

# 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:**

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Christianity

Lesbian

Jewish

Gay

Fat

LGBTQIA++

Arab

Chicks

Trans

Bloopers

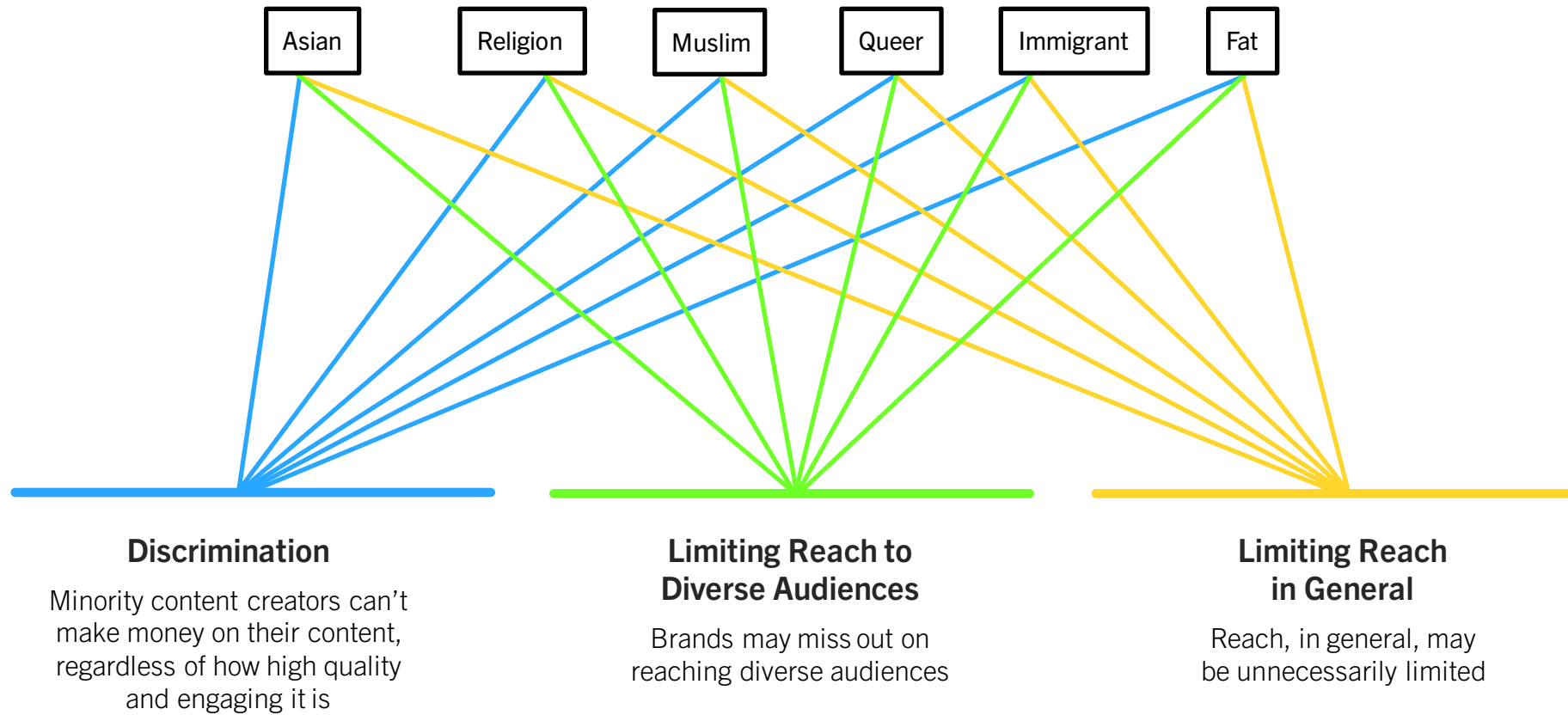
Asian

Cis

Pregnant

Immigrant

# The Problem with Keyword Exclusions



# Methodology

## Experimental Design On Mobile

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- 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

