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ABSTRACT

In this study, researchers will test to see the effects rainbow-washing has on consumers' intent to purchase. Rainbow-washing is a new marketing technique in which companies implement different initiatives to appeal to the LGBTQ+ community while not genuinely investing in the community itself. To test if rainbow-washing is correlated to a consumer's desire to purchase, a survey was distributed using nonprobability sampling to 38 participants. Of the sample, less than half identified as members of the target community (LGBTQ+). As a result, it was concluded there is no significance between consumer attitudes towards rainbow-washing and their intention to purchase. However, the study did allude to the fact that corporate social responsibilities matter to customers something that plays a role in consumer purchase behavior and attitudes toward the brand and advertisement.

INTRODUCTION

With the growth of LGBTQ+ marketing, advertisers need to be at the forefront of understanding how queer consumers respond to their ads. The research on advertising to the LGBTQ+ community has been a more recent focus, however, this research is limited because of how "the dynamics of support for homosexuality [have changed] over time and across different countries," (Eisend, 2019). What is interesting, though, is there is research done into other identities and how companies have incorporated them into their advertising and marketing plans that can be used to help this research study. Because society sees the world in binaries, it sets the precedent of hierarchies and discrimination on marginalized communities. This raises the question of if

these dynamics are similar to when companies began to incorporate marginalized racial and ethnic groups, like black and Hispanic/Latinx individuals, into advertising. Martell discussed the pandering strategy used to garner sales from the LGBTQ+ community, saying they do it because, "it's just good PR," (Martell, 2019). It has been found that 24% of US internet users are more likely to buy from a business that is in open support of the LGBTQ+ community (Martell, 2019).

Learning more about the purchasing behaviors of LGBTQ+ individuals is becoming of mass interest to companies and advertising agencies due to their growing visibility in the consumer market (Schnieder & Auten, 2018). Many companies now dedicate June to celebrating Pride Month with the LGBTQ+ community by selling rainbow-patterned merchandise, changing their social media profiles to feature rainbows, and advertising using same-sex couples and queer-coded individuals as means to drive their sales. However, there have been consumers calling this a capitalist practice called rainbow-washing (Wired Staff, 2018). This skepticism is focused on "a brand's use of LGBTQ symbols to only signal their support through advertising, without engaging in further support of this community or their rights," (Champlin, 2020).
This research study would provide an important baseline for future research into LGBTQ+ consumer purchasing behaviors based on the perception of rainbow-washing. Following the completion of this study, there could be research into rainbow-washing perception effects on donations, consumer bias, and if this form of pandering changes the company's success or not.

There have been a handful of previous studies that have focused on rainbow-washing, queerbaiting, and other issues pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community and marketing campaigns as well as additional articles and opinion pieces concerning Pride Month and how certain brands and companies seem to use it as a marketing ploy. A notable study published in 2018 by Ana-Isabel Nölke titled *Making Diversity Conform? An Intersectional, Longitudinal Analysis of LGBT-Specific Mainstream Media Advertisements* examines depictions of the LGBTQ+ community in mainstream advertising campaigns between 2009 and 2015. This study further discusses how mainstream advertising has a "domesticized version of 'gayness'" and the conflicting effects that result from these campaigns.

In *Queerbaiting: The 'Playful' Possibilities of Homoeroticism* (2018) Joseph Brennan analyzes how the media industry has used queerbaiting in television and movies, specifically in two BBC shows, and the overall negative undertones of the term and its use. Eve Ng also analyzes queerbaiting in the media industry, particularly on how paratexts that suggest or address queer readings, especially promotional material, and public commentary, inform viewer engagement with media texts, and how they interact with media production and LGBT content (Ng, 2017).
In the 2020 publication, *Communicating Support in Pride Collection Advertising: The Impact of Gender Expression and Contribution Amount* Sarah Champlin and Minjie Li look into companies using the entice of potential donations to an LGBTQ+ non-profit while selling "Pride collections" during Pride month effects how both heterosexual and homosexual consumers react to these campaigns. This study concluded that heterosexual participants exhibited more positive attitudes toward the brand than LGBTQ participants.

