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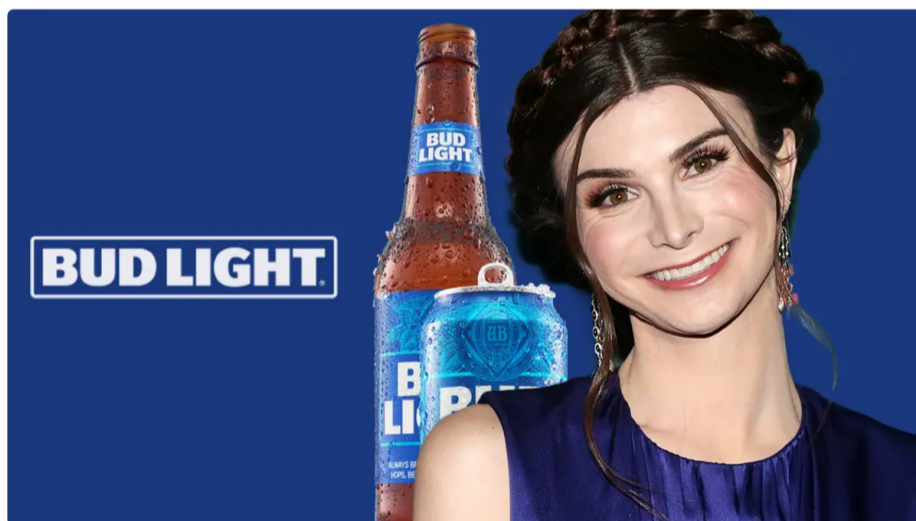
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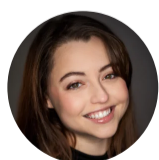
DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

## Bud Light's Response To Dylan Mulvaney Backlash Displays Dangers Of Shallow Advocacy

The brand worked to isolate the trans creator from its core demographic while benefiting from her reach



The partnership is another move to expand the beer brand's consumer base by including women in the conversation, but some experts assert that the collaboration represents an oversimplified approach to influencer campaigns. Bud Light, Bruce Glikas/WireImage




By Emmy Liederman

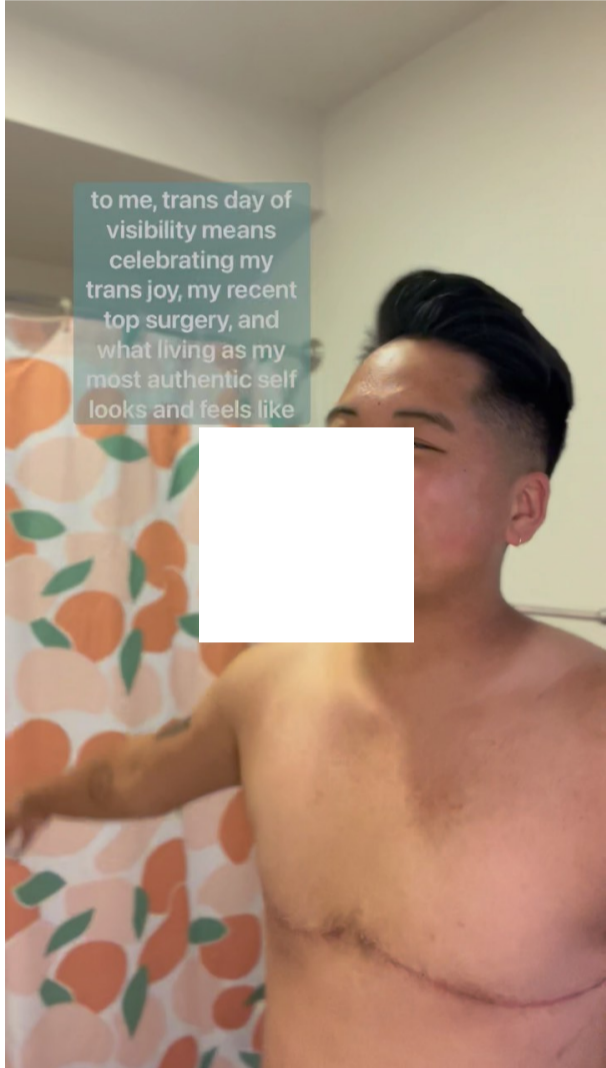
APRIL 20, 2023

On April 14, Bud Light responded to the uproar around its partnership with trans influencer **Dylan Mulvaney** with a declaration of patriotism. The expression of its **"responsibility to America,"** which did not address the slew of consumers who responded to the collaboration with resistance, left

her.

