

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE MARKETING DIMENSIONS ON ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract

Inclusive marketing, as a type of marketing, nowadays is often used by companies to enhance their advertising effectiveness and establish stronger connections with diverse consumer groups. Although inclusive marketing is widely actualized in many scientific studies of recent years, there is still a lack of clarity about which dimensions of inclusivity most effectively impact consumer responses and advertising effectiveness. Considering the above circumstances, the research problem is stated: how to use inclusive marketing to increase the effectiveness of advertising? Therefore, the aim of the paper is to evaluate the impact of different dimensions of inclusive marketing on the effectiveness of advertising. To reach the aim, research methods of literature analysis, quantitative research using questionnaire as an instrument and Friedman's test with descriptive statistical analysis methods were used. Research results showed that all dimensions of inclusive marketing have a statistically significant effect on the different stages of the advertising affect hierarchy. All dimensions have a significant effect on advertising effectiveness at the cognitive and affective stages of advertising perception; none of the dimensions has a significant effect at the conative stage.

Keywords: *Affective Stage of Hierarchy of Advertising Effects, Cognitive Stage of Hierarchy of Advertising Effects, Conative Stage of Hierarchy of Advertising Effects, Inclusive Advertising, Inclusive Marketing.*

JEL Codes: M31, M37, M14.

Introduction

In the competitive business world, organizations are no longer focused solely on attracting customer attention, improving their reputation, and driving sales. In recent years, they are more and more actively trying to rearrange their marketing strategies in order to contribute to the solution of social problems and to destroy stereotypes that have become entrenched in society. Attention to socially relevant issues can change customers' attitude towards the brand, encourage them to act, therefore various brands increasingly choose the direction of socially responsible marketing, in which their consumers can see themselves. For this, a type of socially responsible marketing is used - inclusive marketing, which defines the representative representation of its audience in brand marketing campaigns, with the aim of breaking established stereotypes of society and depicting

various social groups of people. According to Dixon (2024), inclusive marketing can be understood as an approach that aims to accept and broadly represent diverse identities, backgrounds and experiences. Such a marketing position not only aims to avoid exclusion, but also actively tries to find a connection with the diversity of the target audience and to reflect it. As Hendricks (2017) points out, to date many brands have traditionally targeted their communications only to certain prototypical consumers: white, young-middle-aged, slim, Christian heterosexual men and middle-class women. However, there is currently a tendency to break down stereotypes and include in communication people from different social backgrounds or groups: different races or ethnic groups, different religions, different ages, LGBTQ+ members, etc. In recent years, there has

been an increase in advertising that is inclusive and representative of diversity, i.e. the existing boundaries of advertising have expanded, with increasing depictions of religious minorities, diversity of sexual orientation, gender diversity, alternative lifestyles, and different standards of physical attractiveness (Fried & Oprea, 2023). The ideas of inclusive marketing are becoming more and more relevant in the communication of organizations and brands, because more people are talking about the desire to see themselves in it and the need to represent the diversity of society more. By authentically reflecting the diversity of society with the help of marketing tools, organizations and brands can create a relationship with consumers who feel recognized, valued, supported and understood, and such relationship can influence consumer behavior, not only attract new consumers, but also retain them in the long term.

Although the use of inclusive marketing in communication is widely actualized in many scientific studies of recent years, significant research gaps remain, especially regarding the impact of different inclusiveness dimensions on the effectiveness of advertising. Acknowledging that consumers increasingly prefer brands that demonstrate inclusivity and diversity in their marketing efforts (Jaiswal et al., 2021; Nguyen & Johnson, 2020), it remains unclear which dimensions of inclusivity are most effective in achieving the desired consumer response or in understanding the impact of advertising efforts at various stages of consumer decision-making. It should be noted that researchers highlight various effects of inclusive marketing on consumer responses; some underscore its impact on brand perception (Trkulja, 2024), others on purchase intentions (Austin et al., 2021, cited in Verbytska et al. 2023; Lima et al., 2020), and still others on brand reputation (Joo & Wu, 2021; Qayyum et al., 2023). Given these findings, the overall impact of inclusive marketing across different stages of customer decision-making and advertising effectiveness remains unclear. Different cultural contexts can also influence the effectiveness of advertisements that incorporate inclusiveness concepts. Therefore, to more thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive advertising, it is necessary to analyze the impact of individual inclusiveness dimensions in brand advertising and identify the stages of advertising effectiveness evaluation at which the use of

inclusive marketing ideas are most appropriate. Considering the above circumstances, the research problem is stated: how to use inclusive marketing to increase the effectiveness of advertising?

Therefore, the aim of the paper is to evaluate the impact of different dimensions of inclusive marketing (gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, integration of people with disabilities) on the effectiveness of advertising.

