The Trouble with Keyword Exclusions

Why Marketers Should Move Away From Exclusion Terms in Media Buying
The History of Keyword Exclusions

Background

As the nuances of online content have grown, marketers started taking extra steps to ensure their ads were appearing next to safe content (not offensive, hateful or violent), and content that is brand suitable (doesn’t conflict with brand values).

Enter, Keyword Exclusions

Marketers began using exclusion keywords as a means to avoid unsafe and unsuitable content alignment for their ads. However, the terms being used often refer to human groups that are not inherently bad or dangerous. Often times, marketers add words due to singular current events, but don’t revisit and remove terms that are no longer a concern.

Exclude These Please:

- Christianity
- Lesbian
- Jewish
- Gay
- Fat
- LGBTQIA++
- Arab
- Chicks
- Trans
- Bloopers
- Asian
- Cis
- Pregnant
- Immigrant
Limiting Reach to Diverse Audiences
Brands may miss out on reaching diverse audiences

Limiting Reach in General
Reach, in general, may be unnecessarily limited

The Problem with Keyword Exclusions

- Discrimination
  Minority content creators can’t make money on their content, regardless of how high quality and engaging it is

- Limiting Reach to Diverse Audiences

- Limiting Reach in General
Experimental Design On Mobile

• Total n=2,563
• Recruited mobile users of popular online video aggregator

Users spent time on the platform as they typically would. Users randomized to test or control groups, with appropriate pre-roll video ads served

Content Tested

Standard Content
General interest content not included on keyword exclusions

Keyword Exclusion Content
Content excluded based on brand designated keywords
Videos Blocked by Exclusion Keywords

Standard, high-quality videos featuring exclusion keywords either in the caption or the video title

**Exclusion keyword: BLM**

Video titled: ‘Women in wildfire bootcamps’

Published by BLM* Oregon & Washington

*Bureau of Land Management

**Exclusion keyword: LGBTQIA++**

Video titled: “ADOPTION DAY!!!
Our journey through our unique adoption as an LGBT family in Texas”

Published by The Holgate Family
What Every Brand Should Know About Keyword Exclusions
Exclusion Keywords Don’t Prevent Brands From Creating Memorable Ad Experiences

Ads and their messages are just as memorable when aligned with content flagged by keyword exclusions.

Impact on Awareness by Content Alignment - Delta (Exposed–Control):
- Ads in Standard Content
- Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content

Unaided Ad Recall — First Mention
- Ads in Standard Content: Control n=327; Exposed n=317
- Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content: Control n=960; Exposed n=959

▲ = significant difference between exposed and control at =>90% confidence
Exclusion Keywords Don’t Prevent Ads From Being Persuasive

Ads are just as effective at driving purchase intent when running next to keyword exclusion content

Impact on Persuasion Metrics by Content Alignment - Delta (Exposed–Control):

- Ads in Standard Content
- Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content

Purchase Intent:

+10pts

\[\uparrow\]

\[\uparrow\]

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Ads in standard content: Control n=327; Exposed n=317
Ads in keyword exclusion content: Control n=960; Exposed n=959
\[\uparrow\] = significant difference between exposed and control at >=90% confidence
Ads Remain Unaffected, Even When Under the Halo of Keyword Exclusion Content

Ad Opinions by Content Alignment - (% Strongly/Somewhat Agree):

- Ads in Standard Content
- Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content

The ad…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ads in Standard Content</th>
<th>Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was likeable</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was high quality</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caught my attention</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got me excited about the brand</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ads in standard content: Exposed n=644
Ads in keyword exclusion content: Exposed n=1,919
Note: No statistical difference between groups
What Users Think About Keyword Exclusion Content:
The “bad” is not so bad

Perceptions of Content with Exclusion Keywords - (% Strongly/Somewhat Disagree)

Content is Not “High Quality”

In general, what did you think of this video?