**CONTROL AD**

*Public Service  
Announcement*

VS

**TEST AD**

*Brand*

## Content Tested

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### Standard Content

General interest content not included on keyword exclusions

### Keyword Exclusion Content

Content excluded based on brand designated keywords

*Variety of Genres*

VS

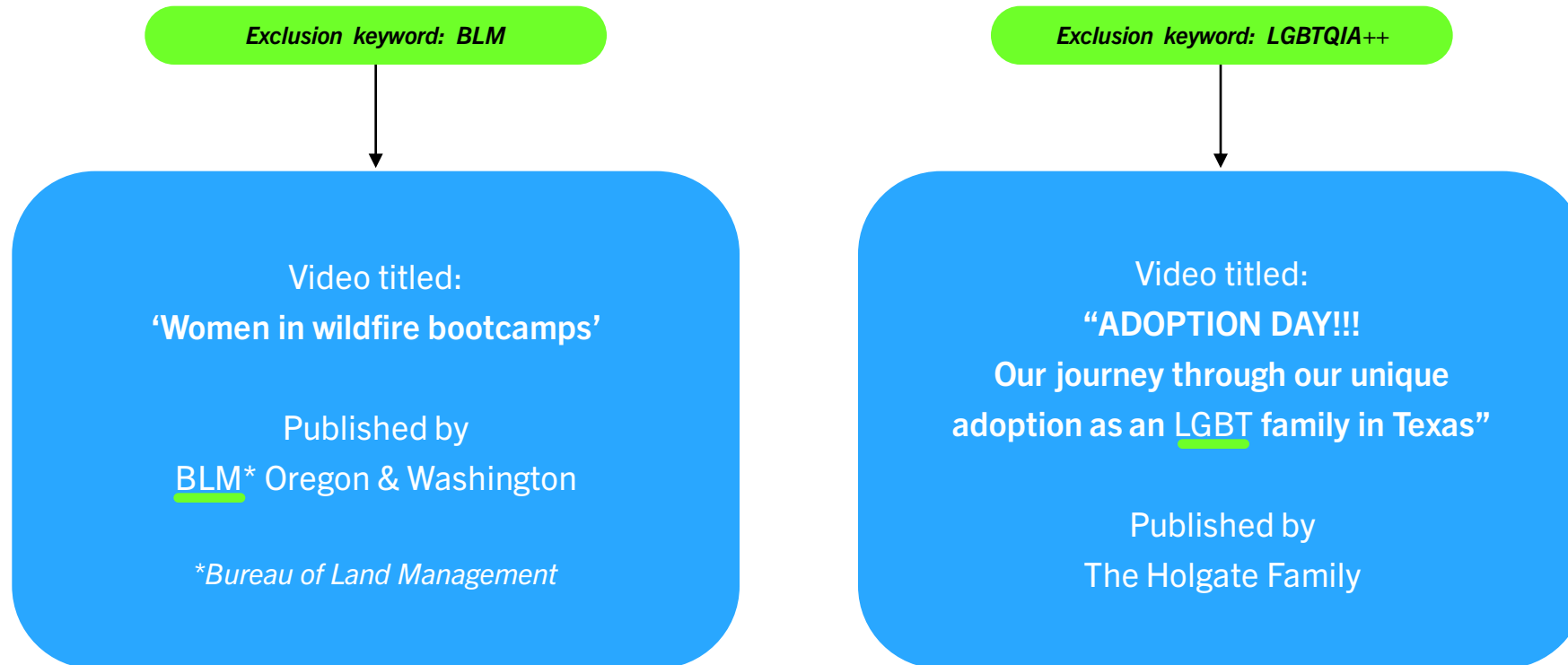
*Diversity*

*Mental Health*

*Politics*

