to predict the responses to the dependent variable question "Do you think this progressive marketing (i.e. commercials directed towards the LGBTQ+ community) is a moral stance or a business tactic?" This survey had participants from a variety of parties and ideologies, which is critical in ensuring that it is not skewed because of one-sided political beliefs.

Independent Variables

Sexuality is relevant to the dependent variable because people who belong to the LGBTQ+ community are more likely pay more attention to these advertisements and

would be more critical of their integrity. This variable had an open-ended response where participants could input whichever response they wished. In accordance to the distribution in society, the majority of participants were heterosexual. 77% of respondents were straight, 14.8% were bisexual, 4.4% lesbian, 2.2% gay, and 1.4% heteroflexible (identifies as heterosexual with homosexual tendencies). With research pertaining to progressive marketing towards the LGBTQ+ community, their opinions are critical to the analysis of data.

Political ideology and party identification are important predictors of how someone feels about the LGBTQ+ community and the economy. Conservatives are generally more opposed to the LGBTQ+ community and more supportive of capitalism and the free market. Liberals, however, are more committed to advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community and placing restrictions on large corporations and the free market. While these are generalizations, the platforms of each party are important to this discussion and many individuals align with these ideas based on ideology or party. Republicans identify more with conservative beliefs and democrats with liberal. However, 26% of the 131 participants aligned with the independent/moderate party who fall more in the middle. Most participants fell in the 3-4 range on the scale of conservative to liberal. Republicans represent 25.9% of participants and Democrats 28.9%. The congruence of Republican to conservative participants is present in the 35 individuals who identified as republican and 33 individuals who identified as either extremely or moderately conservative. Democratic participants would likely be more critical of corporations and progressive marketing but would still be supportive of the visibility it provides to the LGBTQ+ community.

In an open-ended question about what capitalism means to the participant, many people were unsure. Many participants only knew that it pertained to money or were altogether incorrect about what it means. The responses were operationalized by those that gave responses that were (1) positive, (2) negative, (3) neutral, (4) unsure, (5) no answer. The primary takeaway from this question was that many people are unsure about what capitalism means and the implications it has on modern society. Capitalism can be dressed up in very positive ways that are seen through the responses to this question. Many people responded with “hard work pays off, competition that rewards work ethic and innovation,” and other variations of the same idea. Although the reality points to the opposite outcome of this economic structure, many individuals believe that capitalism allows them to succeed and anyone is able to reach the top. Individuals who felt negatively commented on the focus on greed, alienation, and competition that capitalism breeds.

The next questions directly stated a simple description of capitalism as “an economic system focused on building the means of production and creating as much profit as possible for the owners of capital through free market practices.” Many people responded very positively to this even though this directly states that it benefits the owners of capital. Support was measured on a 1-5 scale and 41.8% of participants felt either moderately or extremely supportive of these practices while only 15.7% felt unsupportive. Someone who feels more positively about capitalism would believe in the integrity of capitalistic practices like advertising whereas someone more critical of capitalism would be quicker to judge the motives behind these ads. While these two variables might seem to bring up the issue of multicollinearity, they are distinctly

different because of the differing answers. An equal number of people answered with a positive, negative, or neutral response to the first question whereas a larger number of people answered positively for the second question. This shows a disparity in the perception of capitalism and illuminates the lack of education that participants had on the topic.

Like the reasoning behind the independent variable of sexuality, support of the LGBTQ+ community is relevant because those who feel more connected and supportive of this movement would likely be more critical about progressive advertising. This variable was also operationalized on a 1-5 scale, 1 being very unsupportive and 5 being very supportive. 70.3% of people felt either moderately or very supportive of the LGBT+ movement while only 11.1% felt unsupportive.

The next independent variable is whether participants are active in ethical purchasing. For example, many people are influenced by green marketing and will buy products that are marketed to be better for the environment. This is relevant because those who purchase items that they believe is for a certain cause are more likely to believe the integrity and legitimacy of progressive advertising. Those who believe in the greenwashing of today's market are more likely to believe that companies who advertise to the LGBTQ+ community actually support the cause and play an active role in advancing the movement. Only 20.7% of people said yes, 42.2% said somewhat, and 37% said no. This shows that many people are not influenced by progressive ads and do not gravitate towards companies simply because of their marketing towards certain causes.