The research object: the impact of different dimensions of inclusive marketing on advertising effectiveness. To reach the aim, research methods of literature analysis, quantitative research using questionnaire as an instrument and Friedman's test with descriptive statistical analysis methods were used, seeking to evaluate the impact of five inclusive marketing dimensions (gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, disability integration) on three different stages of advertising effectiveness according to the hierarchy of advertising effects: cognitive, affective and conative. Sector of fashion industry was chosen as appropriate for conducting empirical research-based on insights that fashion market has experienced rapid growth in recent years, driven by factors such as the increasing use of mobile devices for online shopping, rising consumers' expectations for fast and reliable delivery, and the growing importance of sustainability and ethical practices in the fashion industry (Statista, 2024). Research was conducted among Lithuanian customers, who are at age of 18 and above. Based on analysis results, hypotheses were confirmed or denied, providing comprehensive insights into how various inclusive marketing dimensions impact advertising effectiveness across cognitive, affective, and conative stages of advertising perception.

Literature review

Inclusive marketing and dimensions of inclusiveness. Inclusive marketing is a type of marketing and a method that emphasises, unites, and tries to represent all the differences and diversity of the real world (Verbytska et al., 2023). It is based on the principle of recognizing and valuing the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalized groups (Dixon, 2024). Demunter

& Bauwens (2023) note that the aspirations of inclusive marketing can extend beyond the boundaries of brand communication; this marketing approach not only promotes inclusion and togetherness but also gives voice to diversity, fostering a more inclusive and welcoming society. Rivera et al. (2020) identify four main aspects of inclusive marketing:

- Representation: Inclusive marketing aims to represent diverse groups of people, including individuals of different ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, abilities, and body types, by giving them meaningful roles.
- Empathy: The goal of inclusive marketing is to understand the unique experiences and emotions of different groups, communicate with them respectfully and sensitively, and take into account their needs and differences.
- Authenticity: Inclusive marketing seeks to avoid stereotypes and superficiality, aiming to create authentic, realistic, and meaningful campaigns that resonate with various audiences.
- Accessibility: Inclusive marketing aims to create campaigns that are accessible to all, including those with disabilities, and to provide information and services that meet the needs of diverse consumers.

As noted by Dimitrieska et al. (2019), brands' use of inclusive marketing involves being open to people's differences and ensuring that every consumer feels valued and respected. This marketing approach aims to foster a closer relationship with consumers by promoting feelings of acceptance, belonging, empowerment, equality, and respect (Licsandru & Cui, 2018).

Although inclusive marketing has not yet been extensively explored in the scientific literature, available research and prevailing societal issues suggest that various brands are beginning to embrace the most popular directions of inclusive marketing.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: One of the most clearly visible directions of inclusive marketing is the effort to portray the sexes equally. According to Eisend (2010), brand communication is dominated by gender stereotypes. "Gender stereotypes are consequently based on the beliefs that certain characteristics,

attributes and behaviors differentiate the different genders" (Eisend, 2010, cited in Åkestam et al., 2021, p. 65). Stereotypes are often depicted in various brand advertisements, justified by the fact that stereotypes simplify and systematize information and help us understand the world (Åkestam et al., 2021). While stereotypes do not necessarily portray people negatively, they oversimplify individuals and fail to reflect their true complexity (Åkestam et al., 2021).

A study conducted in Brazil identified six stereotypical roles in which women are usually portrayed in advertising: housewife, trophy woman, sex object, embodiment of sexuality, professional, and object of beauty. The most dominant stereotype identified in the study is women as "sexual objects" (Middleton & Turnbull, 2021). Women in advertising can be depicted half-naked in any communication campaign, even when it is not correlated with the product. For a long time, women were shown in simple, family-oriented roles, while men were portrayed in more independent, professional, strong, athletic, and "masculine" roles (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Brands often portray stereotypical female and male gender roles that present individuals as unattainable ideals, which can lead to anxiety, eating disorders, and issues with self-confidence and self-esteem, among other real health problems for consumers. Stereotypical gender roles in advertising also affect children and their perception of the world, teaching them how girls and women, as well as boys and men, should behave, dress, and what they should value (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020).

However, gender representation in brand marketing communication is changing. We are now witnessing a shift in the portrayal of men towards "softer", more family-oriented roles (Goedecke & Klinth, 2021). As gender representation evolves, so does the image of women. Women are now often depicted as perfect, capable individuals; they are still portrayed as attractive, charming, loving wives and mothers, but they are also shown with top careers and well-paid jobs (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020). According to Michailidou et al., (2022), consumers are more receptive to advertising that challenges traditional gender stereotypes, which leads to more positive engagement with the brand message.

Racial Diversity. Various societal groups of different races and skin colors have long experienced racism and discrimination in many areas of public life. This has also been reflected in media and brand communication, as white individuals have historically dominated the advertising market (Mayo et al., 2005). In today's society, this issue is becoming increasingly important because, according to Shinoda et al., (2020), lack of variety in skin colors and races in advertising is problematic because this contributes to perpetuating biased beauty standards and the favoring of Eurocentric features.

