

Feeling 'Seen' In the Metaverse

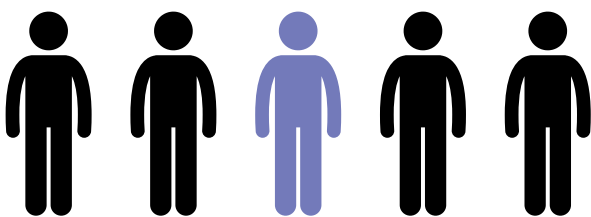
A Point-of-View for Marketers on Diversity & Equality in the Metaverse



There has been much written about the potential to build diversity and inclusion into the very fabric of the metaverse – as an opportunity to build a space where we leave our current biases, systematic racism and flawed systems at the proverbial door. However, the early reality has exposed some issues –Bloomberg wrote in December of 2021 about price differences that existed for digital avatars based on race, gender and skin color among a popular (and status symbol) collection of NFTs known as CryptoPunks. Female avatars and those with dark skin tended to sell a lower price than white/male avatars. Is this just a function of early adoption, or will this be a space where these types of inequalities continue to persist? And how can marketers help build a more authentic and diverse metaverse for the future?

Before answering that question, let's take a step back and look at social media. Currently, only 55% of Americans feel represented in social media. There are no significant differences in this perception by age, race or gender – indicating many people feel less than "seen." The perfect curation of ordinary lives with a heavy sprinkle of influencer culture has left nearly half of American's feel underrepresented on social media.

Data suggests that most expect this feeling to translate into the metaverse – more than 40% do not expect to see themselves represented in the metaverse (43%), though about three in five (59%) expect the metaverse to be an equal playing field for all. There are no differences in this belief by race, but males are significantly more likely than females to see the metaverse as an equal playing field (65% vs. 54%). When asked to select the top words associated with the metaverse, relatively few Americans currently associate it with diversity (17%) or equality (8%). And nearly 1-in-10 associate it with the white (9%) patriarchy (7%). Interestingly, younger individuals – those 18-24 – are the most likely to associate it with being white (21%).



One-in-five (21%) of those 18-24 choose 'white' as one of the top 5 words they associate with the metaverse, and 31% chose elitist.

So how can brands help to drive diversity and inclusion? Don't bother with the social media playbook. Instead, individuals are excited about new, authentic experiences from brands. By leaving the influencer-driven perfection of Web 2.0 behind, brands have a chance to connect with potential customers in an exciting and more authentic way. There is also a hunger for experiences that will drive link the physical world to the digital world – helping all individuals bring their most authentic selves to Web 3.0.

How will your brand engage? If you'd like to brainstorm, reach out.

amber.broughton@harrispoll.com | jennifer.musil@harrispoll.com