The last independent variable is feelings about the visibility that progressive ads provide to the LGBTQ+ community. Those who feel that these ads have given more visibility to the community would be less critical of the marketing campaign. Regardless of the motive behind progressive advertising, the visibility that the community gets is important. A majority of the participants felt that these ads increase the visibility of the LGBT+ community.

These independent variables were chosen because feelings about the motives behind progressive advertising are influenced by opinions regarding the LGBTQ+ community and capitalism. Those who feel more supportive of the LGBTQ+ community and critical of capitalism would be more likely to believe that progressive marketing is a business tactic. On the other hand, those who are more conservatively aligned, support capitalism, and criticize the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to view marketing as a moral stance. The results of the dependent variable were that 48.1% believed progressive marketing is a business tactic, 21.5% felt it is a moral stance, and 30.4% were unsure. With most participants responding with 3-5 on the scale of support of capitalism, it is curious what led most people to believe it is a business tactic.

Chi Square and Lambda

	Chi Square	Degree of Freedom	Significance	Lambda
Sexuality	17.901	8	Yes	.043
Ideology	15.330	8	No	.046
Political Party	12.574	12	No	.049

Definition of Capitalism	7.518	8	No	.037
Support of Capitalism	6.695	8	No	.000
LGBT+ Support	10.272	8	No	.008
Ethical Purchasing	2.591	4	No	.21
LGBT+ Visibility	11.686	8	No	.034
Bothered by Chick-Fil-A	3.584	4	No	????

Although analysis of the Chi Square test shows that only one of these variables are statistically significant, the lambda scores reveal that there is some value in these variables predicting the dependent variable. The chi square numbers are lower than their respective values on the chi square chart, making them insignificant. The only variable that is significant from the chi square test is sexuality. The lambda scores reveal that only one variable has no correlation to the dependent variable, the support of capitalism. While all of the other values are also fairly weak in predicting the dependent variable, ethical purchasing seems to be the second strongest. Political party, ideology, and sexuality have the next highest values. The closer the number is to 1.0, the stronger the relationship between the two variables is. Most of them are under 0.1, which leads to the

assumption that the relationships are weak. Overall, all variables except sexuality are not statistically strong in their relationship to feelings about the motives behind progressive marketing.

Regression

The regression equation for this analysis is opinion about morality of progressive marketing = sexuality + ideology + party + definition of capitalism + support of capitalism + support of the LGBT+ movement + level of ethical purchasing + feelings about whether ads increase visibility.

Adjusted R-Square: .077

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Significance
Constant	1.968	.470	-----	4.185	.000
Sexuality	.187	.058	.295	3.233	.002
Ideology	.095	.085	.120	1.117	.266
Political Party	-.011	.041	-.025	-.295	.796
Definition of Capitalism	.084	.049	.155	1.703	.091

Support of Capitalism	.004	.059	.006	.069	.945
LGBTQ+ Support	-.124	.065	-.198	-1.901	.060
Ethical Purchasing	.070	.081	.074	.854	.395
LGBTQ+ Visibility	-.101	.067	-.130	-1.517	.132

The significance of the variables in this model are determined by a significant value lower than .05. The only value that is significant in this model is sexuality with a value of .002. While others like LGBTQ+ support with .060 and the definition of capitalism with .091 come close, their value is not low enough to be significant in this regression model. The significance of the sexuality variable is consistent with the chi square test. The reasoning behind the insignificance of the other variables may simply be because of the size of the sample and the varying opinions of human beings. Some people may not have answered in accordance with possible trends of political ideologies or parties. Additionally, many more Caucasians took this survey than other races and many more females took it than men. There could be disparity in the data in that not all voices of society are accounted for. Many demographic groups are underrepresented or not represented at all in this survey.

The adjusted R square of .077 represents the fact that these independent variables account for 7.7% of the reasons why people feel the way they do about the motives

behind progressive marketing. As far as a regression model goes, this relationship is very weak. The hypothesis provided is not supported by the data as the independent variables do not predict the dependent variable in a significant way. When building the regression model, many of the variables from the survey clearly had no impact on the dependent variable such as race, academic class, age, and how many ads they had seen targeted towards the LGBTQ+ community. The independent variables that were chosen appear very relevant to determining someone's opinion on the dependent variable, but all but one are shown to be insignificant in the model. Had there been more participants from a wider range of societal groups, these independent variables may have been significant. With the participants in this survey, however, the regression model does not accurately predict the dependent variable.