According to Jones (2010), aligning skin color and race with a brand's target audience in visual communication is effective. Research indicates that both Black and White consumers want to see themselves represented in brand advertising. This desire relates to the fact that people want to identify with and feel represented in public spaces. However, there is an important condition for racial diversity in the context of inclusive marketing: races cannot be viewed in isolation from one another. Individuals in different societies are diverse and do not necessarily look the same, even if they live in the same country. Inclusive marketing does not focus on categorizing people into racial or skin color groups; rather, it aims to engage various individuals in society and to depict and represent them (Shankar, 2020). In inclusive marketing that focuses on racial or skin color diversity, it is important to pay attention to the term “tokenism”, which is often used in a racial context. Tokenism can occur when non-white individuals are portrayed in a stereotypical manner, emphasizing their differences from white individuals (Törngren & Ulver, 2020). As Törngren & Ulver (2020) state, those who are the object of tokenism are always reminded of their differences; that they have to present themselves in certain ways in order to be valued. To achieve inclusiveness, it is crucial that different races or skin colors are not singled out, thereby drawing exclusive attention (Shankar, 2020).

LGBTQ+ integration. In recent years, as the relevance of inclusive marketing has grown, so has the portrayal of homosexual individuals in communication (Read et al., 2018). LGBTQ+ visibility in advertising, moving towards clearer and more accepting portrayals, demonstrates the advertising industry's ability to adapt and its

potential influence on cultural norms and perceptions (Demunter & Bauwens, 2023). Brands that support the LGBTQ+ community are seen as solidarity-driven and responsive to the needs of homosexual individuals (Tuten, 2005). Consumers are attentive to brands that aim to be friendly to the LGBTQ+ community; it is important to them who supports their goals and principles (Tuten, 2005).

Most brands fear alienating their heterosexual audience by including members of the LGBTQ+ community in their communications (Tuten, 2005). During the study by Wilke (2007), it became clear that 24 percent of heterosexual consumers would be less likely to buy a new product if the brand chose a homosexual person to promote it (Wilke, 2007; cited in Um, 2016). For this reason, brands often use hidden messages that heterosexual audiences do not understand, but which the LGBTQ+ community recognizes (Grau & Zotos, 2016). However, other studies have found that the use of LGBTQ+ themes in communication does not alienate heterosexual audiences (Tuten, 2005). A study conducted by Tuten (2005) showed that although the LGBTQ+ community very positively accepts marketing actions representing them, heterosexual consumers do not react to these actions at all. This indicates that practicing LGBTQ+ inclusive marketing can bring benefits to brands. According to a study by Read et al. (2018), communication involving same-sex couples can often elicit more favorable reactions than communication involving heterosexual couples. Additionally, market research shows that many young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, view brands that support the LGBTQ+ community more positively than those that do not (Read et al., 2018). Inclusive advertising of this nature not only satisfies the need for authentic representation but also plays an important role in promoting social inclusion and acceptance in society (Demunter & Bauwens, 2023).

Age Diversity. According to Harvey et al., (2003), age inclusiveness is important in communication, particularly when representing older people, as it influences the audience's purchase intentions and brand attitudes. The audience most often represented in the media -those aged 18-49 - tends to be interested in new products, changing their style, and spending money. However, as various studies indicate, the people who spend the

most money are often over 50 years old. “In 2023, the global population of golden age consumers (aged 65+) belonging to social class A (earning more than twice the average gross income in the country) saw the largest absolute growth across all age cohorts, expanding by nearly two million to represent 9% of the total number of higher-income earners. The primary driver of growth is the rapidly ageing population” (Top Five Income and Expenditure Trends - Euromonitor.com, 2024). Despite their high purchasing power, older individuals rarely appear in advertising, and this trend continues (Prieler & Kohlbacher, 2016). While public interest in underrepresented groups such as women, sexual minorities, and ethnic minorities has either remained steady or gradually increased, the focus on the portrayal of older people has not significantly risen (Eisend, 2022).

Disability integration. According to Qayyum et al., (2023), inclusive marketing - specifically, advertising featuring disabled individuals - is crucial because it helps combat the insufficient and inappropriate representation of disabled people, challenges societal stereotypes, and contributes to the destigmatization of disability. This approach more accurately reflects the diversity of society and promotes inclusion and acceptance. Although advertising has historically focused on the image of a healthy person, Timke (2019) points out that there is a growing awareness of the importance of portraying disabled individuals in a more impartial and respectful manner, indicating that positive changes in interaction are occurring in the advertising sector.

More and more frequently, it is observed that different mass media are beginning to depict this vulnerable group of society not as passive, pitiable, or dependent objects of charity, but rather through more empowering and bold images that normalize their features. Inclusive marketing that represents the disabled and special needs segments of society can influence how audiences perceive brands and promote a sense of belonging and engagement. Such authentic portrayals can create an equal connection with disabled audiences (Liu et al., 2021), fostering a deeper consumer-brand connection. Brands that commit to such inclusion and representation in their marketing campaigns can also encourage the

engagement and loyalty of a wider audience that values diversity and inclusion (Qayyum et al., 2023).

