Embracing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A New Frontier in Marketing

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Abstract

Background: As consumers' concerns about ethical issues have increased in the twenty-first century, marketers are being pressed to fulfil customer needs, operate in sustainable and socially conscious ways, and show that they are successfully doing so. Companies must have an impact on society because it is profitable, strategic, and necessary. The United Nations (UN) is driving the two initiatives that are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to address as an appeal "to achieve a more sustainable future." **Objective:** To discuss and assess how companies can integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion in their marketing efforts to have an impact on society. **Methods:** The narrative review approach is employed to compose this article and the triangulation method is adopted by the authors to collect pertinent data from a variety of journal publications. **Results:** Corporate Social Responsibility is proving to be a successful method of achieving both social and commercial objectives concurrently by utilising techniques like social impact marketing, socially responsible marketing (SRM), and inclusive marketing. Thus, in addition to their legal responsibilities, enterprises must integrate environmental, social, and ethical considerations into their business activities and connections with interested parties in order to acknowledge accountability of their sociocultural and ecological impacts **Conclusions:** It is now evident from a thorough review of the studies and an exploration of major concepts that socially responsible marketing strategies are essential to bringing about substantial shifts and furthering DEI goals. Companies may leverage their marketing strategies to promote change and contribute to developing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive society by adopting creative

Keywords: sustainability, inclusive marketing, diversity, equity, inclusion, social impact, social change, corporate social responsibility, marketing strategies,

INTRODUCTION

As consumers' concerns about ethical issues have increased in the twenty-first century, marketers are being pressed to fulfil customer needs, operate in sustainable and socially conscious ways, and show that they are successfully doing so. Companies must have an impact on society because it is profitable, strategic, and necessary. Companies must continually evaluate their objective while taking evolving customer and social factors into consideration. A key challenge that numerous nations around the world are dealing with is sustainable development (Imran, Alam, and Beaumont 2014). Human society faces numerous overlapping challenges related to sustainable development. Human rights violations, poverty, disasters, social injustice, inequality, and unsustainable production and consumption are some of these issues, as well environmental issues including climate change and environmental degradation (Ismail 2024).

The United Nations (UN) is driving the two initiatives that are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to address as an appeal "to achieve a more sustainable future." These goals include "ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring health and well-being, ensuring quality education, achieving gender equality, ensuring access to water and sanitation, ensuring affordable and clean energy,

promoting decent work and economic growth, building sustainable industry, innovation and infrastructure, reducing inequalities, making sustainable cities and communities, ensuring sustainable consumption and production, taking climate action, conserving marine resources, halting biodiversity loss, promoting peace, justice and strong institutions and revitalizing partnerships for sustainable development" (Krannich and Reiser 2023).

As an outcome of raising public knowledge and promoting political accountability, UN aims have become widely recognised. They adopted local, national, and international institutions as a result of the social pressure this generated. Corporate operations and strategies are greatly impacted by social pressure. Thus, the dominance of companies in the political and social spheres and their operations have been studied by social pressure researchers. Social pressures can increase with improved social performance. In the context of this changing environment, where international programs like the UN have inspired the public and private sectors, it is becoming progressively more important to investigate how businesses react to political and social demands. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a concept, which includes a number of tactics like social impact marketing, socially responsible marketing (SRM), and inclusive marketing, is growing into a popular way to accomplish societal goals whilst advancing the business objectives of the company. This study observes at how social impact marketing, socially responsible marketing (SRM), and inclusive marketing are implemented in the real world to promote diversity and inclusion (D&I) (Ismail 2024).

METHODS

The narrative review approach employed to compose this article aligns to the IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) framework (Ferrari 2015). The triangulation method is adopted by the authors to collect pertinent data from a variety of journal publications (Wilson 2014). Finding previous and more recent publications that addressed or were related to the subject of interest was the primary motivation of this study. The process had four steps involved in performing the narrative review. Finding all pertinent studies was the first stage. To confirm that the majority of the identified articles were relevant, a number of databases were searched. Among the databases checked were JSTOR, Science Direct, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Additionally, authors looked for relevant publications utilising the Google search engine. Identifying keywords was the next stage. When the authors published their findings, they included keywords in order to make it simpler for prospective readers to navigate to their aper (Demiris et al. 2018). Thus, when conducting database searches, keywords are important. This article was compiled using the following search terms: "marketing AND diversity" OR "inclusion AND social impact" OR "marketing for diversity" AND "representation." The next stage was looking over all of the collected abstracts and articles to make sure that only those selected had any information associated with this study. Ultimately, the selected publications' findings and their results were gathered and synthesised (Ferrari R, 2015).