Analysis

Analysis of the regression model, chi square results, and the lambda numbers of this data show that these variables do not significantly predict or correlate to the dependent variable. While these variables may seem very relevant to the dependent variable in theory, the practical applications lead to the conclusion that the null hypothesis is not rejected through this formula of independent variables and the dependent variable. The hypothesis of this project is not supported because of the results of the statistical models shown above. The only variable that proves significant in predicting how participants felt about the motives behind LGBTQ+ targeted ads was sexuality. This is logical because those who feel more connected to the movement are more likely to be critical of advertisements targeted towards them. The ultimate goal of targeted advertisements is to reach the buying power of that group. The HRC Corporate

Equality Index estimates the buying power of the LGBTQ+ community as \$971 billion. This is a considerable market for companies to be targeting. Although the LGBTQ+ population makes up a minority of the population, their influence in the consumer market is substantial. Corporations appeal to this target group because that amount of spending power can have a real impact on their profit. However, these targeted advertisements must be convincing and appealing to the LGBTQ+ community for them to work.

Many LGBTQ+ individuals face discrimination and judgment regarding their sexual orientation and making them feel welcome and accepted is vital to the success of targeted ads. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to be more critical of targeted ads because these large corporations are guiding public opinions about this group. The motives and integrity behind marketing is important for LGBTQ+ representation and acceptance in society. A total of 131 individuals took this survey and 28 of those individuals were members of the LGBTQ+ community. 19 of those were bisexual, 3 were gay, and 6 were lesbian. The dependent variable question is "Do you think this progressive marketing (i.e. commercials directed towards the LGBTQ+ Community) is a moral stance/opinion or a business tactic by these companies?" Of the participants who identified as part of the LGBT+ community, 12 answered that they thought it was a business tactic, 5 answered that it was a moral stance, and 11 answered unsure. This shows a direct trend in opinion based on sexual orientation. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are most likely to view progressive advertisements as business tactics, which is very relevant to the discussion of the success of these ads. If LGBTQ+ individuals are not convinced by progressive ads, the companies that produce these advertisements will suffer. Sexuality is arguably the most important variable in this equation because they are

the group being targeted. If they are viewing progressive advertising in a negative way, the entire purpose of this marketing is discredited.

Two other variables come very close to being significant: LGBTQ+ Support and the definition of capitalism. The explanation for near significance of the LGBTQ+ support variable is similar to the explanation for sexuality. This variable was operationalized on a 1-5 scale, 1 being the least supportive and 5 being the most supportive. 60.7% (n=81) answered very supportive (5), 9.6% (n= 12) answered moderately supportive (4), 18.5% (n= 24) answered neutral (3), 8.1% (n=10) answered moderately unsupportive (2), and 3% (n=4) answered extremely unsupportive (1). Individuals who feel tied to the LGBTQ+ community or view themselves as allies to the cause would also be more critical of targeted ads. Many people who feel strongly in support of the LGBTQ+ community would have similar opinions of the advertisements as members of the community. The significance of this variable on the regression model is .060. The threshold for significance is .050 and this variable is the closest to significant without being significant.

The definition of capitalism variable stems from the survey question “what does capitalism mean to you?” This was an open-ended response question that was operationalized from 1-5, 1 being a positive view of capitalism, 2 being a negative view of capitalism, 3 being a neutral view of capitalism, 4 being an unsure response, and 5 being no response. Objectivity was important in operationalizing this variable. Responses such as “hard work pays off” were classified as positive responses, whereas responses like “exploitation of the working class” were defined as negative. 27.5% (n=36) answered

positively, 23.7% (n=31) answered negatively, 28.2% (n=37) answered neutral, 6.9% (n=9) answered unsure, and 13.7% (n=18) did not answer.

