

SPARK
FOUNDRY



Insights Accelerated

Q2 2024



▲ Introduction

Welcome to the second Insights Accelerated report of 2024, exploring consumer trends in diversity in advertising, sustainability and gaming and tech.

For diversity, we saw a worrying decrease in people's sentiment towards representation in advertising overall, something that brands will need to think about deeply moving forward. However, there are areas of positivity that point to change, with radio ad representation improving due to TikTok integration, and TV and YouTube ads continued to lead in representation.

In gaming, Activision's new patent aims to boost player engagement through streaming, while Call of Duty's latest additions sparked debate. Despite industry challenges, public sentiment towards gaming remains positive, with new advertising strategies emerging for brands.

Sustainability trends showed a rise in interest for eco-friendly travel but a decline in renewable energy and plant-based product searches, indicating economic pressures.

Electric vehicle interest, however, saw significant growth. Brands are encouraged to integrate sustainability and diversity consistently across campaigns, leverage current media trends, and adapt to economic conditions to maintain consumer engagement.

Read on to find out more!



Diversity



Gaming & Tech



Sustainability



▲ Diversity

Diversity in advertising has never been more important but are brands doing enough to address diversity in their campaigns and is this getting through to consumers?

We've surveyed diverse groups within the UK - including BAME, LGBTQ+, and Neurodivergent individuals - to understand how well represented they feel in advertising and what they expect from brands.



▲ Insight #1

People feel less represented in advertising this year

Representation levels are 7% lower than they were in Q2 last year. Almost every audience segment feels less represented by the advertising they see, with the most noticeable drops amongst People of Colour, LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent individuals. Given we are striving to be more inclusive as an industry, this is a worrying trend and there is yet work to be done.

The only audience that saw an increase in representation was the over 55s. This segment often feels the least represented in advertising, so this turnaround is positive news, but it doesn't make up for the gaps elsewhere. With a third of people still saying they'll actively avoid brands that don't emphasise DE&I it's clear from these numbers that the demand for representative advertising is very much still there. So why aren't brand adverts reflecting this?

▲ Implication #1

DE&I is a long-term commitment

The increase in consumers avoiding brands that neglect DE&I highlights the persistent demand for diversity in advertising. Brands must consistently embrace diverse perspectives, ensuring that DE&I principles are deeply embedded in their communications. This involves moving beyond seasonal gestures or tactical campaigns to create campaigns that authentically reflect diverse communities.

Brands such as Voltarol are seeing strong long-term success by building their platforms over time. Voltarol started with a Gay Times partnership and has extended that over the last five years including Channel 4 and TCS London Marathon as platforms to elevate the message to an even wider audience.





▲ Insight #2

Representation in radio ads surges

Representation in radio adverts has increased dramatically, from 32% in Q2 2023 to 49% now. This is primarily driven by younger audiences who have expressed a 57% increase in how representative they feel radio ads are now. This improvement is likely due to the integration of TikTok content and creators into traditional radio platforms. Sirius XM's TikTok Radio, for example, curates playlists from trending TikTok songs ensuring that the content remains relevant and engaging for young listeners.

At the same time, we're also seeing really smart uses of audio ads to engage with listeners such as Meta's 'Behind the Lock' WhatsApp campaign that worked with podcasters to create games that they played in bonus episodes. We've seen before that better, more engaging ads makes all audiences feel more represented so renewed focus on audio as a creative channel is likely driving radio's improvements in representation.

▲ Implication #2

Leverage iconic tracks across social platforms

Brands have a unique opportunity to leverage iconic tracks across multiple platforms, creating a cohesive and engaging experience that resonate with audiences. Incorporating trending songs from platforms like TikTok into radio campaigns allows branded content to automatically feel more current and relevant. For larger campaigns, the fees to use these iconic tracks might be justified but for smaller campaigns looking to avoid hefty licencing fees, brands could look to use TikTok tracks that don't have copyright restrictions.

This strategy not only makes audiences feel more recognised but also bridges the gap between their personalised social feeds and broader broadcast media. Audio thus becomes a unifying broadcast medium, enhancing the sense of representation and connection for listeners across different platforms. By tapping into the viral nature of TikTok tracks and integrating them into radio, brands can create memorable and impactful audio campaigns that resonate deeply with diverse audiences.

▲ Insight #3

The most representative channels are reaping the rewards

TV ads and YouTube ads have consistently been the most representative advertising channels at 57% and 56% respectively. And in Q2 2024, they're pulling ahead even further. Advertising on both channels has driven improved representation across every audience surveyed during the last year, with TV ads up 11% and YouTube ads up 17%. We're also seeing a 10% increase in representation amongst ads on SVOD platforms such as Disney+, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video as more customers move onto their ad-tiers.