- Boring
- Didn’t keep my attention. Was boring
- It was uninteresting to me
- It wasn’t relevant to me
- It’s sad
- It’s boring but informative
- It’s aight
- Kind of boring. The woman talking seemed very scripted in action and tone, not natural and charming. It didn’t really give too much new information either
- Standard type leak video, nothing special really
- Not for me at all
- Best idea. Too long for what it is
- Not my favorite type of content. I really don’t like to examine myself that way
- I am not interested
- Didn’t really have any thoughts about the video

Ads in standard content: Exposed n=644
Ads in keyword exclusion content: Exposed n=1,919
Users Have Positive Things to Say About Content with Exclusion Terms

Perceptions of Content with Exclusion Keywords - (% Strongly / Somewhat Agree)

Content is “High Quality”

In general, what did you think of this video?

- Absolutely love it
- Honest and authentic. Olivia with 1.36 M followed is shining light that Autism isn’t black and white. Her insightful nuances on varied levels of functioning daily very insightful
- Fun informative and relevant
- A good topic that needs to be spoke on
- Gives insight into our military and other countries military
- He is a funny comedian with original content. I had seen other videos by him but not the Asian ghost skit
- As someone who also suffers from depression, I like the breakdown and explanation
- I believe it was fun and patriotic
- Heartwarming
- Emotional
- As a veteran I found this video relevant as well as entertaining
- I follow this content creator and think that he is comedic and makes funny videos
- As a woman with autism deemed high functioning, I feel like the topic was very relevant to my interests and experiences
When Keyword Exclusions Are Used, Brands Leave Positive Impact On the Table

By using exclusion content, brands could miss out forcing stronger connections with people

Impact on Brand Perceptions by Content Alignment - Delta (Exposed–Control):
- Ads in Standard Content
- Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content

Ads in standard content: Control n=327; Exposed n=317
Ads in keyword exclusion content: Control n=960; Exposed n=959
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## Ads Are Highly Memorable Across All Types, Especially Diversity and Politics

Impact on Awareness by Content Alignment - Delta (Exposed−Control):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard Content</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unaided Ad Recall</strong></td>
<td>+34pts▲</td>
<td>+33pts▲</td>
<td>+31pts▲</td>
<td>+41pts▲</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aided Ad Recall</strong></td>
<td>+43pts▲</td>
<td>+51pts▲</td>
<td>+45pts▲</td>
<td>+51pts▲</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Message Association</strong></td>
<td>+13pts▲</td>
<td>+16pts▲</td>
<td>+17pts▲</td>
<td>+16pts▲</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ads in standard content: Control n=327; Exposed n=317
Ads in diversity content: Control n=319; Exposed n=319
Ads in mental health content: Control n=323; Exposed n=322
Ads in political content: Control n=318; Exposed n=318
▲ = significant difference between exposed and control at >=90% confidence
Brands are missing out on 12% of suitable DE&I content because of exclusion keywords.
By Using Exclusion Terms, Brands May Miss Out On the Power of Culturally Relevant Content

Perceived as “Culturally Relevant” - (% Strongly / Somewhat Agree)

Impact on Purchase Intent - Delta (Exposed−Control):

▲ = significant difference between exposed and control at =>90% confidence

Ads in standard content: Control n=327; Exposed n=317; Ads in diversity content: Control n=319; Exposed n=319; Ads in mental health content: Control n=323; Exposed n=322; Ads in political content: Control n=318; Exposed n=318
Most exclusion keywords aren’t protecting brands... they may even be hindering campaign performance
Next Steps
How brands can be safe and suitable beyond exclusion terms

Brand Suitability
Use brand alignment tools to match ads with content that closely reflects the brand’s values or campaign goals.

Brands should customize their profiles based on specific factors such as risk assessment, specialized topics, and other relevant criteria.

Context Control
Leverage context control segments to safeguard brands, allowing people to steer clear of potentially unsafe/risky content that doesn’t meet their brand standards.

IAS’s technology provides near-real-time insight into a web page’s true context, sentiment, and emotion, enabling marketers to effectively target diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI) related content, reach diverse audiences, and support diverse publishers.
Thank You.