RESULTS

As social standards have changed and corporate ethics have become more imperative, the corporate environment has evolved significantly in recent years (Nielsen, 2014). Many tended to believe that these large corporations were primarily

concerned with making as much money as possible, frequently at a cost of grabbing society's needs into account. However, the way companies are viewed in society has changed dramatically in the last several years. As businesses start to realise that there may be more repercussions from their decisions aside from fiscal benefits, concepts of corporate responsibility and sustainability have gained prominence (Motel, 2016).

The term corporate social responsibility (CSR) describes the moral and responsible initiatives undertaken by companies to address issues affecting society. It advocates on companies to acknowledge responsibility for their influence on society and the environment, moving above and beyond the boundaries of legality. It involves the application of a variety of strategies, such as social impact marketing, socially responsible marketing (SRM), and inclusive marketing. Corporate historians and CSR investigators have concentrated their focus towards CSR in recent years (Stutz 2021).

A key aspect of marketing is corporate social responsibility (CSR), which incorporates the values of inclusion, diversity, and business ethics.

The Progression of CSR: As part of the broader movement towards values-driven business practices, CSR has grown from a comparatively small facet to a key component of corporate strategy in recent years. This transformation demonstrates a fundamental commitment to not only reaching fiscal targets but also to fostering favourable social outcomes and having a significant impact on society (Nielsen 2014).

Incorporating D&I concepts in CSR initiatives: Businesses employ an array of strategies to integrate D&I concepts into their CSR functions, such as setting diversity-focused objectives,

including pledges within CSR reports, and establishing inclusive recruiting practices and programmes for leadership development into practice. By illuminating the tactics employed to advance inclusion and diversity in their marketing initiatives, this conversation provides insightful information on how companies integrate these concepts into their CSR programmes (Motel, 2016).

The Impact of Organisational Values and Culture: CSR is essential because organisational values and culture greatly influence the attitudes and behaviours of stakeholders and employees. Companies build inclusive environments that value diversity and promote collaboration, which leads to situation where individuals feel appreciated, respected, and free to express their distinct opinions (Motel, 2016).

Overcoming Challenges and recognising opportunities: While D&I concepts have been incorporated into CSR projects, there are still challenges to be solved. These include the lack of legal standards for diversity disclosure and concerns about the veracity of CSR reporting. However, D&I-focused CSR initiatives have enormous potential for enhancing the reputation of brands and generating positive impact on society, underscoring the significant influence of aligning business objectives with societal values. (Motel 2016; Nielsen 2014).

CSR is proving to be a successful method of achieving both social and commercial objectives concurrently by utilising techniques like social impact marketing, socially responsible marketing (SRM), and inclusive marketing. Thus, in addition to their legal responsibilities, enterprises must integrate environmental, social, and ethical considerations into their business activities and connections with interested parties in order to acknowledge

accountability of their sociocultural and ecological impacts (Ismail 2024).

Social Impact Marketing: Social impact marketing, also referred to as social marketing that is associated with the notion of CSR, is regarded as an emerging trend in the modern world. Social impact marketing is an integrated strategy in which companies proactively take on an active position in society that goes beyond their main financial goals (Mohr, Webb, and Harris 2001). The deliberate application of marketing methods, tactics, and assets to tackle an array of societal issues and challenges, including advancing sustainable development, lowering poverty, encouraging public wellness and environmental preservation, and limiting global warming, is known as social impact marketing (Truong et al. 2021).

Socially Responsible Marketing: Diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) imperatives are the cornerstones of organisational efficacy and societal advancement in modern discussion. As the world keeps changing, companies are realising exponentially how important it is to create inclusive, equal, and multicultural work environments. With this context in consideration, employing socially responsible marketing strategies becomes a powerful tool for bringing about significant shifts in organisational contexts. With both academics and industry professionals exploring the groundbreaking possibilities of marketing campaigns in influencing social standards and beliefs, the relationship between marketing strategies and society values has drawn an enormous amount of attention. In this context, socially responsible marketing (SRM) has become an effective strategy that not only boosts customer retention and image of the brand but also tackles urgent societal concerns, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (Trkulja et al., 2024).

Inclusive Marketing: According to Asenza et al. (2021), inclusive marketing acknowledges the world's abundant diversity by showcasing, applauding, and extending support to individuals and their distinct identities. 64% of respondents to a Google consumer survey in 2019 said they undertook a certain kind of measure upon seeing an advertisement that they identified as diverse or inclusive (Austin et al. 2021; Lima et al. 2020). By addressing their demands, marketers may help society embrace people with diverse backgrounds. The goal of inclusive and diverse marketing is to engage as many prospective customers as feasible, irrespective of their background, age, gender, appearance, health, or any other attributes. Verbytska et al. (2023) found that 69% of Black customers were significantly more inclined to purchase goods from a company that advertisements accurately represent their ethnicity or racial background.

