

Overcoming the Backlash Risk

Lessons Learned from Polarizing Ads
Featuring Diverse Segments

October 30, 2023



To Engage High-Growth Segments, Brands **Must** Tap into Social Issues

72%

of Americans think brands and companies **should be involved** in social and political issues

75%
Hispanic

78%
Millennials

82%
Black

84%
Gen Z

76%
Asian

80%
LGBTQ+

Ads activating on issues are polarizing,
inherently provoking disagreement...

But does disagreement
inherently reduce performance



NO

Some polarization can ***even be good***

01

The Polarization Landscape

Learn to Navigate It

02

Make Polarization Work for You

- *Lean into Identity Polarization*
- *Harness Emotional Polarization*

Polarization 1: Identity Connection

Relevance: "For People Like Me"



Disagree
about
Identity Connection



Polarization 2: Emotions

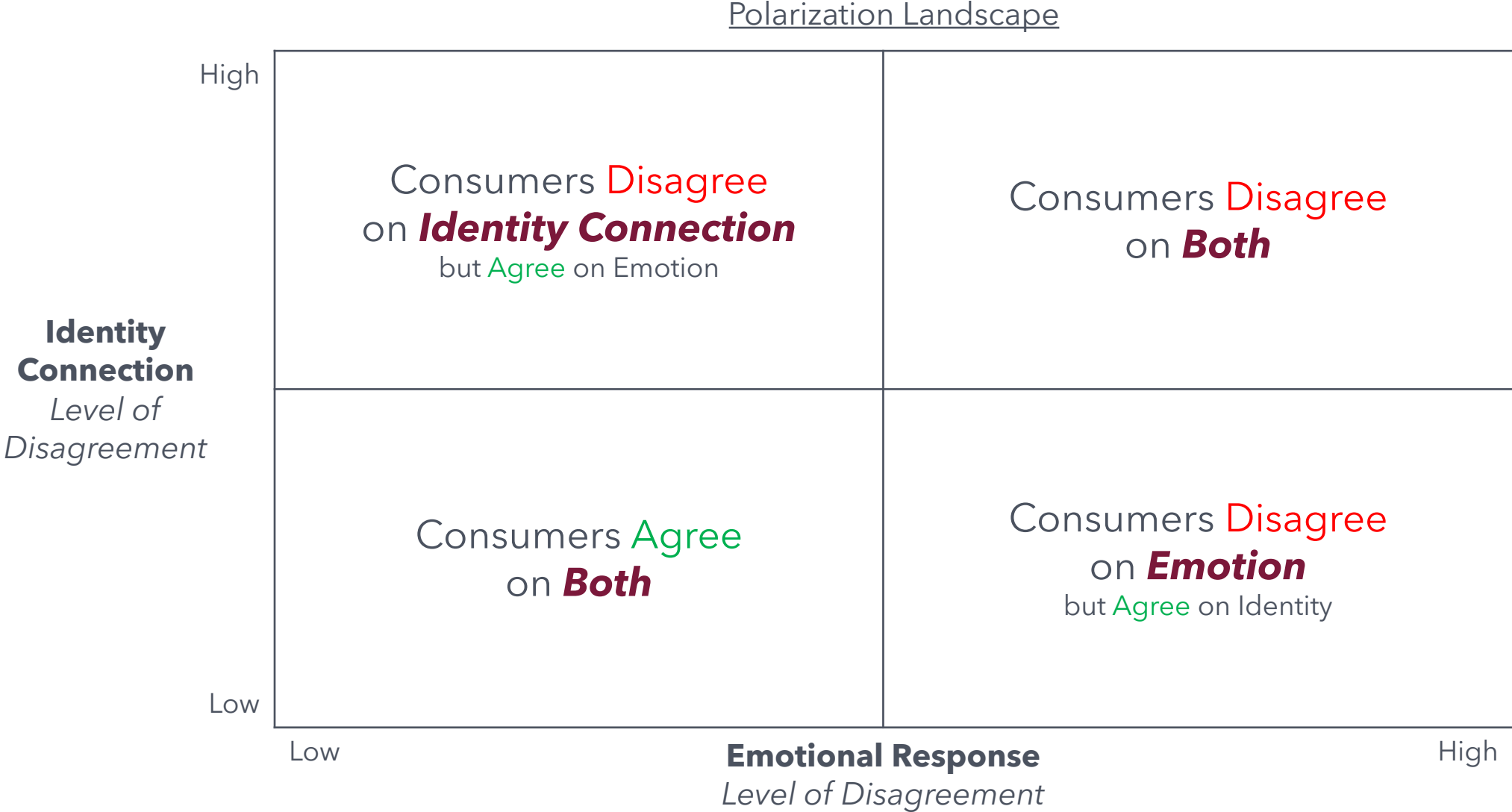
*Happy, Excited, Proud, Sad, Bored,
Angry, Annoyed, Bored, Confused*



Disagree
← about Emotional Response →



Identity and Emotion Define the Polarization Landscape for Ads



Source: Collage Group 2023

Quantifying the Polarization Landscape with **CultureRate: Ad**

- **Every month for the last 4 years** we've been surveying ads.
- Annually: **millions of datapoints from ~80,000 consumers**, -- deep oversample, hundreds of ads
- **Ad Cultural Fluency Quotient (A-CFQ)** predicts **Purchase Intent and Brand Favorability**.
- Plus, we capture viewer emotions, ad characteristics, and other conventional ad testing measures.
- The approach is twinned with a similar methodology assessing **Brand Cultural Fluency (B-CFQ)**.



