

Addressing the Lack of Diversity and Inclusion in the Public Relations and Advertising Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to identify **the lack of racial and ethnic diversity** in public relations and exploring how companies can take a leadership role in becoming more inclusive and diverse by recruiting, developing, and retaining talent. Having efforts like employee resource groups, multicultural clubs, and mentoring programs can assist in employee growth. Research shows that **more diverse companies are better able to win top talent and improve their customer orientation**, employee satisfaction, and decision-making. To address this issue, companies should recognize their biases, create a Diversity and Inclusion committee, select an inclusive interview team, and recruit talent from nationwide universities and colleges.

Background

With the growth of diversity in the US, the industry needs to adapt to respond to the changing audience. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, African-Americans, which represent 11.9% of the U.S. workforce, accounted for 4.1% of the employees in advertising, public relations and related services in 2017 (BLS, 2017). The industry has been more successful in recruiting Latinx—16.7% of the nation's overall workforce; they accounted for 12.3% of the industry's jobs this year. It is very unlikely that we can continue to succeed in reaching out to a minority group without more representation in PR and AD firms. This is an issue that potential clients and employees are starting to be concerned with, especially Millennials. In a study conducted by the Institute for Public Relations and Weber Shandwick, **47% of Millennials believe that diversity and inclusion is an important factor when searching for jobs** (Weber Shandwick, 2017). This is 14% more than Gen Xers. For the next generation that many firms are relying on, diversity and inclusion seems to be an important criterion for job selection. Also, millennials believe that **diversity and inclusion make for a better place to work, increases opportunities for all employees, and improves employee morale**.

Evidence

Lack of diversity in agencies results in lack of representation in communication campaigns.

- Minorities are underrepresented in the media. In fact, black models appear in a lower percentage of magazine advertisements relative to the national population
- When minorities appear in advertisements it is typically stereotypical, marginalized, or group contexts.
- Blacks have increased their representation in recent years and are typically shown as athletes or musicians and appear in government-supported or public service ads.
- Commercial advertisements may contribute to racism and prejudice by placing minorities in marginalized positions, and whites in powerful positions.

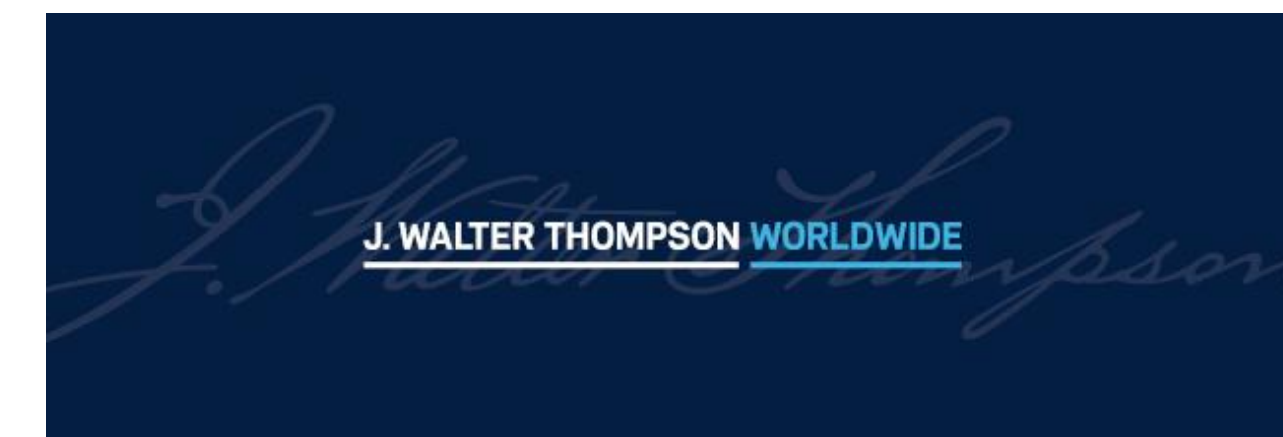
Source: Hoplamazian &, Appiah, 2013

Case Studies

The comparative case study method was used for this project. The two firms looked at for comparison were:

1. **J. Walter Thompson Worldwide (JWT):** This company had been hit with a lawsuit in early 2016 chief communications officer, Gustavo Martinez, was sued for alleged discrimination by a female subordinate who accused him of an “unending stream of racist and sexist comments, as well as unwanted touching.” Additionally, according to the website, there also seems to be no African American or Latinx representation in their executive team.

2. **Weber Shandwick** won the Best PR Firm Diversity Initiative by PR Week in 2015 for their dedication in retaining a diverse workforce. Weber Shandwick partners up with organizations such as The Lagrant Foundation and The United Negro College Fund to continue to recruit younger talent. Their numbers show their progress in this area: 29.6% of 2015 VP/SVP hires were people of color (as of June of 2015), 28.1% of 2015 hires at the entry account director levels, and a third of 2015 promotions into the VP level were also people of color.



In order to address the lack of diversity in the industry, agencies and firms need to devote resources to achieve long-term and lasting change, benefiting employees and consumers.