# Videos Blocked by Exclusion Keywords

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



# **What Every Brand Should Know About Keyword Exclusions**

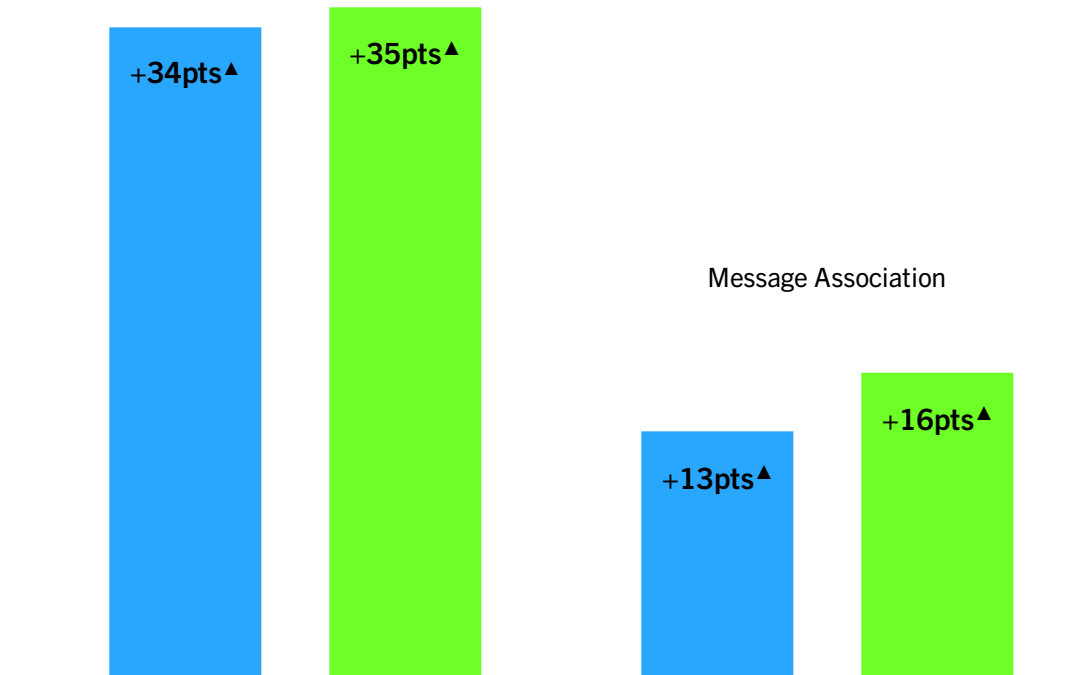
# Exclusion Keywords Don't Prevent Brands From Creating Memorable Ad Experiences

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

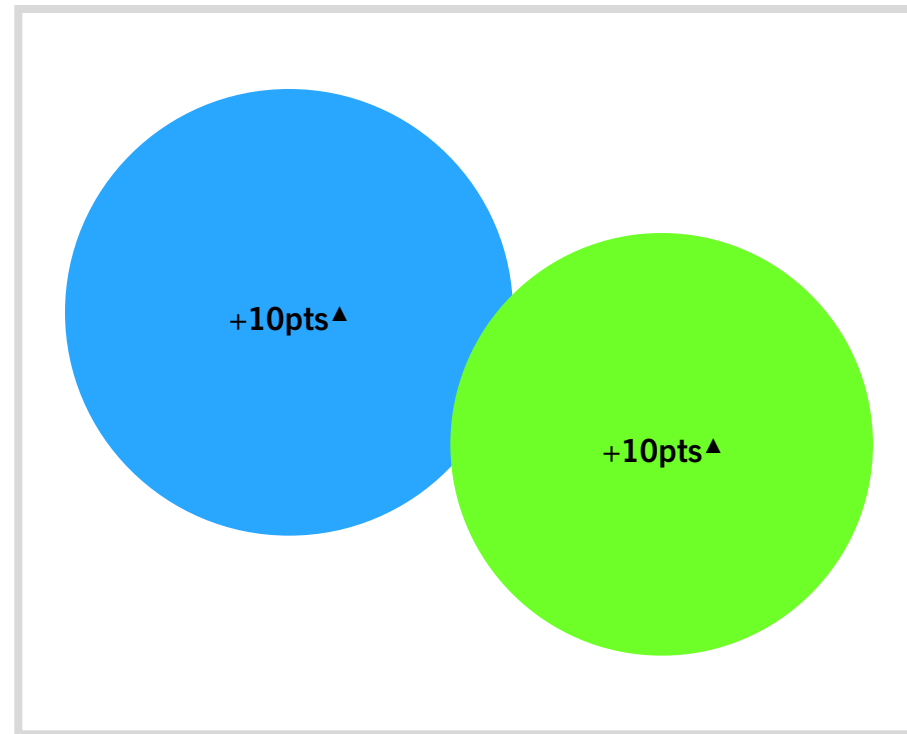
# Exclusion Keywords Don't Prevent Ads From Being Persuasive