Today's Approach

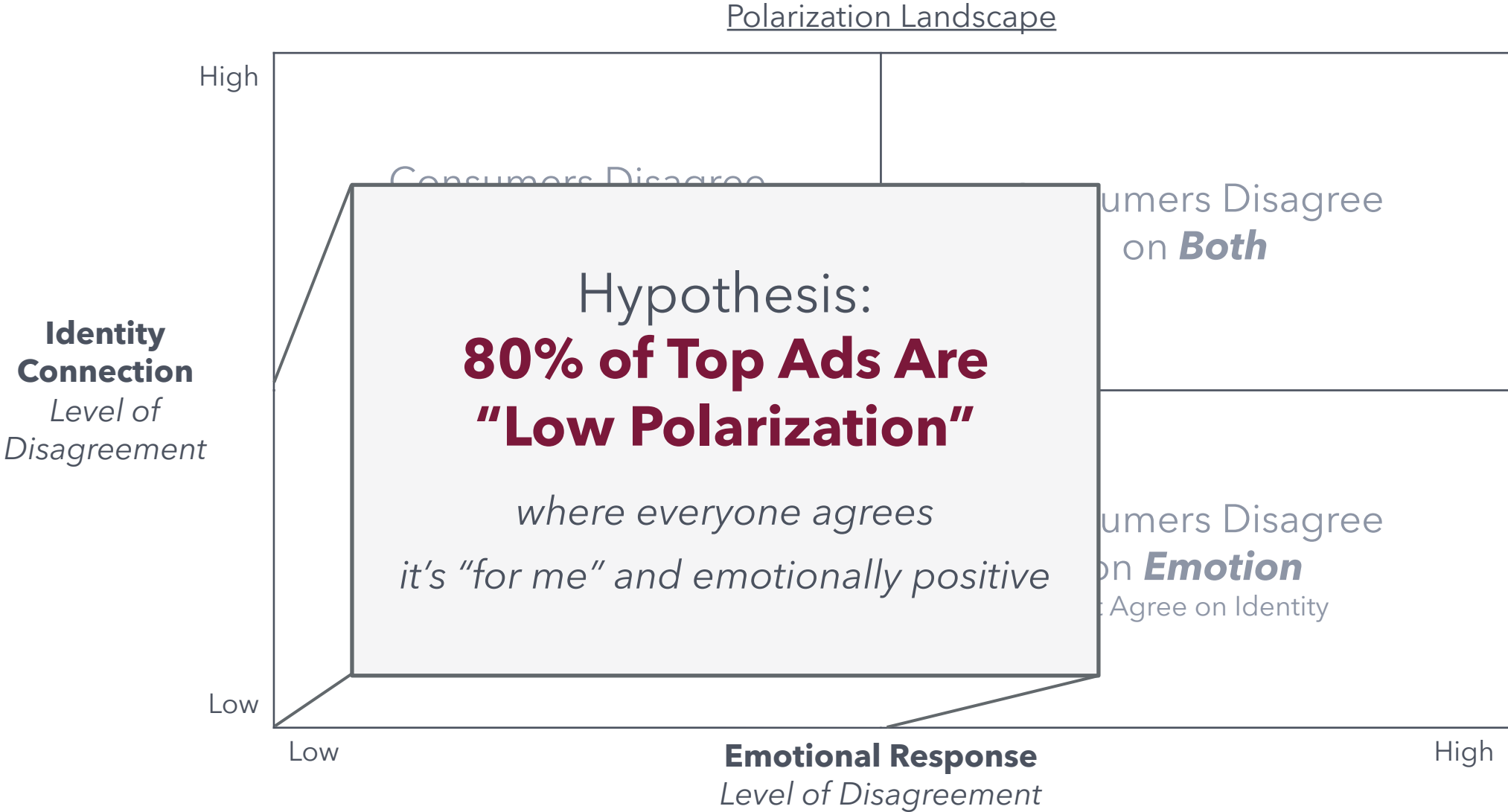
CultureRate:**Ad** measurement system predicts the impact of cultural resonance on purchase intent and favorability

We leverage metrics of

- Emotion ("Boredom," "Anger," "Happiness," etc.)
- Identity connection ("Relevance")
- Ad performance (A-CFQ)

Where are
the Top Performing Ads
in this Landscape?

Place Your Bets...