The meaning of inclusive marketing in advertising. In a sense, inclusive marketing is a holistic approach by organizations and brands that ensures that communication is authentic, respectful, and accessible to diverse audiences through its message, language, and visual representation (Viglia et al., 2023). If the culture of diversity and inclusion is implemented correctly, the business will benefit in all respects (Verbytska et al., 2023). Verbytska et al. (2023, p.47) notes that “Inclusive marketing is the goal of many advertising campaigns in the modern world today. When working on brand development, it is worth considering that incorporating diverse ideas into your company's marketing strategies is a smart decision”.

Inclusive advertising can benefit both consumers and brands. For consumers, especially disabled people, seeing themselves in advertising can improve their well-being, both hedonic and eudaimonic, i.e. they may feel more satisfied, happier and more meaningful, which affects their consumer behavior – engagement, purchase intentions (Qayyum et al., 2023). This shows that inclusive advertising not only improves the emotional and psychological state of consumers, but also encourages them to interact more with the brand and consider purchasing its products or services. Essentially, inclusive advertising fosters a more positive and engaging brand image, which can drive sales and foster brand loyalty among diverse consumers (Qayyum et al., 2023). Joo & Woo (2021) note that there are increasing attempts by brands to use inclusive advertising as a socially responsible position statement, emphasizing non-prejudice, as well as the desire to improve brand image and reputation, and expand their customer base (Joo & Wu, 2021). Brands that use advertising as their communication tool can influence people's attitude and behavior change, and following the principles of inclusive marketing, educate and make a difference in the issues that consumers care about.

Inclusive advertising campaigns featuring diverse narratives enhance brand perception and consumer engagement (Trkulja, 2024). The principles of inclusive advertising not only promote

wider representation of groups in society but also ensure that the advertising message resonates more strongly with a diverse audience, which ultimately promotes a more inclusive brand image.

Brand advertising effectiveness. For brands to achieve the desired consumer response, their advertising is designed around specific objectives, often framed as desired consumer response statements. The effectiveness of advertising is measured primarily by unconscious, then conscious emotional reactions of individuals (Otamendi & Sutil Martin, 2020). This can be understood through the hierarchy of advertising effects, which is structured around how individuals psychologically perceive and respond to advertising. The hierarchy of effects explains the sequential process a consumer undergoes when viewing an ad, from learning about the product to making a purchase decision. The hierarchy is important because it provides a structured framework for evaluating and understanding the impact of advertising efforts at various stages of consumer decision-making, which can then inform the optimization of marketing strategies for maximum effectiveness (Kong et al., 2019). Despite various models of advertising effectiveness, the hierarchy of advertising effects is divided into three successive stages based on human psychology: cognitive, affective, and conative. The first stage, cognition, involves understanding, where advertisements emphasize the product's attributes and the benefits consumers will gain from using it. The second stage, affect, associated with emotional perception, seeks to evoke emotions and feelings in the consumer, creating an emotional connection to the product. At this stage, consumer actions are often irrational (Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2016). At this stage, the aim is to increase the reliability of the product for the customer, the perception of advertising, and in the long term, the aim is to influence the behavior of the user. In the conative stage, related to human behavior, the aim is to encourage the customer to take direct actions towards the brand (Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė, 2014). In summary, it can be concluded that the process of advertising effectiveness takes place through a carefully planned hierarchy of cognitive, affective and conative stages, which are closely related to the psychological processes of customers. This progression emphasizes the complexity and strategic nature of advertising, emphasizing the role

of rational appeal and emotional involvement in influencing consumer behavior. Understanding and leveraging these stages can provide a useful framework for increasing advertising effectiveness and ultimately driving consumer action.

A theoretical model of the impact of inclusive marketing on advertising effectiveness. Research hypothesis. For organizations seeking to create a connection between the brand and the customer, shape an attitude and foster motivation or simply to elicit a desired consumer response, the impact of their inclusive advertising can be assessed based on consumer responses at various stages of the hierarchy of effects.

The model suggests that a consumer's initial response to inclusive advertising involves attention, cognition, and awareness (cognitive stage), as they process information such as product features and perceived benefits. As the process moves to the affective stage, the advertisement's emotional resonance becomes central. At this point, advertising aims to establish an emotional connection by evoking feelings that surpass initial knowledge of the product's attributes. This affective stage fosters liking, desire and preferences, that guide the consumer toward a deeper engagement with the brand. Following the cognitive and affective stages, the consumer's response evolves into specific behavioral intentions in the conative stage. Here, the potential buyer is motivated to act on the information and emotional bonds formed, focusing on the product's perceived benefits, quality, and popularity, ultimately encouraging purchase decisions.

To evaluate the impact of different dimensions of inclusive marketing (gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, and the integration of people with disabilities) on advertising effectiveness, hypotheses are formulated based on the theoretical analysis:

H1: Gender equality and women's empowerment, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the cognitive stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H2: Racial diversity, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the cognitive stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H3: LGBTQ+ integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising

effectiveness at the cognitive stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H4: Age diversity, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the cognitive stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H5: Disability integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the cognitive stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H6: Gender equality and women's empowerment, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the affective stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H7: Racial diversity, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the affective stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H8: LGBTQ+ integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the affective stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H9: Age diversity, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the affective stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H10: Disability integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the affective stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H11: Gender equality and women's empowerment, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the conative stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H12: Racial diversity, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the conative stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H13: LGBTQ+ integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the conative stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H14: Age diversity, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising effectiveness at the conative stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

H15: Disability integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, impacts advertising

effectiveness at the conative stage of hierarchy of advertising effects.