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:

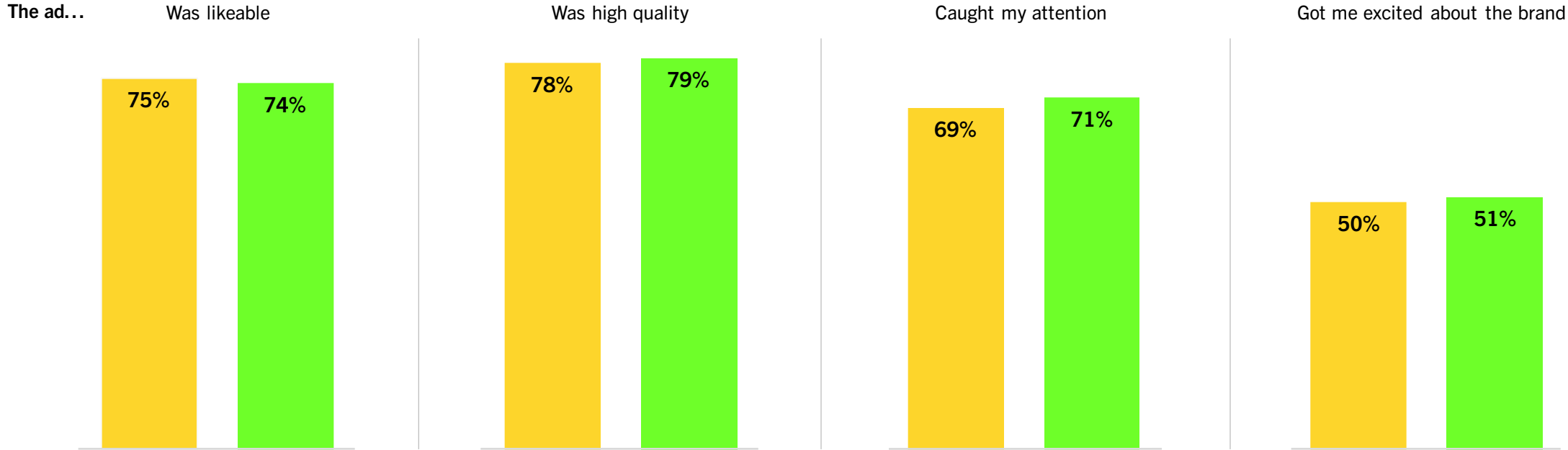




# Ads Remain Unaffected, Even When Under the Halo of Keyword Exclusion Content

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

Ads in Standard Content    Ads in Keyword Exclusion Content

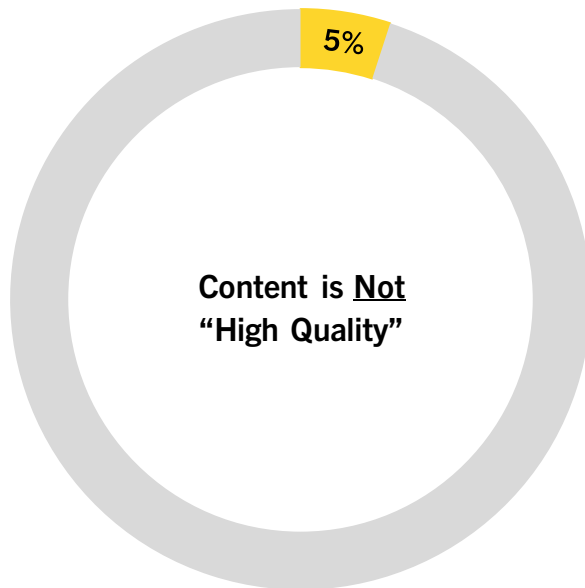


Ads in standard content: Exposed n=644  
Ads in keyword exclusion content: Exposed n=1,919  
Note: No statistical difference between groups

# What Users Think About Keyword Exclusion Content:

The “bad” is not so bad

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



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

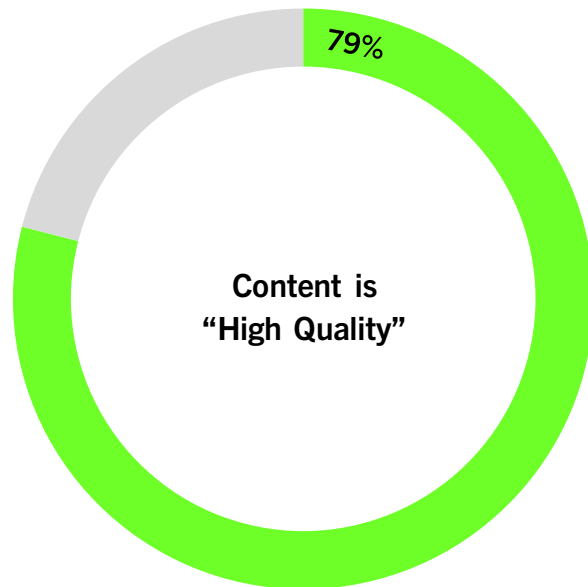
Not my favorite type of content. I really don't like to examine myself that way