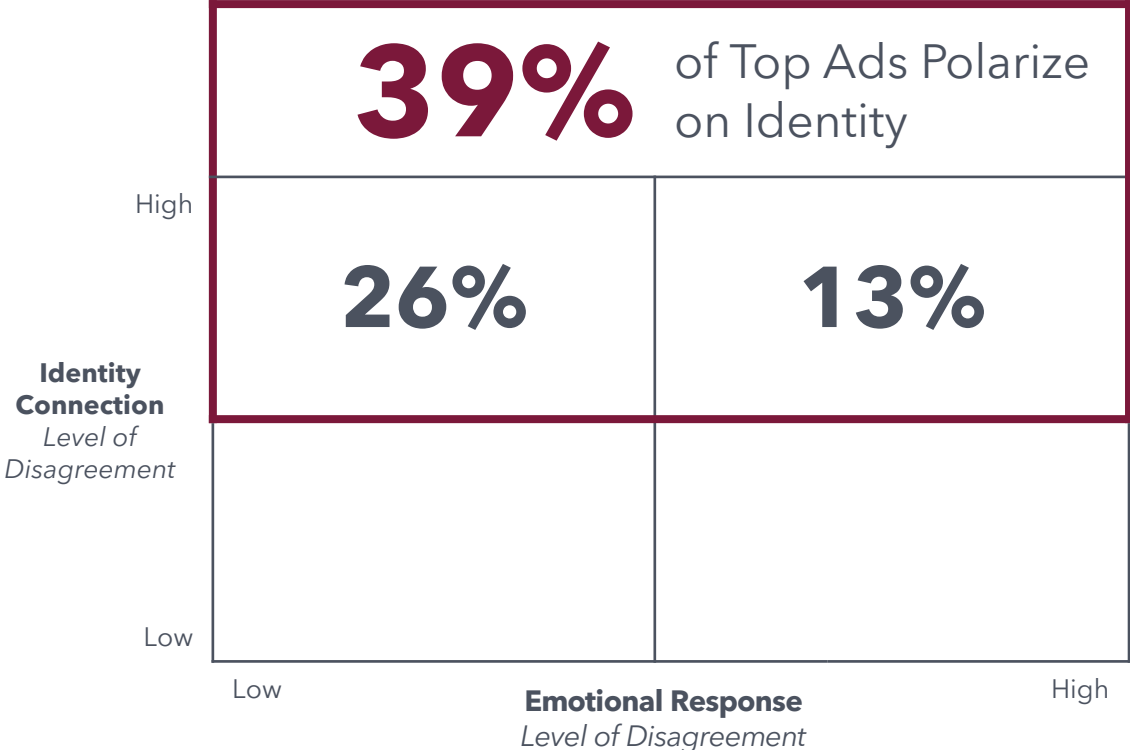


Source: Collage Group 2023

Fact: Consumers Reward Ads, Even If "Not for Me"

Insight

Percentage of Top Tercile Ads by Quadrant



Action

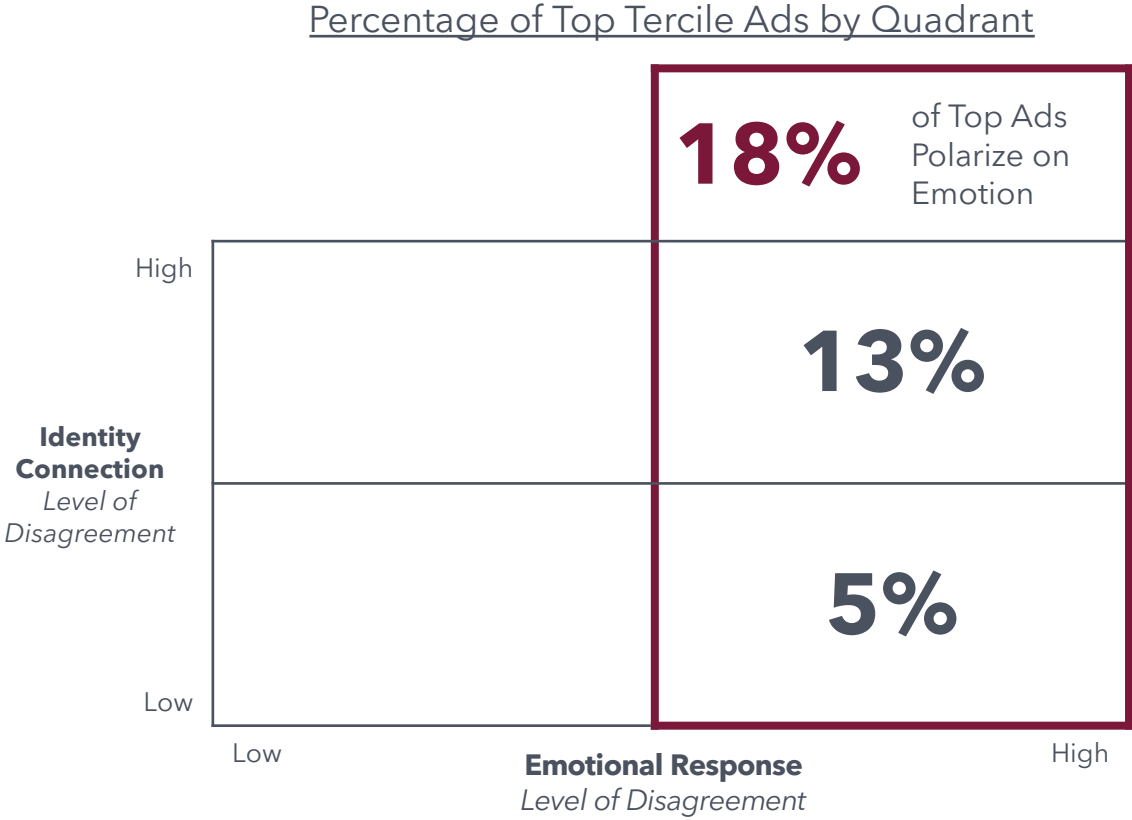
Lean into **identity polarization**



Case Studies teach how to use **Halo Effects**, the positive impact of *in-culture specifics on out-of-culture observers*

Fact: Consumers Like Ads That Can Harness Negative Emotions

Insight



Action

Harness
emotional polarization



Case Studies teach how
the **Kindling Effect**
transforms negative sentiment
into positive actions

01

The Polarization Landscape
Learn to Navigate It

02

Make Polarization Work for You

- *Lean into Identity Polarization*
- *Harness Emotional Polarization*

To Lean into Identity Polarization

Decode In-Culture Specifics for Out-of-Culture Observers



Halo Effect



"Dylan Mulvaney Partnership"



"Wild One – Run with It"

Ads with high Identity Polarization



Kindling Effect



"He Gets Us"



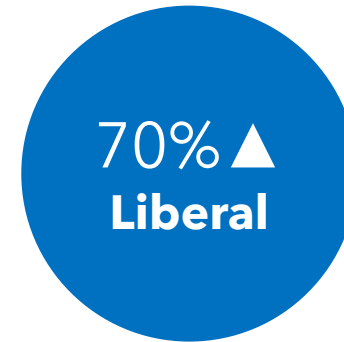
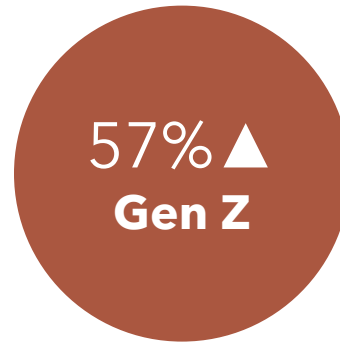
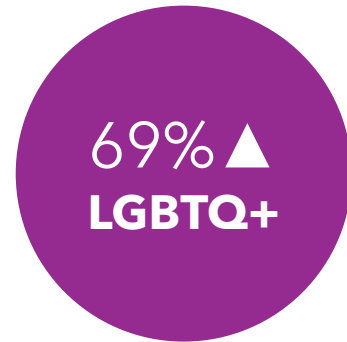
"The Face of Finance"

Ads with high Emotional Polarization

Transgender Representation Can Be a **Real** Brand Growth Opportunity

50%

of Americans think brands should speak up about
Preventing Discrimination of Transgender & Non-Binary People



Source: Collage Group America Now Survey, August 2023, 18-77 population, weighted data
Single-select grid top 2 box; Original question wording: "How do you think brands should respond to the following issues with 1 meaning brands SHOULDN'T speak up and 5 meaning they SHOULD speak up?"
Significance test: Confidence level 95%. ▲ ▼ over/under Total Pop.