There are many online articles on this topic, G2 emphasizes the importance of brands setting short- and long-term goals for Pride month campaigns as well as implementing internal diversity,

equity, and inclusion efforts to ensure genuine support for LGBTQ+ consumers and not just profiting off them (Doeing, 2019). In 2018 Wired asked their staff members opinions on rainbow-washing during Pride Month and the overall viewpoint was a mix between being happy that more companies seemingly want to support the LGBTQ+ community and being skeptical if it is just for profit or if they actually support them behind closed doors. In *Pride or Pandering?* Katie Martell calls out examples of insincere Pride Month support such as Adidas selling rainbow merchandise in a "pride collection" but also sponsored the 2018 World Cup in Russia, where there are anti-LGBTQ laws that made the event "unsafe for fans and athletes.". These articles review a variety of different brands' previous handling of Pride Month campaigns and the LGBTQ+ representation in advertisements, bringing forth a better idea of what rainbow-washing is and how it has been received by the public.

Trends help motivate individuals' and corporations' decisions, when something is deemed socially acceptable or considered a "hot topic," it influences others to join in. The problem with this is, some things, specifically, in this case, being LGBTQ+ and supporting the Pride movement, are not a trend yet many corporations treat them as though they are. This research is significant because so often we see many companies display "special collections" or "exclusive merchandise" in support of Pride but the reality is the company is trying to sell things just to appeal to a specific market. In an article in which Katie This leads to the plausible assumption that many companies may only be marketing with the Pride movement for higher sales and the attention of new customers. This is important because it is important to bring awareness to the fact that queer-baiting does exist and much of what we see is for publicity purposes. 5.6% of the United States identifies as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and having their, and others around the world, lifestyle used for PR purposes is unfair and inappropriate (Jones, 2021).

This study will explore the use of "rainbow-washing" by companies as a way to appeal to the LGBTQ+ community. "Rainbow-washing" is the act of companies implementing different campaigns and brand changes to appeal to the LGBTQ+ community with little to no investment in the community itself (Champlin & Li, 2020). This marketing is especially noticeable during the month of June, which is the official LGBTQ+ Pride Month. By utilizing the United State's LGBTQ+ community as the selected segment, this paper will assess the perception of this marketing technique on consumer's purchase intention, attitudes toward the ad, and attitudes toward the brand's authenticity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LGBTQ Identification

The LGBTQ population in the United States is an independent variable in this research. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the abbreviation LGBTQ as standing for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (one's sexual or gender identity)". This is referring to one's sexual orientation and gender identity, with a plus symbol (LGBTQ+) as an inclusive way to represent different individuals' identities. Individuals typically develop new social roles and configure their self-identity during emerging adulthood (ages 18-25) and sexual and gender identity development occurs within social interactions, with the "LGBTQ+ community being a

source of support to aid in identity exploration and seeking support within larger non-affirming contexts" (Arnett, 2000; Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Frost & Meyer, 2009; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996 as cited in Parmenter et al, 2020). When researching the LGBTQ community, the demographic characteristics are based on self-reported data that suffer from biases due to the sensitivity of the subject matter thus depending on the study, different data is reported such as a 2011 study stating there were 9 million Americans who identify as LBGT while others estimate a range between 1.7% - 5.7% of all American adults who identify as LBGTQ (Coffman et al.,2017; Gates 2011, as cited in Eisend & Hermann, 2020).

The Gay Liberation Movement/LGBT Rights Movement started in the twentieth century with the (now) LGBTQ+ Rights Movement still being carried on today (History.com, 2017). The topic of the LGBTQ community is frequently in the nation's spotlight, "In the past few decades, the visibility of and positive public opinion toward homosexuality in society have increased considerably" this increased visibility has led to the LGBTQ community having a buying power of $1 trillion in 2017 (Ghaziani et al., 2016; Chesney, 2017, as cited in Eisend & Hermann, 2020). With the LGBTQ+ community considered an individual segment, more studies have been done to further narrow in on how these individuals differ among others in terms of consumers - "differences in consumption-favoring behaviors, evaluations, and traits between homosexual and heterosexual consumers and between lesbian and gay consumers...we provide a more realistic portrayal of the "homosexual consumer" (Eisend & Hermann, 2020). One way brands feel they can show understanding and support to these specific consumers is with social responsibility advertising campaigns such as "pride collection" or limited edition products often aimed at the LBGTQ+ millennial audience (Champlin & Li, 2020).