I am not interested

Didn't really have any thoughts about the video

# Users Have Positive Things to Say About Content with Exclusion Terms

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



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

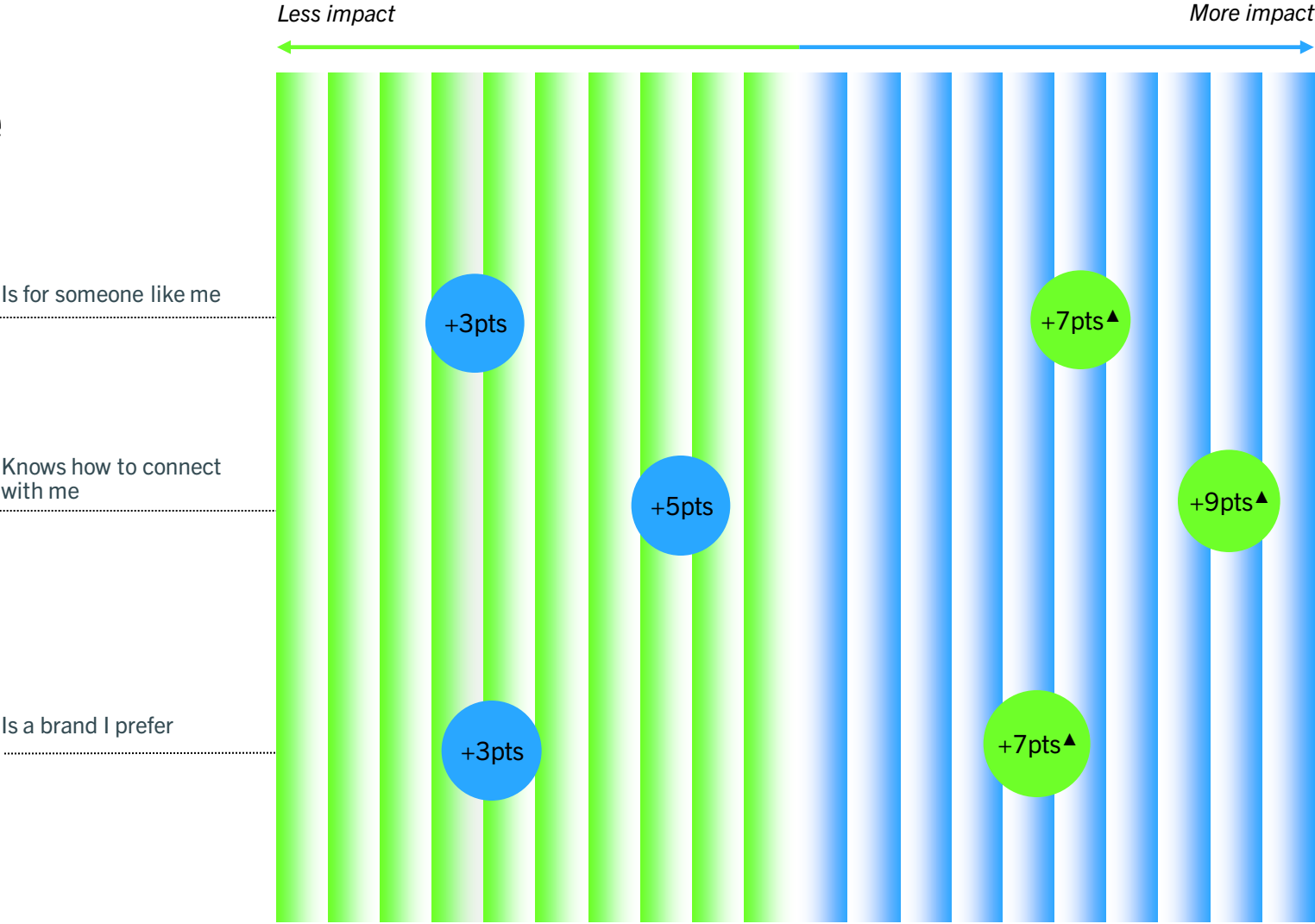
As a woman with autism deemed high functioning, I feel like the topic was very relevant to my interests and experiences

# 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 Are Highly Memorable