But Merely **Capitalizing** on Inclusivity Carries Enormous Risk



GOAL

Reach young, diverse segments while maintaining existing customer base.



EXECUTION

An abrupt pivot loses touch with core brand identity.



OUTCOMES

Halo Effect is overshadowed by lost connection to brand legacy and suspicions of performative inclusion.

Low Brand Fit Fuels **Backlash** across the Board



Key Ad Performance Metrics:
Dylan Mulvaney Partnership

	Hispanic	Black	Asian	White	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Norm	
A-CFQ Score	61	58	59	54	67	57	71	
A-CFQ Components	Relevance	32% ▼	25% ▼	25% ▼	23% ▼	47%	25% ▼	50%
	Fit	33% ▼	30% ▼	32% ▼	27% ▼	44% ▼	29% ▼	52%
	Message	38% ▼	37% ▼	41% ▼	34% ▼	53%	36% ▼	54%
	Enjoyment	42% ▼	45% ▼	43% ▼	39% ▼	57%	40% ▼	61%
Backlash	18% ▲	14%	20% ▲	23% ▲	17%	19% ▲	13%	



Source: Collage Group, CultureRate:Ad Studies, fielded February 2022 - August 2023 (21-77 population), Bud Light "Dylan Mulvaney Partnership"

▲▼ indicate 5+ percentage points difference above/below the CultureRate Norm

Backlash: Percentage of brand-aware respondents whose perception of the brand got worse after ad exposure and brand-unaware respondents with a negative post-ad brand perception. This data was collected following the initial backlash to the ad; the timing has likely impacted performance scores.

A Dismissive Joke about Sports Clashes with the Brand Legacy



1 in 3 **LGBTQ+** people enjoy following college and / or professional sports



Source: Collage Group Passion Points May 2022, 18-76 population, weighted data
Single select top 2 box (% like, love)
Significance test: Confidence level 95%. ▲ ▼ over/under Non-LGBTQ+

55%

of LGBTQ+ people say brands' advertising campaigns aimed at LGBTQ+ audiences often **come across as insincere**

"I took a brand deal with a company that I loved. What transpired from that video was more bullying and transphobia than I could have ever imagined... **I was waiting for the brand to reach out to me, but they never did.**

For a company to hire a trans person and then not publicly stand by them is worse in my opinion than not hiring a trans person at all."

– Dylan Mulvaney



Cultural Specificity with a Healthy Dose of Delight Multiplies Reach



GOAL

Reach young, diverse segments while maintaining existing customer base.



EXECUTION

Energetic delivery of culturally nuanced storytelling with interplay of novel and familiar creates **Brand Fit** elasticity.



OUTCOMES

Halo Effects multiply thanks to culturally intelligent, intersectional storytelling that connects to universal truths.



Cultural Fluency Turns Mixed *Relevance* into Universal *Resonance*



Key Ad Performance Metrics:
 “Wild One – Run with It”

	Hispanic	Black	Asian	White	Women	Men	Norm	
A-CFQ Score	76	78	73	69	72	75	71	
A-CFQ Components	Relevance	56%▲	57%▲	50%	46%	49%	56%▲	50%
	Fit	60%▲	63%▲	56%	44%▼	50%	62%▲	52%
	Message	69%▲	68%▲	65%▲	57%	62%▲	68%▲	54%
	Enjoyment	75%▲	74%▲	75%▲	65%	70%▲	74%▲	61%
Backlash	8%▼	6%▼	12%	13%	9%	10%	13%	



Source: Collage Group, CultureRate:Ad Studies, fielded February 2022 – August 2023 (18-77 population), The NFL, “Wild One – Run with It”

▲▼ indicate 5+ percentage points difference above/below the CultureRate Norm

Backlash: Percentage of brand-aware respondents whose perception of the brand got worse after ad exposure and brand-unaware respondents with a negative post-ad brand perception.

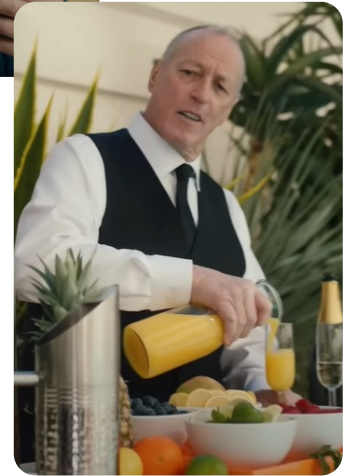
The Star-Studded Cast Is Full of Delightful Easter Eggs