Research methodology

“The fashion industry is witnessing a change, with inclusivity and diversity becoming the dominant trends, encompassing age, skin tone, ethnicity, sexual orientation, body size, etc” (Suraadkar & Chanana, 2024, p. 23). Over the years, the fashion industry has played a significant role in shaping societal norms and influencing individual perceptions. As industry evolves, the growing demand for inclusiveness drives embracing diverse perspectives and challenging prevailing stereotypes to create a more equitable and representative landscape. Considering the circumstances, the fashion industry sector was chosen as one of the most appropriate contexts for conducting the study, highlighting the use of inclusive marketing strategies and prospects.

A quantitative approach was chosen for the research. Questionnaire, as an effective tool to measure attitude, opinion, behaviour, allowing to gather large amount of information, was chosen as an instrument. The questionnaire was composed by the authors and consisted of two parts: (1) the part related to respondents' demographic characteristics; (2) the part related to respondents' attitudes towards advertisements of different dimensions of inclusive marketing. This part (2) is divided into five sections according to 5 different dimensions of inclusive marketing: gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, disability integration. Before each group of questions, respondents are presented with 3 examples of inclusive fashion brand advertisements, respectively according to the dimensions of inclusive marketing. The research selected fashion brands that are publicly recognized as leaders on promoting a more inclusive fashion industry – those that have received awards, been featured in prestigious fashion and marketing publications, or have publicly committed to inclusion and diversity in their business strategies.

Later, for each dimension, the same questionnaire questions are presented - statements that evaluate the respondent's reaction according to the

stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects (cognitive, affective, conative). The cognitive stage was assessed with three statements evaluating attention, awareness and cognition, the affective stage was measured with statements evaluating liking, preference and desire, and the conative stage was assessed with three statements measuring conviction, purchase intention and purchase.

Each of the 5 parts of the questionnaire consists of 9 questions – statements; respondents are asked to choose one of 7 answers, on a Likert scale from “completely disagree” (1) to “completely agree” (7). The definition of inclusive marketing and the dimensions of inclusive marketing are not presented separately to the respondents, so that the respondents only give an initial reaction to the advertisements presented in the examples and do not form a prejudice regarding inclusive marketing and its dimensions.

The research was conducted in Lithuania in 2024. After evaluating data from the Register Center (2024), which reports 2,554,637 permanent residents of Lithuania over the age of 18, the sample size needed to achieve the research objectives was determined to be 196 respondents. The sample size was calculated using the Paniotto formula, with a probability of 95% and a margin of error of 7%. The questionnaire was completed by 212 participants, who met all the required criteria. 126 women (59.4%) and 86 men (40.6%) participated in the study. The age of the respondents participating in the study was divided into 4 groups: 18-29 years, 30-44 years, 45-65 years and over 65 years of age. Examining the gender distribution of respondents by age, it can be seen that the majority of respondents fell into the 18-29 age group: 65 women (30%) and 43 men (20%), that is 51% out of a total of 212 respondents. 28 percent respondents stated that they were 30-44 years old: 34 women (16%) and 26 men (12%). 12 women (6%) and 10 men (5%) respondents are aged 45-64, and 15 women (7%) and 7 men (3%) are over 65 years old.

Measurement model

Firstly, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each scale, all in the range of 0.884–0.955, were calculated. To statistically analyze the data collected from the quantitative research, the Friedman test and descriptive statistical analysis methods were selected. These tools were applied to

assess the impact of five inclusive marketing dimensions - gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, and disability integration - on the three stages of advertising effectiveness according to the hierarchy of effects model: cognitive, affective, and conative. The Friedman test was chosen as the appropriate method due to its suitability for comparing related samples across non-parametric conditions. Specifically, it allowed for the comparison of different inclusive marketing dimensions within each stage of the hierarchy of effects, thereby enabling an assessment of whether statistically significant differences exist among these dimensions in terms of their influence on each type of advertising response.

The primary rationale for employing the Friedman test was to determine whether consumers' responses - measured as attention, cognition, and awareness at the cognitive stage; liking, desire and preference at the affective stage; and conviction, purchase intention, and purchase at the conative stage - differ significantly depending on the inclusive marketing approach applied. The test was deemed appropriate because the data obtained from the survey did not meet the assumptions required for parametric repeated measures analysis of variance (RM-ANOVA), such as normal distribution or homogeneity of variances.

Finally, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to identify which inclusive marketing dimension had the strongest impact on each stage of hierarchy of advertising effects (cognitive, affective, and conative) within the advertising perception process.