LGBTQ Advertising History

To understand the history of LGBTQ Advertisement is to acknowledge that advertising was not created with the intent of including the LGBTQ community. Advertising is defined as the "action of calling something to the attention of the public especially by paid announcements" and is utilized with the intent of persuading the targeted audience to either take on a certain belief or purchase a certain good/item (Webster 2021). In the United States of America, advertising has always been derived from a heterosexual point of view. According to Schroeder & Zwick (2007), a majority of advertisements "invoke gender identity" and tend to portray the "stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity". Given the negative history of homosexuality in the U.S, the LGBTQ community's representation in the advertising industry was nearly nonexistent. The Hollywood Production Code and the Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters both indirectly prohibited imagery of homosexuality (Cook 2018).

As the LGBTQ community has grown, so has their presence in television and advertising, however, that recognition is not always considered positive. According to Raley & Lucas (2008), when television does not show a specific demographic/social group or only displays them in a "negative and/or stereotypical fashion" then that social group is denied respect. Mass media is a primary source of information and "without recognition and respect on TV and other forms of mass media, social groups are more likely to be devalued by society (Raley & Lucas 2008)". Most advertisements that included members of the LGBTQ community were from the

viewpoints of heterosexuals which did not aid with recognition - "the majority of work examining LGBTQ advertising has largely focused on heterosexual consumers attitudes toward gay imagery" (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020). For example, certain LGBTQ+ ads would stereotypically portray gay men as "effeminate" and lesbians as more "masculine" in relation to heterosexuals (Cabosky 2017).

Understanding Materialism, Capitalism, And Brand Authenticity

This study aims to explore how the intersection of materialism, capitalism, and brand authenticity mix when advertising to LGBTQ+ consumers. Is there a point where a company's inclusive efforts are perceived to be a ploy to garner money (i.e., rainbow washing) and not an authentic dedication to inclusion? To explore consumer perception of an advertisement or brand, one must understand the relationship between these large, multi-faceted concepts. Materialism is a continuum focused on "the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states," (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins, 2017). Unlike previous research suggesting possession is linked to luxury/expensive goods, possession does not rely on the monetary value of the new possession (luxury versus cheap) (Richin, 2017). The emphasis in materialism is on how people or living organisms assign and place value after acquiring a possession (Richins & Dawson, 1992). For example, a dog may place a higher value on a new toy based on its newness and the value of their other toys may decrease due to the new toy. However, if you were to introduce a new dog to a household, the original dog may place an equal, high value on all their toys because the new dog was introduced.

From previous research, it was determined that in the nature versus nurture debate regarding materialism, this characteristic is a learned behavior, observed over a person's life from parents to friends to celebrities and other people (Richins, 2017). The "Daily Event Cycle" is the process of developing materialistic tendencies focused on events people experience throughout their day, leading to the application of their resources, and ending with an outcome that a person has learned from; This cycle is continuous and happens multiple times a day (Richins, 2017). Through the daily event cycle, people complete developmental tasks (or mastering skills) and gain knowledge on how things are used and the meaning behind them (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins, 2017). These two tasks lead to what Richins has found to be integral to the development of materialism: developing a secure identity and having successful relationships with peers (2017). If one experiences an insecure, unstable self-image and/or feels the need to change themselves in order to obtain relationships with peers, research has found they are more likely to exude materialistic behaviors (Richins, 2017).

In a capitalistic society, materialism takes center stage on both the consumer's behalf and in the possession companies and organizations have over those consumers (Jaeggi, 2016). For the purposes of this study, capitalism refers to the "designates an economic and societal order that… became dominant worldwide as industrial capitalism via high technological sophistication, connected with a substantial concentration of capital," (Jaeggi, 2016). Through research, there are five parts needed to have a capitalistic society: a company, person, or organization can have private ownership to the production of a good or service with a distinct separation of employer or

brand and the workers, the economic system of the society is based on the supply and demand model with very little government interjection, a person or entities ability to acquire and amass capital (whether money or goods and services to trade), a focus on "cultivation of capital instead of the consumption of it or subsistence on it," and the market exists to non-identically allocate and distribute goods and services (Jaeggi, 2016).