Diana Flores, 26, quarterback of the Mexican Flag Football team



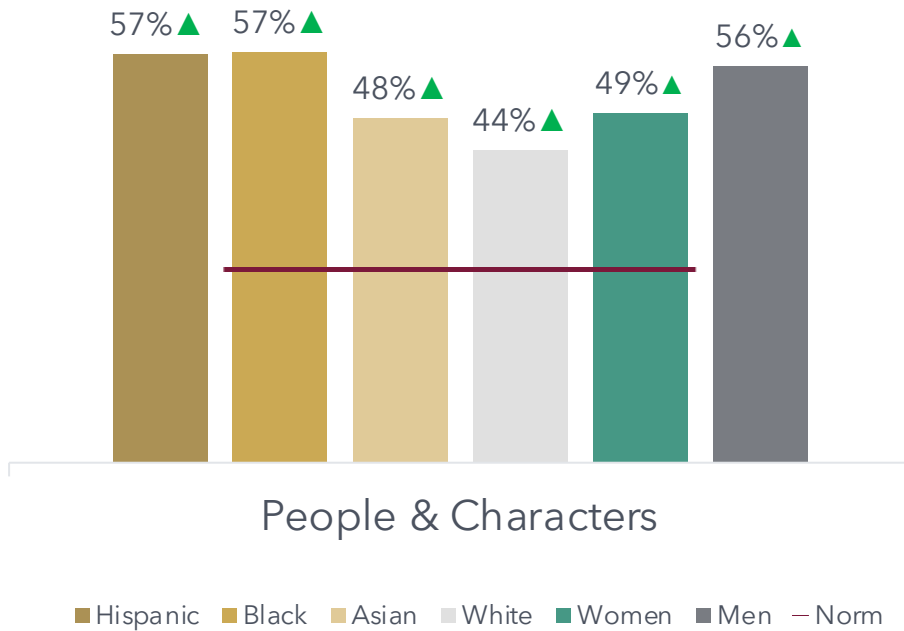
Billie Jean King, the winner of the 1973 "Battle of the Sexes"



Powerful **Halo Effects** Drive Virality and Embrace of the Characters



Percentage of consumers who say the following features are the best part of the ad



Halo Effects

Broad Halo Effects extend beyond **Women** or **Hispanic** consumers as many people appreciate culturally-specific, authentic stories, even if the protagonist doesn't share their own identity or heritage.

50% of **women** and 59%▲ of **men** say they would talk about the NFL's "Wild One" with others



Source: Collage Group, CultureRate:Ad Studies, fielded February 2022 – August 2023 (18-77 population), The NFL's "Wild One—Run with It"
Multiselect answer option

▲▼ indicate 5+ percentage points difference above/below the CultureRate Norm

The Ad Taps into Growing Popularity and Inclusivity of Flag Football



“The future of football is flag.”

– Troy Vincent, NFL Executive VP of Football Operations

SPORTS

Flag football will be an Olympic sport at the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles

October 21, 2023 · 8:30 AM ET

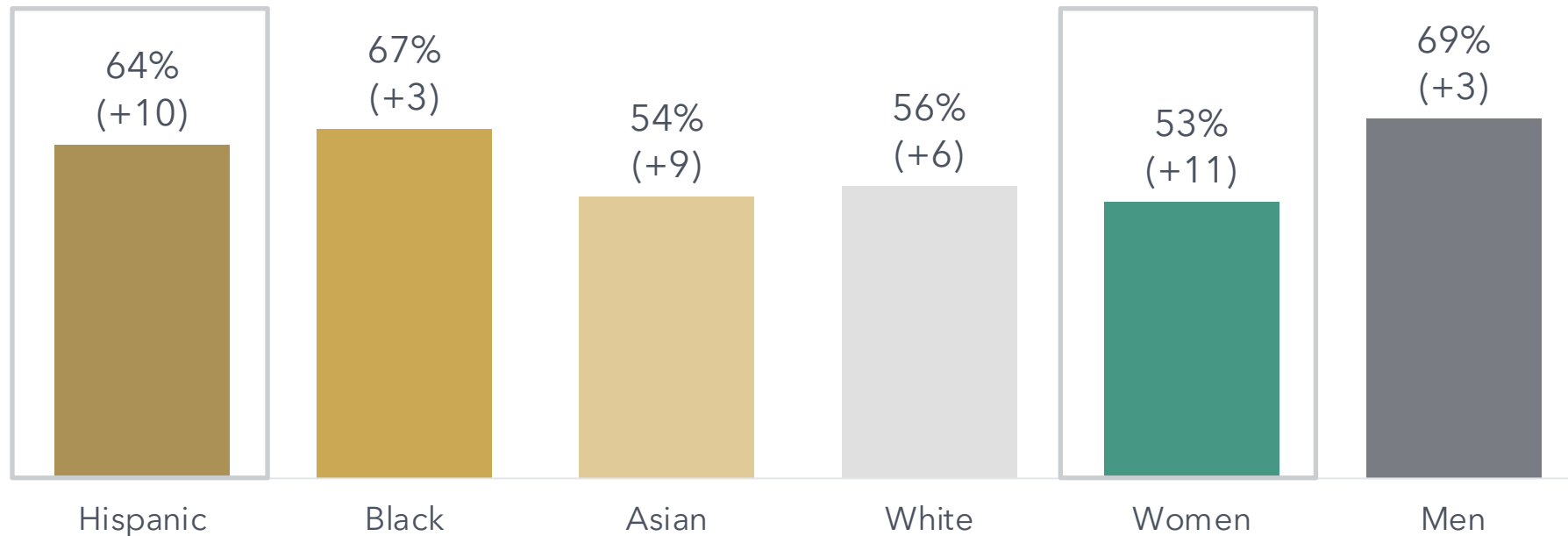


The NFL Scores Big with New and Existing Fans Alike



Post-Ad Intent to Use the Brand

% respondents who say they will “probably” or “definitely” use the brand’s products or services in the future after viewing the ad
(+ Indicates percentage-point change from pre-ad purchase intent)



Sources: Collage Group, CultureRate:Ad Studies, fielded February 2022 - August 2023 (18-77 population)
The NFL’s “Wild One—Run with It”

▲▼ indicate 5+ percentage points difference above/below the CultureRate Norm

LESSON LEARNED:

Cultural Specificity Rooted in Brand Values Magnifies Halo Effects



Exercise cultural specificity for inclusivity that draws in new audiences



Unearth layered, intersectional stories that bridge to shared values



Keep to your purpose and tentpoles to build with your brand lovers

To Harness Emotional Polarization Transform Negative Sentiment into Positive Action



Halo Effect



"Dylan Mulvaney Partnership"



"Wild One – Run with It"

Ads with high Identity Polarization



Kindling Effect



"He Gets Us"

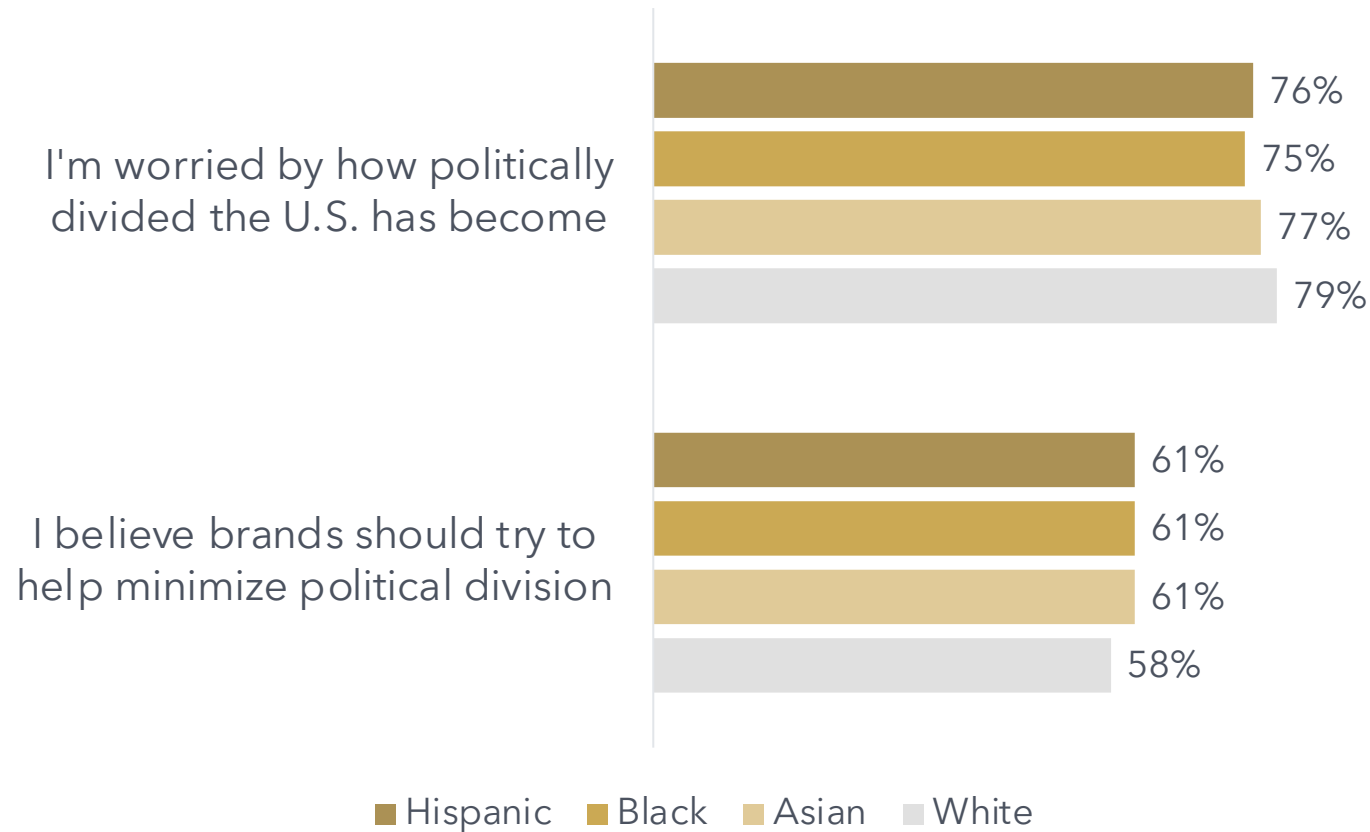


"The Face of Finance"

Ads with high Emotional Polarization

American Anxiety: Political Polarization Demands Urgent Action

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements:



Stoking Emotional **Tension without Resolution** Incites Confusion



GOAL

Communicate an important message of unity to broad, cross-segment audiences.



EXECUTION

Emotionally charged delivery lacks proper resolution of the negative sentiment, leaving viewers disoriented.

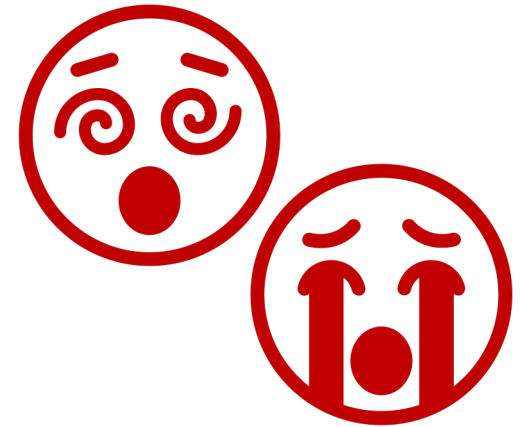
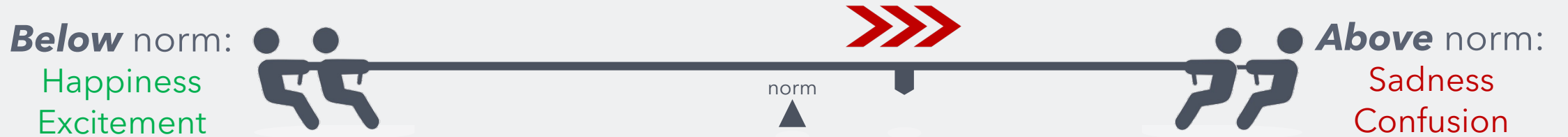


OUTCOMES

Insufficient call-to-action **fuels** negative emotions but fails to **kindle** positive response.