YouTube has grown viewership on TV screens and has introduced 30-second un-skippable ads (i.e. 30-second TV spots), whilst Netflix and Amazon have moved large proportions of their viewers into their ad-tier this year.

▲ Implication #3

The TV ad is back

The last decade has been defined by the fragmentation of TV into so many different channels and viewing formats. We still have many different channels, but the formats are starting to consolidate around traditional TV spots.

This means that brands can once again focus on creating a single, truly impactful TV asset. We hope that this consolidation of formats allows brands to work on creating AV assets that tell impactful stories that speak to audiences.

We know that representative creative drives better brand lift in 90% of ads and short and long-term sales two thirds of the time, so this is an opportunity for brands to develop a single, representative and engaging TV ad that drives success across all TV screens.





▲ Gaming & Tech

Everyone seems desperate to explore gaming and its associated new technologies, but what does the larger world think of things, should brands engage and how should they start to establish a presence?

We've analysed sentiment using **Social Sparks**, our proprietary social listening tool that analyses data from across the digital landscape, to take the pulse of the nation.



▲ Insight 1

Game on! Activision's patent incentivises streamers with rewards

Activision has filed a groundbreaking patent that could transform game promotion. Titled "Video Game Group Dynamic Building," the patent, published on June 13, 2024, envisions rewarding players for streaming their gameplay of titles like Call of Duty. This system aims to enhance engagement by incentivising players to share strategies and feats with their audiences, like Twitch Drops.

This innovation seeks to combat solitary gaming by fostering community interaction. Whether Activision or Microsoft will implement this remains uncertain, but the patent highlights the evolving strategies to boost player involvement through streaming. This has already begun to resonate with gamers, shown by a 21% increase in content surrounding this.

▲ Implication 1

Time to go live

The implications of Activision's new patent for brands and the advertising industry are profound. This innovative approach to game promotion could significantly reshape marketing strategies and brand engagement in the gaming sector.

Brands could seamlessly integrate their products and services into live streams, creating more authentic and engaging ads. Streamers showcasing branded content during gameplay can foster a more organic connection with their audiences. The system's ability to monitor and reward specific in-game actions allows for highly targeted advertising.

Brands can tailor their ads to align with particular milestones or achievements, ensuring they reach engaged and relevant audiences. The patent encourages deeper partnerships between brands and influencers. Streamers who promote games could receive sponsorship deals, creating new revenue streams and enhancing brand visibility through trusted voices in the gaming community. It's fair to say this is super exciting – watch this space!





▲ Insight 2

Has Call of Duty bitten off more than it can chew?

Call of Duty fans are clucking over the latest addition: a fried chicken gun, sparking debates on whether the franchise is becoming too whimsical. Historically grounded in realism, the series has seen a shift with fantastical crossovers like Texas Chainsaw Massacre and The Boys, even giving players superpowers. The latest controversy involves a datamine hinting at future tie-ins, including Deadpool and Wolverine, with unique finishing moves inspired by Wade Wilson.

However, the most outrageous addition is the “Extra Crispy” rifle, which turns enemies into fried chicken when hit. This quirky weapon comes with animations of soldiers in chicken costumes and a comical weapon inspection where a chicken gets fried on the gun barrel. Exclusive to Call of Duty: Warzone Mobile, this zany item has ruffled feathers among traditional fans, creating a buzz that the official ‘Call of Duty: Warzone’ Mobile Twitter account is playing up.

With the franchise embracing more outlandish elements, will Call of Duty maintain its gritty roots, or is it on a path to becoming the next Fortnite? Players are eagerly watching the battlefield to see what’s next. Call of Duty search terms have spiked 12% in the lead up to the next edition which will be released in Q4 this year.

▲ Implication 2

Will other franchises follow suit?

These developments signal a shift towards more immersive and experiential marketing strategies. Traditional ads may be losing their effectiveness amongst younger, ad-blocking generations. Interactive, in-game promotions, however, can capture attention and drive engagement in ways static ads cannot.

This divergence in player opinions highlights a broader question: Can Call of Duty balance its realistic legacy with a playful, modern twist, or is it straying too far into silliness? And more importantly, will other franchises follow suit to appeal to the masses?

In conclusion, the fried chicken gun is more than a quirky addition; it’s a blueprint for future brand integrations and a testament to the evolving landscape of the gaming industry.