In this capitalistic market model, people and capital are objects of possession to companies, organizations, and other entities. Because of the function of capitalism, the concept is exploitative not because of the give and take of labor; it penetrates everyday life "which enables such impersonal domination and dynamics of coercion in the first place," (Jaeggi, 2016). A society based on capitalism, like the market in the US and most developed western countries, lays a fertile ground for the exploitation of workers and consumers (Jaeggi, 2016). Consumers' thoughts, impressions, and perceptions of a brand are integral to the vitality of a company, organization, or entity. Concerning identity-based marketing, authentic communication is integral to connecting with a consumer (Cizek & Pounders, 2020). When speaking about the LGBTQ+ consumer, prior research has found that "authenticity demands more than a special Pride Snapchat filter or Pride merchandise for stores in the month of June requiring a holistic organizational commitment to LGBTQ stakeholders," (Cizek & Pounders, 2020). In the same vein, Cizek & Pounders found that "participants emphasized the importance of inclusion, not separation, in creating content that resonates with LGBTQ audiences," (2020). In an example of this concept, LGBTQ+ consumers want to see themselves represented in advertising year-round, not just during pride month, and would further connect with a brand that does represent them in this way (Cizek & Pounders, 2020).

Consumer Response

For the sake of this study, our dependent variable can be defined as "consumer responses in response to queer baiting." The LGBTQ+ community has a buying power of about $1 trillion, and because of this many advertisers have made it their duty to include homosexual imagery in their content (Eisend & Hermann, 2019). Since this has become a commonality among advertisements, the reception of the imagery has been mixed. In some cases, the use of homosexual couples in advertising did not affect heterosexual viewers nor did it make them feel more inclined to purchase a product, instead they believed the advertisements were simply promoting diversity (Eisend & Hermann, 2019). In most previous studies, researchers examined the responses of a pool of individuals that did not necessarily belong to the LGBTQ+ community. In a 2017 study, 229 survey respondents were tested for their responses on ads with homosexual imagery based on different factors such as age, attitude, and religiosity (Rowden, 2008). Once again, the analysis showed that there was no significant difference in how the ad or company was perceived whether the ads featured homo-, or hetero-, sexuals (Rowden, 2008). On the other hand, some research suggests that people's responses to these ads are dependent upon that individual's lifestyle and schema. For example, in a 2016 study, it was shown that oftentimes there are more positive evaluations of these ads when the consumer can relate in some way, whether that means being a member of the community or being an avid supporter of the group (Pounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2016).

There have also been cases in which researchers studied the responses based on what type of imagery was portrayed and see if that influenced consumer response; Results indicated that whether the imagery was explicit or implicit in nature and whether it involved homosexual males or females did not make a difference in how the ad was perceived (Eisend & Hermann, 2019). While it is interesting to see that homosexual imagery is not as big of a conflict as it once was, these studies surveyed a heterogeneous group of people. With this study, we aim to see if members of the LGBTQ+ market share similar views as heterosexuals, or if the use of queer baiting and other tactics have a different or negative effect on the market.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Theory of Planned Behavior

A continuation of the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behavior, is used to make sense of the behaviors of humans. It provides an explanation of the intention behind the performance of one's behavior (Ajzen 1991). The theory of planned behavior places heavy emphasis on behavioral achievement being dependent on motivation (intention) and ability (behavioral control) (LaMorte 2019).

The theory of planned behavior is broken into 6 constructs which represent a person's actual control over their behaviors (LaMorte 2019). *Attitude* is the first construct, and it accounts for the favorability that one views a certain behavior. It also takes into consideration the possible outcomes of behavior (LaMorte 2019). *Behavioral intention* directly references the motivational intention behind a specific behavior (LaMorte 2019). That is, the stronger the intention to perform a behavior the more likely that it will be done (Ajzen 1991). *Subjective norms* deal with the opinions of those who are close to the person completing the behavior. It displays their approval or disapproval of the completed action. *Social norms* refer to the "customary codes of behavior" otherwise being viewed as the "normative" or "standard" behavior by a group (LaMorte 2019). *Perceived power* takes into consideration the perceived outside factors that may "impede" or "facilitate" the performance of a behavior (LaMorte 2019). Finally *perceived behavioral control* refers to the perception of ease or difficulty in performing a certain behavior (Ajzen 1991). The final construct is what makes the theory of planned behavior different from the theory of reasoned action. It provides a level of context to the situation by explaining that certain behaviors may vary based on the situation.