Sadness and Confusion Ignite Negativity

Consumer sentiment after viewing "He Gets Us"
 (Emotions that scored significantly lower / higher than CultureRate Norm)

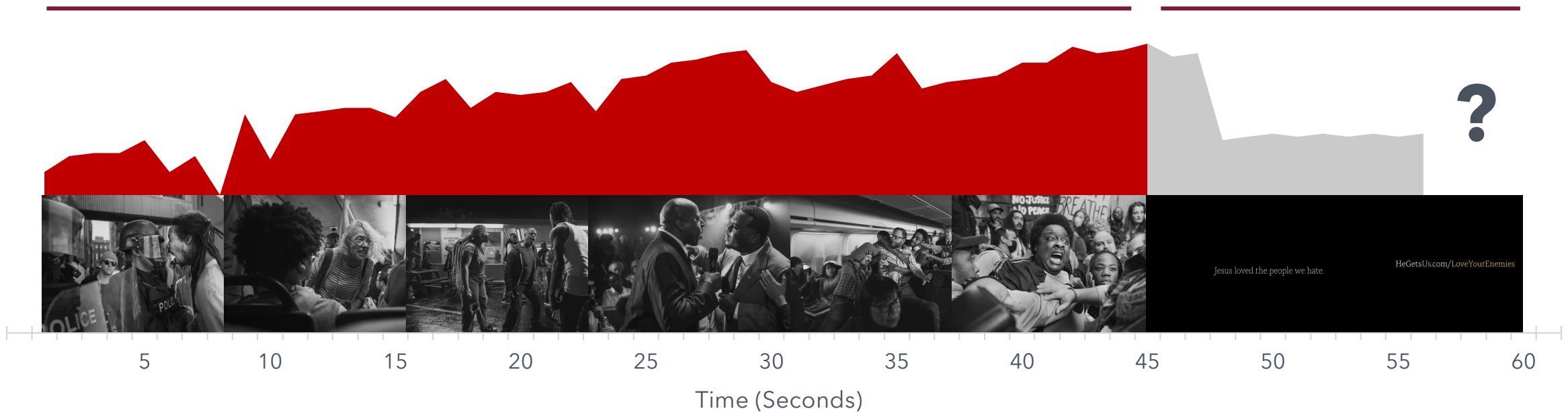


Last-Minute Attempt to Put out the Flames Is Too Little, Too Late

Emotional arc of the ad
(Illustrative plot)

Emotional Escalation

Inadequate Resolution

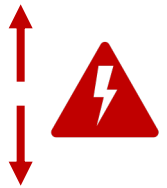


Jesus loved the people we hate. HeGetsUs.com/LoveYourEnemies

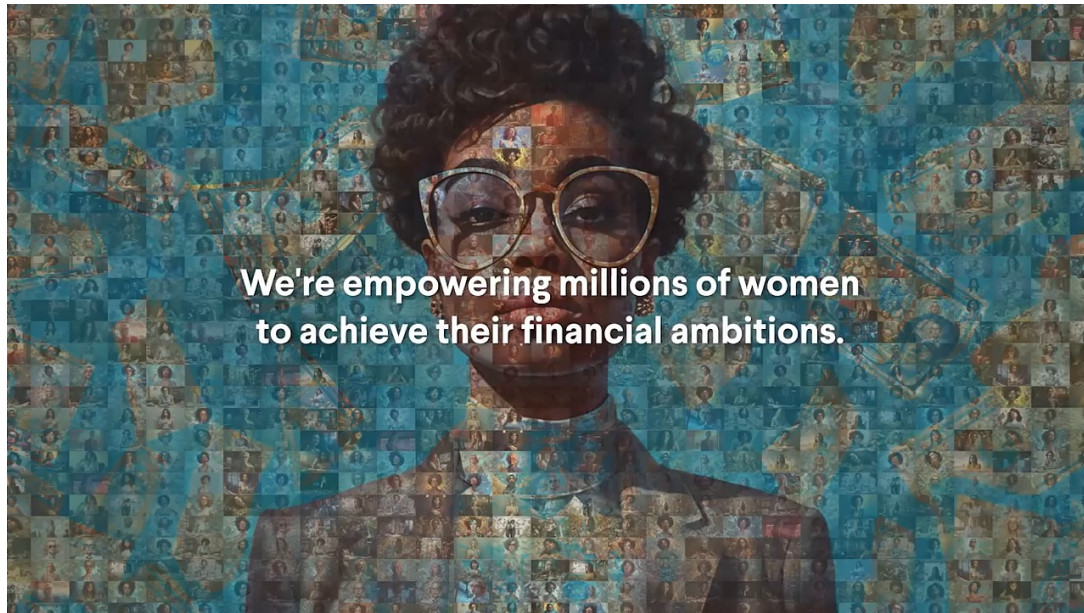
Dissonance between Message and Enjoyment Fuels Backlash

Key Ad Performance Metrics:
"He Gets Us"

		Hispanic	Black	Asian	White	Norm
	A-CFQ Score	70	69	67	67	71
A-CFQ Components	Relevance	44% ▼	49%	37% ▼	44% ▼	50%
	Fit	48%	46% ▼	42% ▼	43% ▼	52%
	Message	71% ▲	69% ▲	63% ▲	66% ▲	54%
	Enjoyment	57%	48% ▼	44% ▼	51% ▼	61%
	Backlash	15%	11%	20% ▲	18% ▲	13%



Sparking Hope from Discontent Is Memorable and Satisfying



GOAL

Communicate an important message to broad, cross-segment audiences.



EXECUTION

Generalized AI anxiety grabs viewers' attention. It serves as an emotional shortcut to the core message of gender equity, bypassing preachy undertones.