Many of the responses to this question were incorrect in defining capitalism. In fact, many people wrote the exact opposite of what the correct definition of capitalism is in modern society. Examples of incorrect responses were “a political system that is controlled, local control over state control, a threat to democracy, and an economic system where everyone shares everything equally.” However, this question and the survey as a whole is about public perception. Even if someone’s positive view of capitalism is incorrect, their view remains the same. Their misconception gives them the ideas that the practices and motives of capitalism are positive and beneficial. People who define capitalism in a negative way are more likely to view progressive advertising in a more critical way. Those who support capitalist practices and view it in a positive light are more likely to view these ads as sincere and effective. Positive responses included “mobility between social classes, free market, an economic system that rewards innovation, and great for the working man.” Individuals who feel supportive of the competitive, for profit nature of capitalism are more likely to view progressive advertising as morally sound and simply another way in which capitalism operates.

Advertising in general is a large part of capitalism in modern society and acts to reach citizens through motives of profit and competition. Progressive advertising must be included in this underling motive of profit if it is to have any purpose in the market. Individuals who feel negatively about capitalist practices would also feel unsupportive of progressive advertising as it is a capitalist practice in itself. Many people who responded with a negative view of capitalism mentioned “selfishness, moral impotence, greed,

worker slavery, spending too much money for everything, only benefits the rich, unequal distribution of wealth, etc.” This variable was very close to being significant, however the variable “support of capitalism” was one of the least significant variables. This is important because the definition given for the support of capitalism question was one of the common definitions that is used as an overview of capitalism in a modern sense. The definition used for the question was “Capitalism is an economic system focused on building the means of production and creating as much profit as possible for the owners of capital through free market practices.” This definition does not sound so bad but it does not go into detail about the implications that go along with this practice. It is not possible to go in depth about capitalism in a short survey, so this definition had to suffice. The vast difference in responses to this question and the open-ended question shows a disconnect between what people believe about capitalism and how they feel about the idealized definition of it. 41.8% (n= 56) of participants felt positively about that definition in comparison to 27.5% (n=35) who responded positively to the first question. Reading the definition above sounds like a positive statement as readers gloss over what “creating as much profit as possible” can mean for an economic system. That is where economic exploitation and income inequality comes into play. The constant quest for profit at the expense of others is a part of a capitalism that many people ignore. The language used to talk about capitalist practices can affect how people feel about it and the disparity between the responses of these two questions shows this.

Discussion

While the data from this survey reveals patterns of views on capitalism and sexuality, it is incomplete simply because of the small number of participants. If it were

done again, it would be much more successful if more people could have taken the survey. 131 is a decent sample size and exceeded my goal, but when examining a small group such as the LGBTQ+ community, having more participants would have led to a larger voice for those individuals. The main problem with this survey was the overall lack of diversity. A large portion of the individuals who took the survey were white females between 18-21. While this demographic is very relevant to the discussion, results could have been much more conclusive if there had been a representative distribution of participants from all genders, races, ages, and sexual orientation.

A lack of knowledge about capitalism is another barrier that played a significant role in this research. Many people are unaware of what this economic system truly means outside of the heavily used term “free market.” Dimaggio (2015) explains this false consciousness as the ignorance that individuals have towards the consequences and negative aspects of capitalism (p.494). It is impossible to include a comprehensive definition of capitalism in a 5-minute survey, but participants being fully informed about the pros, cons, etc. of capitalism would have provided for more accurate responses about how people feel about capitalism and progressive advertising. Public perception was the basis of this research because there were not enough resources or time to investigate individual companies in exploring the motives behind progressive advertising. The question of how people feel about progressive ads and what leads them to feel this way is difficult to answer with a small number of participants.

The question of whether advertisements are motivated by capitalism or a moral stance is unknown because it may be different for every company. The dependent variable question did not include an option for “it depends.” Had this been included, it

may have been the popular choice. The HRC CEI shows that some companies are participating in inclusive workplace practices and donating money to LGBTQ+ foundations and groups, but others are not doing anything but profiting from this merchandise. This is a tricky question to get to the bottom of because many companies will not be forthright about how they feel about the LGBTQ+ community and the reasons why they create ads the way they do.