The theory of planned behavior was first posited by Icek Ajzen (1985), aiming to provide a framework to assist researchers in their ability to predict and explain a person's intention to behave in a certain way at any given time. The achievement of an individual's behavior is dependent on two concepts: the intention of the person and their ability to exert self-control or behavioral control (LaMorte, 2019).

> ***RQ1: Does the consumer's perception of a brand's authenticity affect purchasing behavior?***

With our study, we aim to explore how the theory of planned behavior can apply to LGBTQ+ marketing and the effect that rainbow washing has on purchase intention, brand likeability, and

ad enjoyment. Within this theory are six constructs integral to the control over their behavior: attitudes, behavioral intention, subjective norms, social norms, perceived power, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985).

> *H1: The higher the attitudes toward the rainbow washing ad, the higher the intention to purchase.*

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory refers to the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. In other words, social identity theory is the relationship between membership and behavior (Korte, 2007). Social identity theory has been used many times to help further conduct and explain consumer research. Regarding consumerism, social identity theory suggests that consumers are likely to accept meanings from brands associated or consistent with their group (Ilaw, 2014). One 2020 study used social identity theory to explain how consumers respond to drag queen-themed advertising. It was suggested that once one forms a social identity, they then become a part of an "in-group" which promotes positive group-relevant outcomes (i.e., commitment and loyalty). The study concluded that those that were members of the in-group had more of a tolerance of the ad imagery portraying drag queens and their culture (Frankel & Ha, 2020).

Concerning our study, social identity theory sets the precedent of how inclined individuals that identify as LGBTQ+ will be to purchase products that are marketed specifically to their community. Being that we are surveying that community specifically, them being the in-group will allow for a more authentic consumer response which will enhance the credibility of our study. Additionally, because they are members of the in-group, they may feel more strongly against the use of queer baiting which will make them not want to purchase certain products. In a study conducted to assess the effects of LGBTQ+ advertising on donations, Champlin and Li found that their heterosexual participants had more favorable attitudes toward the queer advertisements than the LGBTQ+ participants, however, they were not able to examine why (2020).

> *H2: LGTBQ consumers will elicit more negative attitudes toward the rainbow washing ad than non-LGTBQ consumers.*

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory or Critical Cultural Theory, first introduced by George Gerbner and Larry Gross, is the idea that the media operates primarily to justify and support the status quo at the expense of ordinary people (Bruner, 2019). In 2010, *Visibility That Demystifies: Gays, Gender, and Sex* studies Cultivation Theory related to the conclusions of gay and straight audiences after watching a variety of primetime television shows involving gay or same-sex sexual situations. The study concluded that cable tv was more likely to depict female gay characters and commercial television had 8 out of 10 gay characters cast as guest stars versus reoccurring roles. Despite how the characters were presented, gay viewers felt more accepted.

Regarding the cultivation theory, heterosexual viewers who watched these shows believed that what they were watching was an accurate depiction of the real world. There were some differentiating views on how relevant the cultivation theory was during this time but overall, it was determined that these television shows in the early 2000s made viewers more aware of the LGBTQ community. This study is suitable for our study because, in order to address the current situation and issues present in advertising to the LGBTQ+ community, one must understand where mass societal acceptance began, with television playing a major role.

Refusing to Tolerate Intolerance: An Experiment Testing the Link Between Exposure to Gay-Related Content and Resulting Attitudes and Behaviors examined how individuals responded to gay-related images with a social media context by a factorial design experiment with 334 participants. Cultivation theory was supported based on the evidence that television and movies are amongst the most common sources of information regarding homosexuality (Calzo & Ward, 2009 as cited in Hefner et al.). This study concluded that individuals are more likely to interact with gay-related social media content that is portrayed as pro-gay over anti-gay content, women were more likely than men to support tolerant attitudes of gay men, exposure to pro-gay photographs is a positive predictor of tolerant attitudes of gay men, and prior gay-related social media use is associated with the likelihood to interact with more gay images on social media. To summarize, research has found that traditional forms of media, such as television, have been linked with the advancement of attitudes associated with the LGBTQ community in modern areas such as digital media. This study helps to solidify the idea that certain advertisements affect the opinions and behaviors of consumers depending on the sentiment of the ad. An LGBTQ+ ad can be pro-gay without coming off as using the movement for clout.