▲ Insight 3

Game Developer Collective Survey – unveiling the future of gaming

Amid a whirlwind of layoffs and closures, the Gaming industry faces significant challenges in maintaining the explosive growth experienced during the COVID-19 era. According to the Game Developer Collective Survey, a staggering 59% of industry developers believe the sector is in a bad state. A majority of these developers (61%) attribute this downturn to unrealistic investor expectations, driven by the pressure to sustain record profits from the lockdown years.

However, there's a silver lining! Despite internal pessimism, gaming continues to captivate mass audiences. Our social listening data reveals a remarkable 81% net positive sentiment for gaming, which has consistently held strong quarter after quarter. This continued public enthusiasm highlights a robust foundation for the industry's future.

▲ Implication 3

New frontiers in gaming advertising

The gaming sector is gearing up for an exhilarating evolution in advertising to meet investor demands. With a steadfast audience and economic challenges limiting price hikes, the focus is shifting towards innovative advertising strategies. The industry is poised to pivot from microtransactions to dynamic brand integration opportunities.

In-game advertising is on the rise, opening doors for brands of all sizes to engage with the gaming community. Expect to see an influx of creative brand partnerships, especially in triple-A titles, where longer-term collaborations will flourish. This thrilling transformation promises to redefine the gaming landscape, blending immersive gameplay with captivating brand experiences like never before. The future of gaming is not just bright – it's absolutely electrifying!





▲ Sustainability

There is often a disconnect between what people say and what they do. While sustainability is a key concern for consumers when they are polled, do we see the same level of interest when they are searching for key purchases?

Using, **Intent Based Planning**, a Publicis Media tool that applies semantic analysis to Google search data, we've examined how sustainability concerns are influencing people's buying behaviours.



▲ Insight 1

Interest in sustainable travel grows

Interest in sustainable travel across the first half of this year has seen a 14% YoY increase in searches (compared to the same period in 2023). This peaked in May, particularly within branded keywords, suggesting audience interest grows during their holiday planning research time, coinciding with improving weather and longer days.

People are increasingly looking for eco-friendly travel options, reflecting a broader trend towards sustainability in daily life.

▲ Implication 1

Sustainability messages within branding are key

Brands should ensure upper funnel communications highlight sustainability to capture interest within search activity. As sustainability messaging becomes more relevant in everyday life, particularly in transport—a major contributor to carbon emissions—consumers are actively seeking greener solutions.

By emphasising eco-friendly practices and benefits, brands can align with consumer values, fostering stronger connections and brand loyalty. This approach not only addresses environmental concerns but also positions brands as forward-thinking and responsible.





▲ Insight 2

Renewable energy sees little uplift YoY

Search terms for sustainable energy increased by only 3% in H1 2024 (compared to the same period in 2023), with solar panel demand experiencing a significant decline of -11% YoY.

This trend suggests that amid a cost-of-living crisis, renewable energy products are not a top priority for many consumers.

Economic pressures may be overshadowing the desire for sustainable investments, highlighting the need for more compelling value propositions in this sector.

▲ Implication 2

Branding communications should consider the wider economy

Brands' sustainability messages, particularly related to energy, should emphasize both customer and planetary benefits. Highlighting cost savings, long-term value, and environmental impact can make these products more appealing, even during economic downturns.

By addressing affordability and practical advantages, brands can prevent alienation and make sustainability a more attractive and viable option for budget-conscious consumers. This strategy helps bridge the gap between environmental aspirations and economic realities, ensuring sustained interest and adoption.

▲ Insight 3

Automotive interest in electric and battery power jumps

Electric car features saw search volumes increase by 31% YoY according to our proprietary tool, IBP, with battery power seeing a 26% uplift. It's positive to see these terms are top of people's minds when it comes to automotive, as petrol searches decrease by 7% in the same period.

In terms of brand specific interest, the biggest growth was for BYD at 647%, followed by Land Rover at 117%, and Volkswagen at 54% (NB. these are increases vs base, not total volume).

▲ Implication 3

Sustainability messages should be single minded

Other key terms outside of electric and battery powered like; air filtration, zero emissions, rapid charging are seeing a decrease in feature demands YoY.

With customer knowledge of electric vehicles increasing, perhaps brands need to worry less about education and focus more on the one key benefit to ensure interest is driven at the lower funnel.



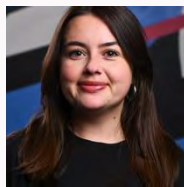
▲ Thank You



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