Across All Types, Especially Diversity and Politics

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

	Standard Content	Diversity	Mental Health	Politics
Unaided Ad Recall — Any Mention	+34pts▲	+33pts▲	+31pts▲	+41pts▲
Aided Ad Recall	+43pts▲	+51pts▲	+45pts▲	+51pts▲
Message Association	+13pts▲	+16pts▲	+17pts▲	+16pts▲

*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*

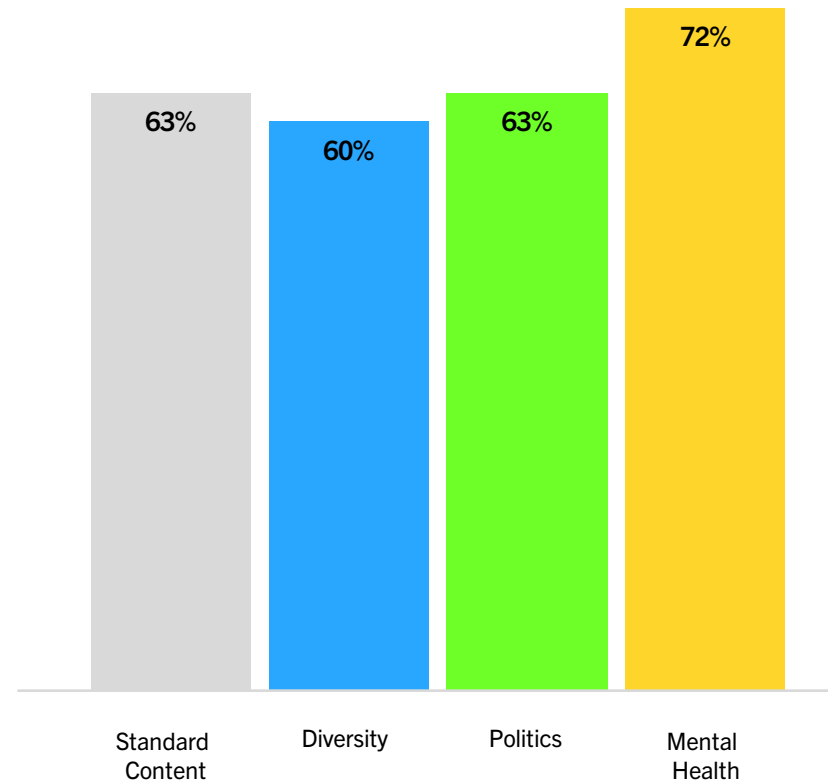
▲ = significant difference between exposed and control at >=90% confidence