Proposal

PR/AD firms should focus on building an inclusive environment by creating programs for their employees and board members starting with a **Diversity & Inclusion Committee** that should be led by a senior manager from an underrepresented ethnic group. Having efforts like employee resource groups, multicultural clubs, and mentoring programs can assist in employee growth (Aperian Global, 2016). Companies should also **include minorities to various account teams** to heighten diversity in the client's advertisements. Audiences should be able to see themselves in advertisements. Identification with advertising models can occur when people perceive their tastes and preferences to be similar to those of the model.

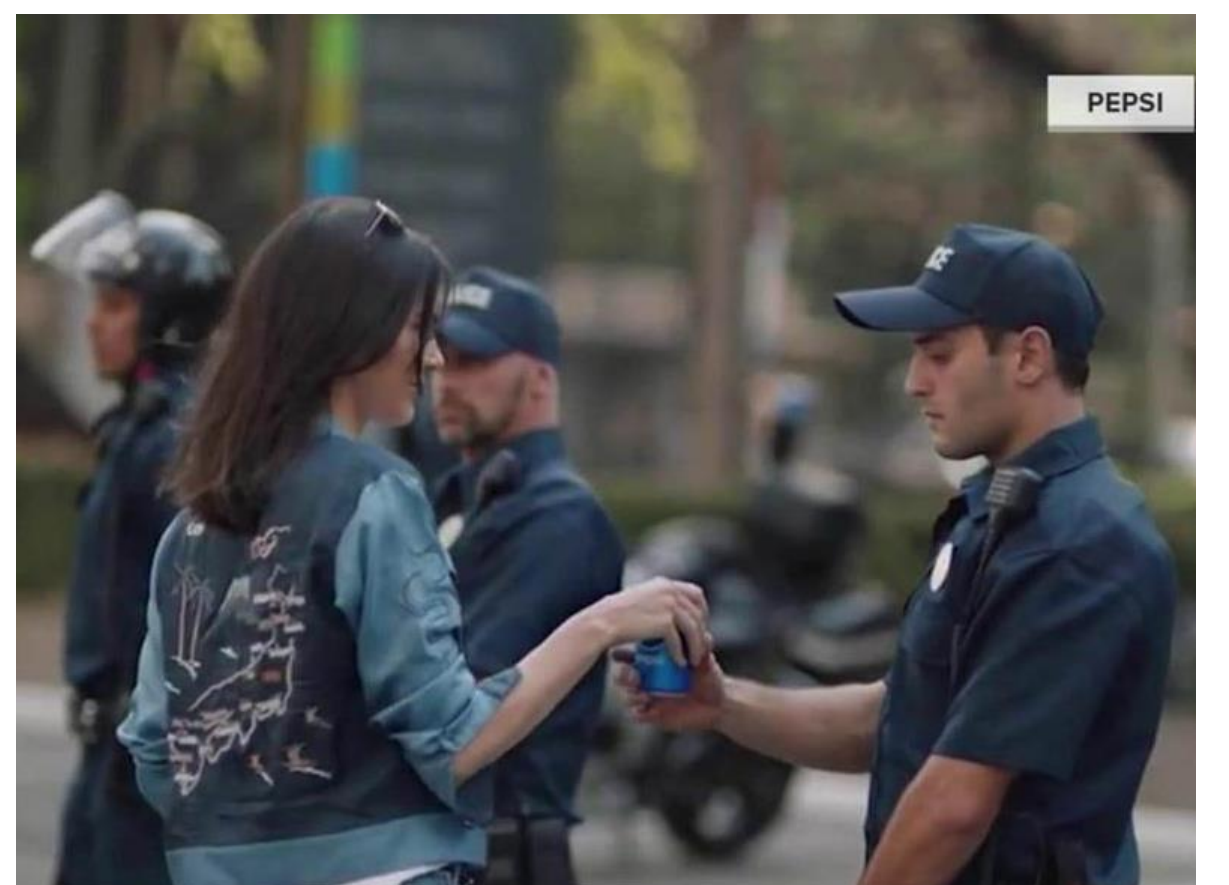
As a roadmap, I have provided the **following four-point D&I plan** to add to improve the employee pool at public relations and advertising firms:

- I. **Recognize biases**, both conscious and unconscious. Start by having the staff, especially the recruitment team, take Implicit Association Tests (Project Implicit, 2011) on topics including race, age, gender, sexuality, and disability.
- II. **Evaluate yourselves**. Harvard University (2013) evaluates their team when looking to interview more diverse candidates. Ask each department: What are the diversity strengths? How can I build on those strengths? What are the diversity challenges? How can I address those challenges?
- III. **Select an inclusive interview team**. Make sure to have a roundtable of diversity when hiring diversity. This includes having interviewees who are respectful of different cultures and characteristics. Make sure that there is no unintended bias in the interview process.
- IV. **Recruiting talent from universities and colleges nationwide** (beyond the usual go-to pool). Partnering up with local universities and colleges in the area would be a great way to recruit talent. Creating a minority scholarship or internship/fellowship such as the Alfred Fleishman Diversity Fellowship, created by FleishmanHillard, which is devoted to helping people from diverse backgrounds communicate with, and understand, one another. It is important to create pipeline programs to support and encourage minority students who aspire to work in public relations.