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are one type of minority group in society that has been treated differently in terms of advertising. *Advertisements Shape Our Social Reality: A Study of Apple Advertisements on Promoting PWDs and Inclusion* looks at how Apple has approached campaigns to include this group with specific video advertisements. This study was one of the few that has focused on cultivation and relating it to a minority group and advertising. In multiple studies, researchers have found that

> "Cultivation is not a one-way, monolithic process but involves factors of demographic, social, personal and cultural contexts that fashion the shape, scope, and degree of contributions television is likely to make to audiences," (Gerbner et al., 1986, as cited in Mokhtar et al., 2019).

This study found that Apple promoting a positive attitude toward disabilities helped people with disabilities feel included and more accepted. Accurate LBGTQ+ advertising campaigns could boost the overall opinion society may have on the community, if done properly.

> ***H3: LBGTQ+ consumers will positively respond to a brand that promotes pride products in a genuine tone that communicates their support effectively.***

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

To gather insights from the target market, an online questionnaire was created to collect quantitative data with questions regarding LGTBQ+ and Pride Month-specific campaigns. Participants were sampled using two main non-probability methods, convenience and snowball, due to the limited time frame of the survey. The main requirements for eligibility were to be at least the age of 18 and to demonstrate a basic awareness of Pride Month, the LGBTQ+ community, and/or recent campaigns featuring an LGBTQ theme.

Sampling

The target sample was adults in the Tallahassee community over the age of 18. The sample aimed to include people of vast genders and sexualities, providing us an opportunity to explore consumer behavior of both allies and those who identify with an LGBTQ+ identity. The non-probability sampling methods utilized were convenience and snowball techniques using social media websites and applications such as Facebook and sharing with personal contacts via email and text messaging (Appendix D) (McCombes, 2021). The targeted sample size goal was to get at least 20 participants and the final participant size totaled 38 participants with complete responses and 3 partial responses.

Instrument Reliability and Validation

The survey incorporated four scales:

Cause-Related Marketing Motive Attributions (Values-Driven) Scale is a three-question, seven-point Likert scale that originated in 2016 to examine the intrinsic behaviors of consumers and assess if cause-related marketing is perceived by consumers as having integrity and not perceived as having capitalistic motives associated with it. The reliability of it was found to have an alpha of 9.28 during one study and a .933 in two other studies (Burner, 2019). For our study, we updated the questions to a general, ambiguous company rather than regarding a specific company since our study is focused on looking at a broad understanding when it comes to the perception of company LGBTQ+ cause-related marketing.

Customer Engagement (Purchase) Scale is a five-point Likert type scale that features four questions tailored to "measure a customer's attitude toward current and future purchases of the brand" (Burner, 2016). The alpha of the scale was found to be .879, an acceptable alpha for a measurement scale (Burner, 2016). For our study, we have adjusted the statements to be about an ambiguous brand to look at how a purchase is affected by the relation of rainbow-washing to the brand. This way, our survey can help to indicate the level of purchase behavior change caused by a brand's authenticity in their LGBTQ+ support.

Relationship Orientation of the Brand Scale originated as a manipulation test for the materials of a study in 2016, intending to measure the consumer perception of if a brand was trying to build a personal relationship with them (Burner, 2019). The alpha was found to be a .90 and though there is not a strong testament to the validity of the scale in its original analysis, the authors were successfully able to use this to check the manipulation of materials. For this study, we chose to update the scale to examine if the consumer feels the company is making an intimate connection

with them because of the rainbow-washed advertising. We are interested to see how the results of this scale support our hypotheses following data collection.

