

Brands are using more imagery of women of colour

New data from iStock on corporate branding and advertising is encouraging. However, companies should not stop here.

[iStock](#) has released data on its most-sold images of 2020. Within searches for 'women', the three most popular pictures all depicted women of colour:

The popularity of these images no doubt reflects consumer demand – with nearly three quarters (73%) of young people feeling it's important that the companies they buy from celebrate diversity of all kinds.

Particularly in the wake of last year's Black Lives Matter protests, it's clearer than ever that businesses can't just choose to exist outside society.

Businesses have a responsibility to operate for the benefit of the society from whence they came – and promoting diversity and inclusion within and beyond their walls is part of this. Customers will no longer let them get away with anything less.

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For the less easily persuaded, it also makes business sense to champion diversity. As we've *reported in the past*, employee-led innovation and problem-solving grows by 83% in organisations that are perceived to be committed to diversity.

With regards to marketing visuals, *a 2019 study on inclusive ads* by Google showed 64% of people took some kind of action upon seeing an ad that they felt was diverse or inclusive. As iStock's Global Head of Creative Insights Dr Rebecca Swift commented on the recent findings,

"It's refreshing to see that brands and businesses are now recognising that they can better reach and connect with consumers when they choose visuals which authentically reflect the diversity of the world around us—In other words, when they mirror our friends, colleagues, neighbours and loved ones back to us."

For Swift, the new data from the leading image provider suggests that "the visual representation of women globally may be improving."

"Given that our perception of what is possible is shaped by what we see, this shift is absolutely something worth celebrating," she added.

It is certainly true that imagery plays a huge role in subverting stereotypes, and in making people feel welcome in spaces they may previously have felt barred from. However, visual strategies must be matched by other tangible steps towards inclusion. Otherwise they will be seen as performative.

It will take more than stock photos to rectify the fact that *over 50 per cent of FTSE 100 companies* have no ethnic minority directors. And that BAME founders received only 1.7% of VC investment in the decade leading up to 2019.

It's all very well using an image of a Black woman in a marketing brochure, but it means little if Black women are systematically underpaid within your company and sidelined by its culture.

Hopefully this new data from iStock is symptomatic of a deeper commitment from UK companies to assess pay, promotions and culture – alongside continuing to champion visual representation.

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the camera

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