Results of the research

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. Based on the Friedman test results, a statistically significant difference was found among all stages and responses of the hierarchy of advertising effects, as the asymptotic significance (p-value) is equal to 0.000. This indicates that respondents evaluated the measured variables unequally; some variables are perceived as more impactful than others. An analysis of the mean ranks shows that within the affective stage, the response of Liking was rated as having the strongest impact (mean rank = 7.16). This was followed by the cognitive stage responses: Attention (mean rank = 6.46) and Cognition (mean rank = 6.24). The

Awareness response of the cognitive stage (mean rank = 4.69) and the Desire response of the affective stage (mean rank = 4.42) were evaluated as moderately impactful. Lower-ranked responses included Preference from the affective stage (mean rank = 4.25) and three conative stage responses: Purchase Intention (4.12), Purchase (4.02), and especially Conviction (3.64), which had the lowest impact according to respondents.

The significant differences identified through the Friedman test, combined with the ranking data, illustrate a clear hierarchy in how the inclusive marketing dimension of gender equality and women empowerment impacts consumer reactions across the advertising effects stages. It can be concluded that gender equality and women empowerment exert a meaningful impact primarily on the cognitive and affective stages of the hierarchy of effects. However, this marketing dimension does not significantly impact the conative stage of consumer response.

Racial Diversity. Based on the results of the Friedman test, a statistically significant difference was found among all stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects and corresponding consumer responses – the asymptotic significance value equals zero ($p = 0.000$), indicating that the observed differences are not due to chance. An analysis of the mean ranks revealed that the Liking response, associated with the affective stage, received the highest mean rank (7.17), suggesting it has the strongest impact on consumer response to advertising.

This is followed by two responses from the cognitive stage – Awareness (6.36) and Attention (6.19) – both of which are also considered to have a substantial impact. Moderate influence is observed for Recognition (4.76) from the cognitive stage and Preference (4.37) and Desire (4.16) from the affective stage. All responses from the conative stage – Conviction (3.14), Purchase Intention (3.92), and Purchase (3.94) – were evaluated as having the least impact on consumer response.

It can be concluded that the inclusive marketing dimension – specifically, the portrayal of racial diversity – has a significant impact on the cognitive and affective stages of the advertising effect hierarchy, whereas it does not exert a statistically significant impact on the conative stage.

LGBTQ+ integration. According to the results of the Friedman test, there is a statistically significant difference among all stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects and consumer responses, as the asymptotic significance (p -value) equals zero ($p = 0.000$). An analysis of the variables related to the hierarchy of effects indicates that the most significant impact is associated with several variables: first, Cognition from the cognitive stage (mean rank = 7.26), followed by Attention from the same stage (mean rank = 6.49), and Liking from the affective stage (mean rank = 6.11). These are followed by Awareness (mean rank = 5.00) from the cognitive stage, Desire (mean rank = 4.19) and Preference (mean rank = 4.15) from the affective stage, and Purchase Intent (mean rank = 4.18) from the conative stage. The variables with the least significant impact are Purchase (mean rank = 3.93) and Conviction (mean rank = 3.69), both belonging to the conative stage.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that LGBTQ+ integration, as a dimension of inclusive marketing, has a statistically significant impact on the cognitive and affective stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects. However, LGBTQ+ integration does not have a significant impact on the conative stage of the hierarchy of advertising effects.

Age Diversity. The results of the Friedman test reveal statistically significant differences between the stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects and consumer responses to the age diversity approach, as the test's p -value is 0.000. An analysis of the mean ranks of the variables indicates that Attention, a cognitive stage variable (mean rank = 7.59), is perceived as having the strongest impact. This is followed by two affective stage variables – Liking (mean rank = 6.92) and Desire (mean rank = 4.96) – as well as Cognition from the cognitive stage (mean rank = 4.88). These variables are also considered to exert a strong impact. The remaining variables – including Awareness from the cognitive stage (mean rank = 4.41) and all conative stage variables – are assessed as having the weakest impact among all analyzed variables.

It can be concluded that the inclusive marketing, emphasizing age diversity, has a significant impact on the cognitive and affective stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects. However,

it does not have a statistically significant effect on the conative stage.

Disability integration. The results of the Friedman test reveal a statistically significant difference among all stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects and corresponding consumer responses, as the asymptotic significance equals zero ($p = 0.000$). The Cognition and Attention responses from the cognitive stage received the highest mean ranks – 7.53 and 7.10, respectively – indicating their strong impact on advertising effectiveness. The Liking response from the affective stage (mean rank = 5.76) and the Awareness response from the cognitive stage (mean rank = 5.54) are also considered to have a substantial impact. The Preference response from the affective stage (mean rank = 4.40) and the Conviction response from the conative stage (mean rank = 4.29) are evaluated as having a moderate impact. The lowest impact is attributed to the conative stage responses Actual Purchase (mean rank = 3.23) and Purchase Intent (mean rank = 3.11).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that disability integration, as an inclusive marketing dimension, has a significant impact on the cognitive and affective stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects. However, it does not have a statistically significant impact on the conative stage.

Discussion

Research findings provide significant insights into how different dimensions of inclusive marketing impact advertising effectiveness across the cognitive, affective, and conative stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects.