Conclusion

Capitalism controls many aspects of modern life and advertising and branding is a big part of this. Many companies have marketed towards the LGBTQ+ community in recent years to attract the large buying power of this niche group. This is a capitalist practice under the idea that advertising is a key component of consumer capitalism in the 21st century. According to the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index, many of the fortune 500 companies who participate in LGBT+ marketing are making a commitment to LGBTQ+ equality within their corporate practices. However, a majority of individuals who participated in the survey for this project felt that the advertisements were simply a business tactic used to profit from a popular trend. Advertising plays a key role in creating and recreating popular culture. Progressive advertisements targeted towards the LGBTQ+ community follow this model of popular culture and trends. In addition to following a trend, companies are reaching out to the \$1 trillion buying power of the LGBTQ+ community. Pride month is the pinnacle for progressive advertising and many companies that produce merchandise during this month are donating a portion of the profits towards LGBTQ+ foundations such as the HRC and the Trevor Project. However, public perception of these advertisements is important when evaluating the

motives behind them. If people are not convinced that these ads are sincere, they are likely not going to respond in a positive way. Political consumerism is a rising form of political participation in the U.S. and the LGBTQ+ movement has shown that they have the power to change the market in a significant way.

The independent variables used in a regression model are not strong predictors of the dependent variable, therefore, the hypothesis is not supported by these independent variables. In addition, research from the HRC CEI, peer-reviewed journals, online publications, and articles show inconclusive results about the possible motives behind the use of progressive marketing. The HRC CEI lends to the conclusion that many companies are participating in inclusive practices for the LGBTQ+ community and have made a commitment to equality, whereas Sender (2005) shows through an interview with Naya Water that these advertisements are solely business decisions. The truth may lay somewhere in between because it could be both a business decision and a moral stance. Those who are supportive of the LGBTQ+ community can still recognize that it would be profitable to market to a growing group in society. Donating to LGBTQ+ groups does not define how supportive a company is of the community because some companies may have more to spare than others. The question of whether corporations use progressive marketing as a business tactic or an extension of their moral beliefs is a subjective one that would have to be examined on case by case basis. Looking further into this idea, one could ask whether it matters what the motives behind these ads were. At the end of the day, it is giving more visibility and attention to an underserved minority group in society and allowing LGBTQ+ individuals to become more normalized. 80% of the individuals who responded to the survey conducted for this project felt that progressive marketing

increased the visibility of the LGBTQ community. At the end of the day, do the motives behind these ads affect the LGBTQ+ community if the result is the same? The LGBTQ+ community has made majors strides over the last decade and will continue to strive for equality in all aspects of life.

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Appendix A.

1. What is your age?

- 18-21
- 22-30
- 31-40
- 41-55
- 56-70
- 70+

2. What gender do you identify with? _____

3. What sexuality do you identify with?

- Straight/Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Other: _____

4. Please describe your ethnicity:

- Caucasian/White
- Black/African American
- Latino
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- American Indian
- Mixed Race

- [illegible]

10. Which political party best describes you?

- Republican
- Strong Republican
- Democrat
- Strong Democrat
- Independent/Moderate
- Libertarian
- Other: _____

11. What does capitalism mean to you?: _____

12. Capitalism is an economic system focused on building the means of production and creating as much profit as possible for the owners of capital through free market practices. How supportive do you feel of this?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Not
supportive

Extremely
supportive

13. How supportive do you feel of the LGBTQ+ movement?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Not
supportive

Extremely
supportive

14. Do you feel that some companies have more progressively marketed towards the LGBTQ+ community in recent years?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

15. Would you be more inclined to purchase something if that company had run pro-LGBTQ+ advertisements?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

16. Does it bother you that some companies like Chick-Fil-A are openly against the LGBTQ+ community?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

17. Would this make you less likely to purchase their products?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

18. Do ethical or political practices mold the way you buy products? (i.e. environmentally friendly, organic, vegan)

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

19. How do you feel about how much exposure that the LGBTQ+ community gets in commercials and advertising?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Not enough

Too much

20. How many companies do you know of that have pro-LGBTQ+ ads or have expressed pro-LGBTQ+ opinions?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9+

21. Have these ads increased the visibility of the LGBTQ+ community?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Not at all

Significantly

22. Do you think this progressive marketing (i.e. commercials directed towards the LGBTQ+ Community) is a moral stance/opinion or a business tactic by these companies?

- Moral stance/Opinion
- Business Tactic
- Unsure