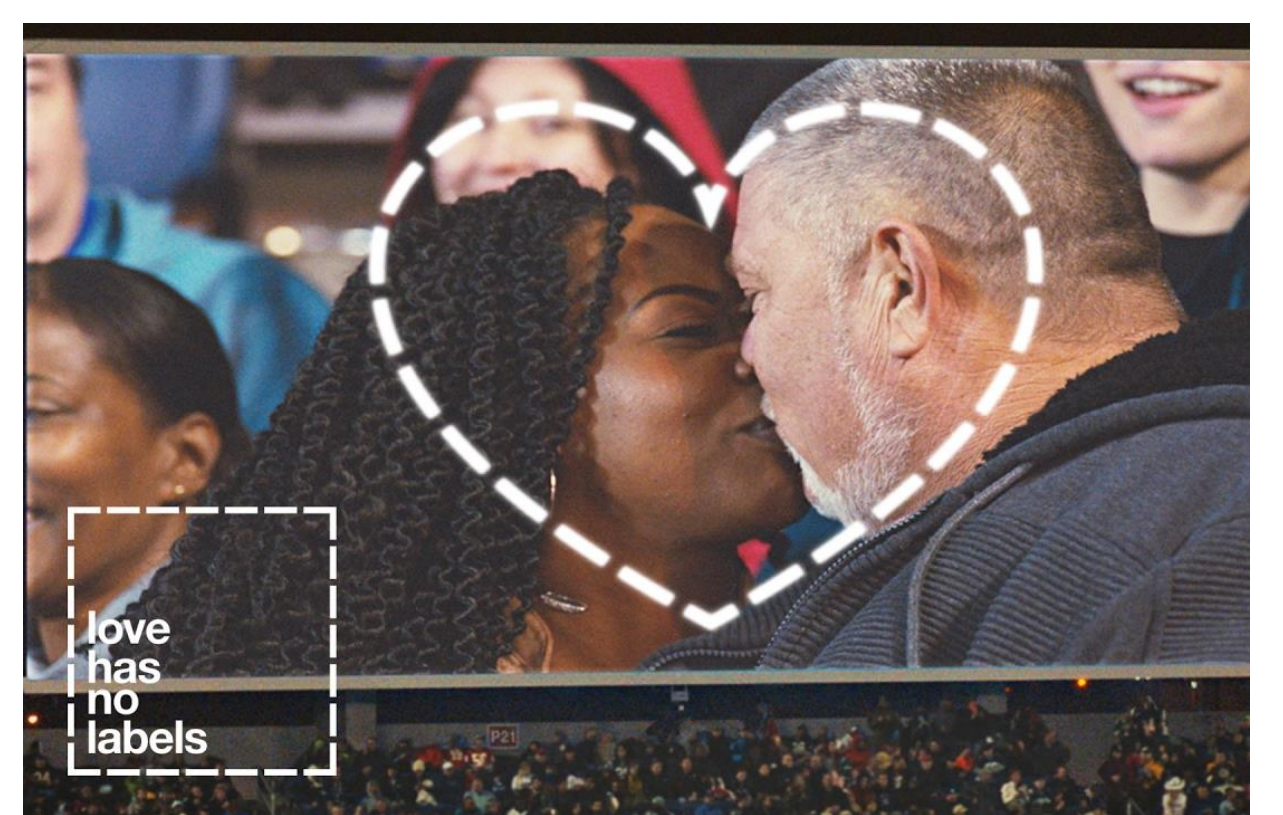
Diversity representation in the industry



The Rukavinas | Swiffer. Swiffer portrays an interracial family perfectly, headed by a father with a disability.



Kendall Jenner | Pepsi. Pepsi appropriating imagery from serious protests to sell their products while minimizing the danger of protesting.



Fans of Love | Love Has No Labels. Adding a twist to the Kiss Cam by turning the admirable symbol into an indication of unbiased love.

Discussion

Brands such as General Mills, HP and Verizon have announced they want to work strictly with agencies that value diversity. **“They demand that the agencies creative departments must be staffed with at least 50 percent women and 20 percent people of color”** (Stewart, 2016). HP's chief marketing and communications officer, Antonio Lucio, mentioned HP's vision is to create technology that will make the world a better place for all everyone, everywhere. Without executive leaders, that represent all people of color, gender, and geography, HP will not be able to make their vision a reality (Lucio, 2016).

Public relations and advertising have major social responsibilities, because of their potential impact. The images that we use affect those who see it in many ways. Kids seeing themselves reflected in our culture is important. The way we mirror a group of minorities affects their culture. Images matter and practitioners affect change in a real and tangible way. Organizations need to step back and take a look at the hiring practices and culture and know that fighting for a more diversity-focused work environment is not only the important thing to do, but it is also the right thing to do.