DISCUSSION

A crucial task for marketers is to embrace diversity and encourage inclusion in order to satisfy the varied requirements of their customers and make a constructive contribution to society. There seems to be a lack of comprehensive knowledge about inclusion and diversity in customer research, as well as the way promotional efforts may contribute positively to an inclusive and equity-oriented community, in spite of necessity for tackling disparities and rising awareness to these issues (Branca et al., 2016).

Diversification in the market environment

Consumers' preferences and tastes are shaped by encounter to cultural variety, which increases their receptivity to goods and services from other cultures. According to Benischke et al. (2023), who documented the intricate link between various cultures and business

performance, cultural diversification has a more favourable effect on the sales of items from international companies than from local ones.

Customers from culturally varied regions tend to be more interested in novelty compared to those from culturally identical locations. According to Ginder et al. (2021), desirable customer perceptions are a result of external as well as internal synchronisation in CSR programmes. Therefore, a business's initiatives related to CSR also improve the company's reputation and cultivate customer trust when they are in line with its internal processes and public relations strategies.

Leveraging representation and advertising to promote inclusion and diversity

According to Russell et al. (2013), advertising has the potential to positively impact consumer views and is crucial for representation. The significance of representation and diversity in advertising was emphasised by Ruggs et al. (2018), who demonstrated how using unconventional appraoch could favourably affect the attitudes and behaviours of customers. Nevertheless, advertising that feature marginalised groups elicit various responses from customers depending on their identities and how well the advertising fit into their frameworks.

According to Henderson et al. (2023), advertising that features minorities and diversification by showcasing multi-racial people reduces a sense of division and enhances society affiliation and the value of well-known businesses. Traditional firms may be able to break through the prejudices connected to conservatism by including a variety of racial indicators into their messaging. By employing racial symbols that are inconsistent with the traditional beliefs of the ingroup, these

companies may also improve customer perceptions, intentions to purchase, and brand preference (Boman et al., 2023).

Societal implications of inclusion and diversity

Communities and society could improve from fostering inclusion and diversity. Identity and representation constitute significant concepts in the marketing process. Marketing could promote diversity and cultural competency and influence society's views of different ethnic groups. Advertising could also contribute to societal change. Numerous research demonstrates how inclusive advertising tactics may promote understanding and acceptance in society (Khan and Kalra, 2022; Septianto et al. 2023; Wilkie et al. 2023; Cheng et al. 2023). Numerous scholars endorse social reforms that would more effectively address the necessities of marginalised communities. Reassessing how services (Dias de Faria and Moreira Casotti 2019; Matson-Barkat et al. 2022; Cloquet et al. 2018; Kipnis et al. 2022) and products are made to recognise and symbolise marginalised populations may bring about these modifications and foster a society with greater diversity (Loughran Dommer et al. 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Ruggs et al. 2018).

Finally, governments, institutions, and firms could play a significant role in enhancing market inclusion, as in the case of bottom-of-the-pyramid markets and economically disadvantaged consumers (Aiyar and Venugopal, 2020; Jacob et al. 2022; Mende et al. 2020), thereby contributing to societal welfare and reducing discrimination's impact.

A conceptual framework: Marketing for inclusion and diversity

While D&I concepts have been incorporated into initiatives related to CSR, there currently are still challenges to be

solved. Some of these include a dearth of legal standards for diversification declaration as well as issues about the veracity of CSR reporting. However, D&I-focused CSR initiatives have enormous potential for enhancing the image of the company and generating optimistic effects on society, underscoring the significant influence of aligning business objectives with the values of society (Motel 2016; Nielsen 2014). In addition to taking into consideration the relationships between customers, companies, policies, and society (de Ruyter et al. 2022; van Bommel et al. 2024), this strategy concurs with the literature that suggests that company and the settings in which they function can benefit from marketing efforts (Madera et al. 2023; Shultz et al.,2022; Henderson et al. 2023).

Since every single individual is distinct, diversity is generated by each individual's identity. Individual distinctions in physical appearance and culture are related to diversity. Religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, indigenous heritage, age, gender, sexual orientation and national origin are all components of identity (Arsel et al. 2022; Patrick and Hollenbeck 2021).

The goal of inclusion is to combat stigmatisation and marginalisation by respecting and uniting various communities in order to foster acceptability. Inclusion, nevertheless, is more than merely representation in advertisements, since it entails fostering an atmosphere where people are valued and acknowledged and are acknowledged despite their disparities (Campbell et al. 2023). Businesses that promote inclusivity have an impact on individual's personal and community well-being in addition to their monetary interests. Marketing experts can advocate for collaborative solutions that are advantageous to customers, businesses, and society collectively, in accordance with

de Ruyter et al. (2022). In fact, there are three distinct ways in which this combined impact can promote inclusion and equity (Arsel et al., 2022).