"If brands don't take that responsibility on, then this begs the question of what are the brand's true intentions when launching this campaign?" said Meg Emiko Lee (they/them), a creator and artist who has worked with brands including Picsart and Fenty. "If it's solely to cause a stir, publicity or anything aside from taking actual action to fight for trans folks and trans rights, then they are participating in performative activism that will not create the waves of change that the trans community needs."

 **megemikoart**  
Original audio View p



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Celebrating #TransDayofVisibility with @fentyskin by unapologetically living as my most authentic self. Thank you, Fenty Fam! #FentySkin #FentySkinSponsored

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The outrage towards the **original video**, which features Mulvaney brandishing personalized beer cans and promoting a March Madness challenge, has been exacerbated by some conservative disdain for Bud Light's vice-president of marketing Alissa Heinerscheid. In an interview for a March episode of the podcast "Make Yourself At Home," Heinerscheid asserted that her mission was to replace the brand's "fratty, kind of, out of touch humor" with a more inclusive approach.

Instead of standing by Mulvaney, Bud Light appeared to loosen its ties with the creator and paint her as an external brand fanatic rather than a strategic partner, according to creators and

heightened susceptibility to hate speech that can be magnified by social media algorithms, while also considering whether the intentions of their partnership will prevail in the face of backlash.

**dylanmulvaney**  
Original audio

View p



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**195,183 likes**  
**dylanmulvaney**

Happy March Madness!! Just found out this had to do with sports and no saying it's a crazy month! In celebration of this sports thing @budlight is you the chance to win \$15,000! Share a video with #EasyCarryContest for chance to win!! Good luck! #budlightpartner

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"People are open to seeing change, but when you show it's not something you're willing to defend, it becomes disingenuous," said Lola Bakare, CMO adviser and author of the upcoming book Responsible Marketing. "They want the benefit of this person's audience and their influence, but they don't want any of the negativity that might surround that."

### Crafting considerate partnerships

Bakare pointed to a double standard that is sometimes evident in how brands protect their ambassadors. While Netflix's co-CEO defended comedians Dave Chappelle and Ricky Gervais' performances on its platform, despite disapproval from the transgender community and allies, Bud Light has not specifically defended its partnership with Mulvaney. When addressing inclusivity, brands must consider the mistreatment the transgender community still faces compared to other marginalized groups, she said.

community, to the Black community, would feel like a bigger risk," said Bakare. "Being trans is just as inherent to someone's existence, and it's even more of a responsibility for those of us who have the power to set the record straight."

**"I now fear that these big brands aren't going to risk paying trans people, which is what these folks wanted. "**

—Elle Deran, Creator

The Mulvaney partnership is another move in Heinerscheid's effort to expand the beer brand's consumer base by including women in the conversation, but some experts assert that the collaboration

represents an oversimplified approach to influencer campaigns.

Jazmin Griffith, creator and founder of social media agency La Marca Consulting, said that brands may be quick to assume that paying prominent talent to promote their product to a new market makes for a seamless expansion of their consumer base. In this case, that lack of foresight led to a "quick switch up" and a campaign that was "too disruptive" for some of Bud Light's audience, she said.

"Bud Light was just looking to put something out there and didn't see (Mulvaney) as a strategic partner who is driving conversions, creative and community," said Griffith. "Brands still have a big lack of knowledge on the power of influencer marketing and content creators in general. When you work with creators, they are an extension of you."

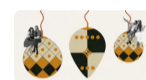
## Spotlighting violence over harm

Bud Light's attempt to please opposing online audiences points to a misguided approach to social media virality that can inadvertently compromise the safety of marginalized groups, according to creator Elle Deran (she/they). Deran, a full-time content creator who is determined to "funnel money from big corporations back to the trans community," has noticed that algorithms can amplify hate. This means it is crucial for brands with even the most inclusive audiences to protect talent from harassment while continuing to elevate them throughout content engagement lulls.





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"When I first started on TikTok, I would get so much hate and my content would blow up but in a horrible way," said Deran, who added that platforms have the tendency to "highlight the violence and not the harm."

"I now fear that these big brands aren't going to risk paying trans people, which is what these folks wanted."

Bakare, who dubs this group of anti-trans consumers "the loud minority," said brands can support marginalized communities and lead with "advocacy without performance" by offering pointed solutions to problems they face. She praised **Absolut Vodka**, which doubled down on its advocacy last year by championing struggling LGBTQ+ bars through its **"Out & Open" initiative**.

Deran, who is a partner at Johnson and Johnson LGBTQ+ fundraising and advocacy wing Care With Pride, said brands that highlight folks with marginalized identities should support the community in more ways than just paying one creator.