**Brands are missing out  
on 12% of suitable  
DE&I content because  
of exclusion keywords**

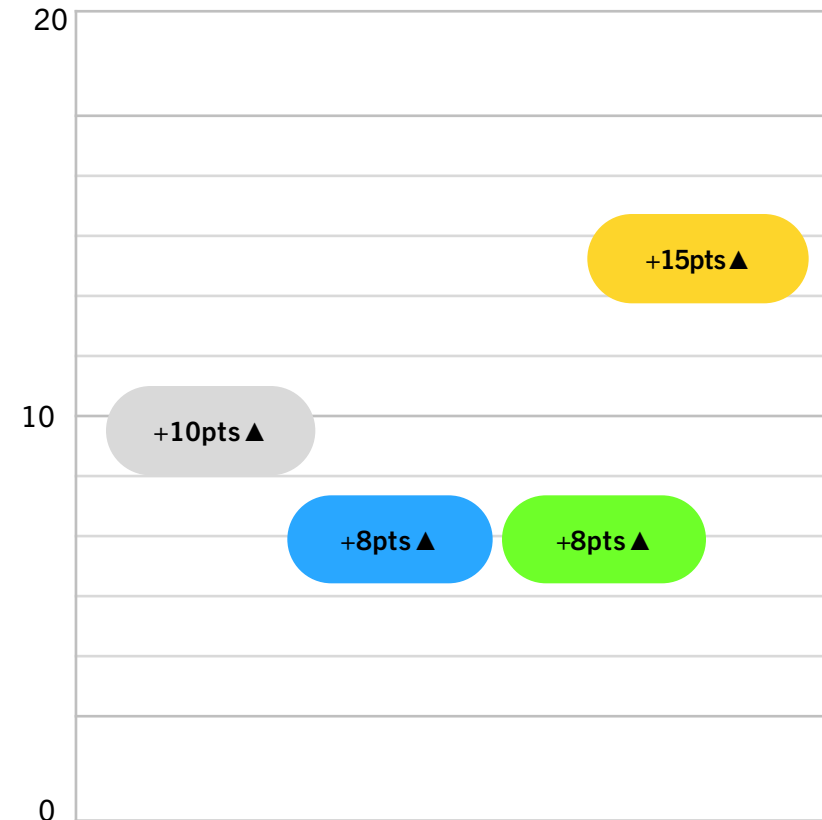
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# By Using Exclusion Terms, Brands May Miss Out On the Power of Culturally Relevant Content

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



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





A photograph of five people (three women and two men) sitting at a long, light-colored wooden table in a modern office or co-working space. They are all facing away from the camera, looking at their devices. From left to right: a woman with long red hair in a red sweater holding a smartphone; a man with a shaved head in a red and white striped sweater; a woman with a braid in a beige sweater wearing a headset; a woman with short blonde hair in a grey blazer; and a man with dark hair in a grey shirt wearing a headset. The background features a large potted plant with variegated leaves, a grey hoodie hanging on a rack, and a dark brick wall on the left. The word "Implications" is overlaid in large white text with a green underline.

# Implications



**Most exclusion keywords  
aren't protecting brands...  
they may even be hindering  
campaign performance**

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# 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



# Thank You.