OUTCOMES

The emotional journey from anger to action **kindles** word-of-mouth and **stokes** purchase intent among all consumers.

The Ad Exposes a Harsh Reality, but Keeps the Message Engaging

Key Ad Performance Metrics:
"The Face of Finance"

		Hispanic	Black	Asian	White	Women	Men	Norm
	A-CFQ Score	74	75	72	72	76	70	71
A-CFQ Components	Relevance	55%▲	55%▲	53%	49%	62%▲	44%▼	50%
	Fit	52%	51%	46%▼	43%▼	50%	45%▼	52%
	Message	66%▲	70%▲	72%▲	71%▲	73%▲	64%▲	54%
	Enjoyment	70%▲	68%▲	64%	69%▲	74%▲	63%	61%
	Backlash	13%	12%	15%	12%	8%▼	17%	13%



Source: Collage Group, CultureRate:Ad Studies, fielded February 2022 - August 2023 (18-77 population)

SoFi, "The Face of Finance"

▲▼ indicate 5+ percentage points difference above/below the CultureRate Norm

Backlash: Percentage of brand-aware respondents whose perception of the brand got worse after ad exposure and brand-unaware respondents with a negative post-ad brand perception.

Women's Wins Stoke Pride and Inspire Viewers to Tell Others

Women were

3x more likely

to feel **PROUD** after watching SoFi's "The Face of Finance" vs. the average ad

"I would talk about this ad with others"

Women

54% ▲

Men

52% ▲



SoFi Uses AI Anxiety to Spark a Conversation on Gender Equity



37% ▼

of women **feel positive** about brands using **generative AI to create visuals for ads**¹

58%

of women think brands must **speak out against sexism**²

Total	Men
41%	45%

Total	Men
57%	55%



SoFi’s criticism of a stereotypical white, male face of the financial industry also appeals to **multicultural people**, who are more likely to use online-only banks or be unbanked.



Source: Collage Group America Now Survey, August 2023, 18-77 population, weighted data

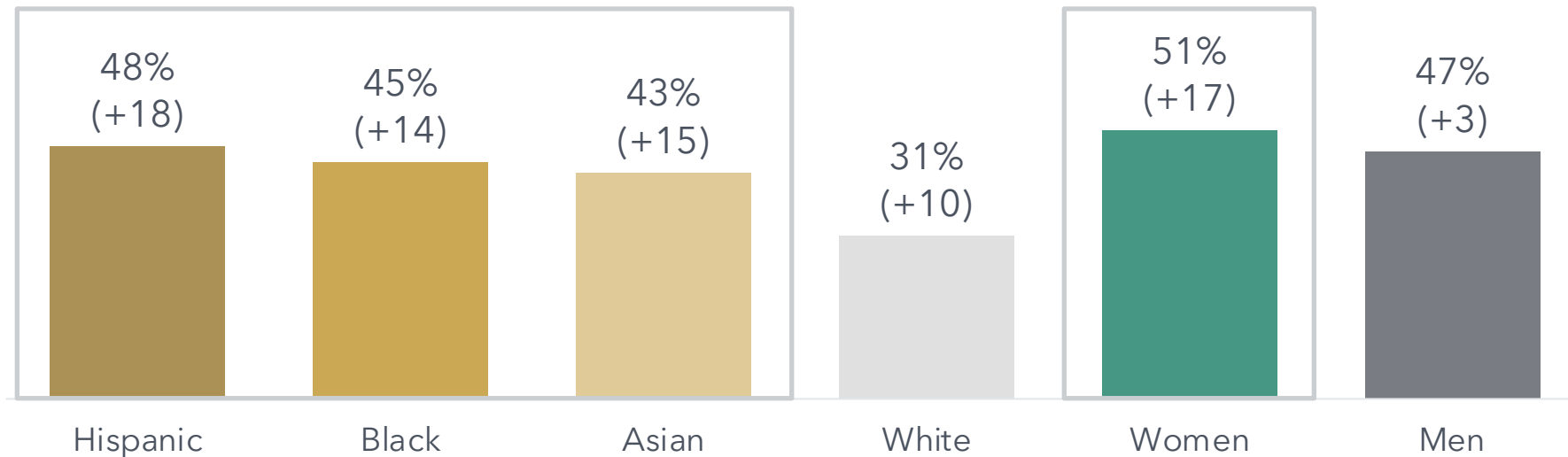
¹ Single-select grid, % positive, very positive

² Single-select grid, top 2 box. Original question: How do you think brands should respond to the following issues with 1 meaning brands SHOULDN'T speak up and 5 meaning they SHOULD speak up? - Reducing sexism; %T2B

Significance test: Confidence level 95%. ▲ ▼ over/under Total Pop.

Post-Ad Intent to Use the Brand

% respondents who say they will “probably” or “definitely” use the brand’s products or services in the future after viewing the ad
(+ Indicates percentage-point change from pre-ad purchase intent)



Source: Collage Group, CultureRate:Ad Studies, fielded February 2022 – August 2023 (18-77 population)
SoFi, “The Face of Finance”

▲ ▼ indicate 5+ percentage points difference above/below the CultureRate Norm

LESSON LEARNED:

Emotionally Resonant Stories Provide Catharsis through Action



Map emotional journeys to tell memorable *and* compelling stories



Channel negativity into action to resolve emotional tension



Stoke unity around a shared goal to captivate broader audiences

LESSONS LEARNED: Overcoming the Backlash Risk



Create Halo Effects

- **Exercise cultural specificity** for inclusivity that draws in new audiences
- **Unearth layered, intersectional stories** that bridge to shared values
- **Keep to your purpose and tentpoles** to build with your brand lovers



Ignite Kindling Effects

- **Map emotional journeys** to tell memorable *and* compelling stories
- **Channel negativity into action** to resolve emotional tension
- **Stoke unity around a shared goal** to captivate broader audiences



**COLLAGE
GROUP**

Thank You!

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