Dimensions related to gender equality and women's empowerment (H1), racial diversity (H2), LGBTQ+ inclusion (H3), age diversity (H4), and disability inclusion (H5) were found to positively impact the cognitive stage of advertising effectiveness. These dimensions significantly increased consumer responses such as attention, awareness, and cognition. Similarly, inclusive marketing dimensions addressing gender equality and women's empowerment (H6), racial diversity (H7), LGBTQ+ integration (H8), age diversity (H9), and disability integration (H10) were associated with stronger affective responses, including liking, preference, and desire. In contrast, no significant effects were observed at the conative

stage, which reflects behavioral intentions and actions. Inclusive marketing dimensions related to gender equality and women's empowerment (H11), racial diversity (H12), LGBTQ+ integration (H13), age diversity (H14), and disability integration (H15) did not increase conviction, purchase intentions or actual buying behavior. These results support hypotheses H1 to H10, confirming a significant relationship between inclusive marketing practices and the cognitive and affective stages of advertising effectiveness. However, hypotheses H11 to H15 were not confirmed, indicating that inclusive marketing has limited impact at the conative stage.

The results of the study confirm the insights of many other studies. To begin with, it is important to note that, in general, inclusivity in advertising proves to be effective, as supported by a 2019 Google Consumer Survey which revealed that 64% of respondents took action after seeing an advertisement they perceived as diverse or inclusive (Austin et al., 2021, cited in Verbytska et al. 2023; Lima et al., 2020). For instance, Joo & Wu (2021) demonstrated that inclusive advertisements featuring models of diverse body sizes had a significant positive effect on brand attitude, as well as an indirect effect on both brand attitude and purchase intention. The findings of the present study support H1, H6 and H11, confirming that inclusivity in advertising - specifically the depiction of models with varying body sizes - exerts a significant impact primarily during the cognitive and affective stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects. Moreover, these results align with Wijaya (2012), who argued that brand attitude is shaped during the cognitive and affective phases of consumer response to advertising. Hartmann et al. (2023) provide both field and experimental evidence that consumers respond favorably to Black models in display advertising. Their findings indicate that this effect extends beyond ingroup favoritism, as White consumers also show increased engagement with racially diverse advertisements. These results suggest that racial diversity can enhance consumer attention and awareness, as well as evoke more positive emotional reactions such as liking and preference, supporting the effectiveness of inclusive advertising at both the cognitive and affective stages. These findings support H2 and H7 of the present study.

The inclusion of LGBTQ+ dimension in advertising strategies remains one of the most debated topics. A substantial body of research emphasizes the social aspect of such inclusion, frequently evaluating advertising effectiveness from representational or societal perspectives. Other studies highlight significant differences in how advertising is evaluated depending on the respondents' sexual orientation - whether they identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community or as heterosexual. In this context, Fried & Oprea (2023) argue that the decisive factor in audience response is not who is represented in advertising, but how that representation is portrayed. While participants generally responded positively to the presence of sexual minorities, they were critical of portrayals that appeared forced or excessively centered on inclusion itself. Public attitudes toward LGBTQ+ representation in advertising are also shaped by broader societal and demographic factors. Variables such as age and cultural background play a significant role in shaping consumer responses. Younger audiences, particularly Generation Z, tend to place high value on authenticity and are more likely to support brands that express genuine commitment to LGBTQ+ rights (Turner et al., 2024; Miller & Timke, 2021). Supporting this, a 2019 study by Ipsos and Google revealed that 71% of LGBTQ+ consumers prefer advertisements that authentically reflect their sexual orientation, while 68% are more likely to purchase from brands that depict diverse sexual orientations. Additionally, 67% hold favorable views of brands that promote gender equality. These findings underscore the importance of authentic and inclusive representation in fostering consumer trust and engagement. In light of previous studies that report diverse and sometimes ambiguous findings, the present research partially aligns with existing insights by indicating that the integration of LGBTQ+ themes into advertising is mainly effective at the cognitive stage (the findings support H3). At the affective stage, however, effectiveness largely depends on the contextual relevance of the message and the perceived authenticity of representation. As in this study, other researches have also found no significant effect at the conative stage.

When evaluating age diversity as a dimension of inclusive marketing, few studies examine how older people are perceived and represented in advertising, as well as what advertising effects they achieve. Eisend's (2022) study reveals that older people are stereotyped in advertising - that is, respondents identified stereotypical portrayals of the elderly, frequently noted that such representations are inaccurate and overly simplistic, and observed that older people are underrepresented in advertising. The limited visibility of older adults in media and advertising, combined with polarized portrayals of aging as either entirely positive or negative, suggests a lack of nuanced and realistic representations that align with the diverse lived experiences of older individuals. Considering the current state of empirical research on the representation and perception of age diversity in advertising, and taking into account statistical data indicating that two out of three U.S. adults favored a brand hiring a spokesperson who looked like them (Statista, 2023), it can be concluded that the representation of older adults in advertising is both necessary and desirable. However, this representation should move beyond stereotypes and be supported by carefully designed structural elements of the advertising message. Based on the findings of this study and their alignment with previous research, it is evident that the current body of empirical evidence remains insufficient, particularly in assessing the effectiveness of advertising based on age diversity.