Willingness to Purchase scale is a five-item, seven-point scale intended to understand the likelihood a consumer will purchase an item from a particular brand. It was derived from two studies and originated in 2016 for a study on "287 African-American students from two large Mid-Atlantic universities in the United States," (Burner, 2019). In our study, we have updated this semantic differential scale to ask about the consumer's likelihood to purchase from a company that supports LGBTQ+ rights versus a company that rainbow-washes during the month of June. By using this scale, it will allow us to understand if consumers actively look for company support in purchase decisions and their likelihood of purchasing to change when seeing support for an LGBTQ+ cause.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Sample Demographics

Of the 38 total participants, 82% identified as female and 18% male. When asked about their sexual orientation 76% choose 'straight', 15% choose 'bisexual', and 9% selected 'lesbian, gay or homosexual'. The age range of participants was highest in the 18 - 24 group at 49%, with the 25 - 34 group second highest at 43% while the remaining were the 35 - 44 group at 5% and over 55 at 3%. The ethnicity of the participants was predominantly white at 74% and the remaining 26% were Black/African American; none of the participants identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino or Asian.

Results

A correlation was used to test hypothesis 1 to identify the relationship between attitudes toward the rainbow-washing ad and intention to purchase. Results indicate that there is no significance between attitudes toward the rainbow-washing ad and intention to purchase. However, it is notable to mention that we found a moderate significance between brand authenticity and intent to purchase, $r(32)=.386$, $p< .05$.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that LGTBQ+ consumers will elicit more negative attitudes toward rainbow-washing ads than non-LGTBQ+ consumers. An independent t-test was conducted to detect whether there is a significant difference between the general attitudes towards rainbow-washing and sexual orientation. Inconsistent with hypothesis 2, the analysis showed that there was no significance between LGBTQ+ consumers having negative attitudes toward rainbow-washing ads than non-LGBTQ+ consumers $t(32)= -.479$, $p>.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 3 also required the use of an independent t-test to test the significant difference between the genuineness of rainbow-washing ads and sexual orientation. The results proved that there was not a significant difference between the attitudes toward genuineness of brands and the

sexual orientation of consumers t(32)=.260, p>.05. Inconsistent with hypothesis 3, the null hypothesis was accepted.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

While none of the hypotheses were significant, there are still some that can be learned from this study. One of the significant correlations found was between purchase intention and belief in the company's goodwill following viewing the Skittles advertisement. Participants felt that the Skittles brand seemed to be trying to make a deeper connection with them through their pride advertisements. Skittles, whose brand is already focused on the rainbow, took a vastly different, deeper approach than others which seemed to have assisted them in creating a bond with the participants.

Marketers can learn from this study that a meaningful appeal to consumers, such as one displayed by the Skittles Pride campaign, can help to drive sales. The Skittles brand is based on a rainbow and so taking the rainbow from the brand and giving it to the LGBTQ+ community was a strong way to build a connection with the consumers, as displayed by the significant correlation of purchase intention to social responsibility in this study.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a couple of limitations to this study. First, the sample for the study was derived from snowball and convenience sampling, which means that our results are not generalizable to the overall population. Non-probability sampling, while common, renders any results the study finds questionably reliable. Another limitation was that the sample population size is small at 38 participants. Furthermore, it is difficult to compare the LGBTQ+ consumer responses to the non-LGBTQ+ consumer responses with the straight participants heavily outweighing the number of queer participants. Further research into this topic would benefit from having a larger sample with a larger amount of LGBTQ+ participants. The final limitation of this study is the look at the effect of only one advertisement from a company whose brand is based on a rainbow. This study may have had more significant or varied results with multiple different ads of varying levels of rainbow-washing.

Research into this topic is scarce as it is a relatively new concept in the marketing field. This leaves many different options for future research to delve into. One recommendation would be looking at the difference in purchase intention, attitudes toward brands, and attitude toward advertisements between ads with rainbows and ads featuring LGBTQ+ couples or people. This research would provide a set of managerial implications focused on the direction companies should utilize when advertising to LGBTQ+ consumers.

In addition, the study found a significant relationship between purchase intention and belief that a company, Skittles, displayed a social responsibility to the LGBTQ+ community through their advertising. Further research should be done into how consumers make presumptions of social commitment of companies. Furthermore, an interesting study would be to see if a deeper

understanding of a company's intentions would change the consumer's mind on purchasing intention or their attitudes.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the effect of rainbow washing on consumer purchase intention and attitudes. While it was not conclusive as to how it correlates, the study found an inkling of hope that corporate social responsibility matters to the average consumer. With further research into this topic, marketers and advertisers will benefit from a better understanding of what a successful LGTBQ+ marketing campaign would be.

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