1. First, individuals and groups could benefit from company guidelines that promote destigmatization (Matson-Barkat et al. 2022), demarginalization (Mende et al. 2020) and empowerment (Septianto et al. 2023; Tsai 2011; Yang 2023).

2. Second, injustices can be lessened and society cohesion improved as a result of such endeavours (Henderson et al., 2023; Licsandru and Cui 2019). These societal impacts, in turn, support the equity fundamentals that promote equitable treatment and equal prospects for all customer categories, thereby improving the well-being of society. The various manifestations of diversity influence a wide variety of individuals, including those who are indirectly connected, including family, friends, and pertinent ones, despite the fact that it may be believed to affect a minority.

3. Third, there are numerous advantages for organisations themselves when they promote inclusivity through tangible marketing initiatives, such as advertisements, product designs and offerings, and resource accessibility. Sales (Cheng et al. 2023; Benischke et al. 2023) and brand assessments (Ruggs et al. 2018; Strebinger et al. 2018; Henderson et al. 2023) may be among the advantages.

Diversity must be continuously acknowledged as part of the constant endeavour to achieve equity in the

marketing process. According to Schultz et al. (2022), equity necessitates continual recognition of the diverse identities of customers that compose the market environment since it entails purposefully ensuring fairness, equity, and neutrality in an organization's procedures, processes, and deployment of resources to every individual. The ongoing process of equity, inclusion, and diversity in customer studies and company practices is reinforced by this technique. The goal of this conceptualisation framework is not to encompass all potential manifestations and facets of inclusion and diversity, particularly influencing variables and implications. However, it seeks to offer a methodical way to comprehend the intricacies of inclusion and diversity in customer studies and demonstrate how marketing may have tangible impacts on companies, individuals, and society.

CONCLUSION

It is now evident from a thorough review of the studies and an exploration of major concepts that socially responsible marketing strategies are essential to bringing about substantial shifts and furthering DEI goals. The available literature assessment emphasised the complexity of socially responsible marketing, including aspects like sustainability programmes, ethical advertising, and cause-related marketing. These approaches improve long-term profitability, consumer loyalty, and brand reputation in addition to promoting constructive social change. The discussion also focused on the transformative potential of responsible marketing to create corporate cultures that are more inclusive and diversified. Organisations may show their dedication to social responsibility and support the development of a more varied and inclusive society by integrating DEI values into their promotional initiatives. There are still obstacles to overcome, such

as dealing with organisational opposition to change, managing cultural differences, and addressing structural hurdles, regardless of the progress that has been made.

But organisations can overcome these obstacles and make significant success by embracing a comprehensive strategy to DEI that combines marketing strategies with more general organisational policies. In fact, an enormous amount of opportunity for the advancement of socially responsible marketing in progressing DEI in the future. With creative strategies, cooperative alliances, frameworks for educational programmes and accountability and measurement, companies can continue promoting change and helping to create a society that is more inclusive, diverse, and egalitarian. In addition to boosting their brand value, companies may contribute to make the world more equitable and inclusive by adopting DEI principles and integrating them into the marketing strategies they employ. The next advancements in socially responsible marketing that support DEI hold an immense number of opportunities to create more welcoming and balanced work settings. Companies may leverage their marketing strategies to promote change and contribute to developing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive society by adopting creative approaches, establishing cooperative partnerships, emphasising measurement and accountability, and funding training and educational programmes.

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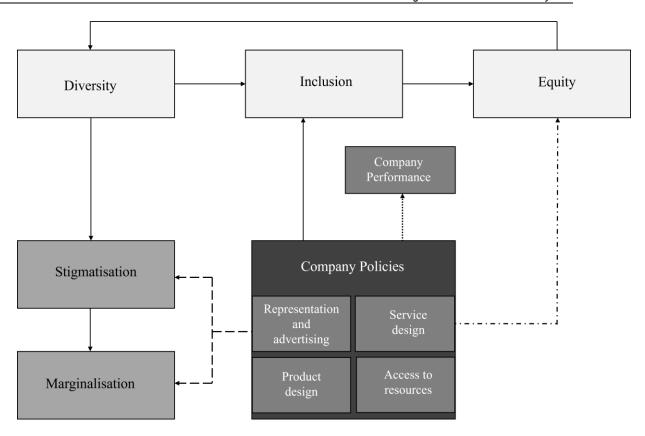
Figure 1. *A conceptual framework. Marketing for inclusion and diversity. The dashed line illustrates the impact on individuals, the dotted line pertains to the effects on business performance, and the dashed and dotted line depicts the implications on society (Branca et al., 2024).*