Disability representation in advertising reveals results that are largely comparable to those observed in studies on age diversity, particularly in relation to stereotypical portrayals. Moreover, some similarities can be identified with findings from other studies examining the effectiveness of advertising based on inclusive marketing principles. Empirical findings indicate that consumers' age plays a significant role in shaping their evaluation of disability representation in advertising (Kulkarni & Iyer, 2023; Muralidharan et al., 2024). According to the findings of Muralidharan et al., (2024), younger-generation consumers evaluate the disability representation in advertising more positively than older generations and exhibit stronger behavioral responses. The authors highlight that younger individuals tend to have a

higher level of knowledge about inclusivity and are more frequently exposed to such content through various touchpoints with other social groups. Consequently, the authors conclude that being informed about DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) issues and having high self-efficacy in addressing them are essential for enhancing advertising effectiveness. The findings of Muralidharan et al. (2024) study support the hierarchy of effects theory; however, points of alignment with the current research are observed only at the cognitive and affective stages and exclusively among younger consumers.

Limitations

It is important to note that the interpretation of the research findings should take into account several limitations. The quantitative study was conducted within a specific geographical context - Lithuania - which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions. The cultural norms and social dynamics specific to Lithuania may not reflect the perspectives prevalent in different geographic areas. This contextual specificity suggests that the conclusions drawn from this sample cannot be directly transferred to regions with different cultural or social backgrounds, and certainly not applied on a global scale.

The survey used in the quantitative study included examples of inclusive advertising from fashion brands; therefore, the findings may have limited applicability to brands operating outside the fashion sector. Due to this sector-specific focus, the conclusions may not be suitable for industries where consumer behaviour and the impact of inclusivity may differ, such as in the technology or food sectors.

Moreover, the structured questionnaire did not include items related to respondents' psychographic characteristics, such as their social status or identification with particular social groups (e.g., minorities). As a result, there is a possibility of response bias toward certain dimensions of inclusive marketing. This gap limits the understanding of how various social and psychological factors may influence consumers' reactions to inclusive advertising, potentially distorting conclusions regarding the effectiveness of different inclusive marketing dimensions.

Conclusions and managerial implications

Findings from both the theoretical and empirical parts lead to the conclusion that, in general, inclusivity in advertising proves to be effective. Inclusive advertising seeks to authentically represent diverse groups and perspectives, and findings from the scientific literature demonstrate its multifaceted effects on consumer behaviour and brand perception.

According to the current study results, different dimensions of inclusive marketing - gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, and disability integration - have a significant impact on the cognitive and affective stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects, but do not have a statistically significant impact on the conative stage. The findings of the study indicate that different dimensions of inclusivity have varying effects at different stages of the hierarchy of advertising effects. For example, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity, and the integration of people with disabilities appear to have the strongest impact at the cognitive stage of the hierarchy of advertising effects, eliciting attention and cognition, suggesting that consumers are particularly responsive to information and messaging related to these dimensions. This highlights the continued importance of raising awareness and addressing informational needs in inclusive advertising. The findings also emphasize the value of tailoring advertising content to match the cognitive needs of consumers, especially when representing LGBTQ+ community, older people or people with disabilities. Brands can enhance advertising effectiveness by authentically integrating inclusive values in their marketing strategies not only to reflect social responsibility but also to build brand identity and make stronger connections with diverse consumer segments.

The study results also reveal that gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as racial diversity, have the strongest impact at the affective stage of the hierarchy of advertising effects, primarily eliciting liking responses. These findings indicate that these dimensions of inclusivity may have reached a more advanced stage in the hierarchy of advertising effects, generating strong emotional reactions among consumers.

This could be attributed to the longer-term presence of these themes in marketing communication, which has contributed to greater consumer awareness and understanding, as well as to lower levels of consumer polarization in response to these dimensions of inclusivity. From a managerial perspective, these insights suggest that marketing strategies emphasizing gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as racial diversity can be particularly effective in building emotional connections with consumers. As these inclusivity dimensions already resonate positively with broader audiences, brands can leverage them to strengthen brand identity and equity, increase message likeability, and reinforce emotional brand positioning.

The findings of this study also indicate that different dimensions of inclusive marketing – gender equality and women's empowerment, racial diversity, LGBTQ+ integration, age diversity,

and the integration of people with disabilities - do not have a statistically significant impact at the conative stage of the hierarchy of advertising effects. One possible explanation is that consumers - particularly younger audiences - often recognize the persuasive intent behind inclusive advertising, which can lead to scepticism and defensive processing. Moreover, if such advertising is perceived as inauthentic or tokenistic, it may undermine trust and reduce purchase intentions. The effectiveness of inclusive campaigns at the conative stage thus appears to depend heavily on perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and alignment with the lived experiences of diverse audiences (Long, 2024; Lim et al., 2022; Ndasi & Akcay, 2020). To increase the likelihood of conative responses, marketers should ensure that inclusive advertising efforts are not only visually representative but also reflect genuine brand values and long-term commitments.

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