

INCLUSIVE MARKETING – REALITY OR MAKE UP

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Abstract

There is no model of the ideal man or woman in the world. No one is perfect! We all, as people, parents, consumers, doctors, businessmen, professors, politicians, students, tailors, shoemakers, butchers, etc. have our strengths and weaknesses. We are capable of performing certain activities and incapable of doing others. We cannot ideally understand and complete all the jobs and activities because as human beings we are faced with lack of skills, knowledge, intelligence, physical strength, health, money, beauty and so forth. Due to different types of barriers, we are not able to respond to all challenges and feel disadvantaged. However, we live in a cruel, commercial and fast-paced world. Companies that offer products and services should address to all consumers. Marketing literature, in order to make it easier for companies and to help them to save on costs, indicates that they need to segment and target consumers and position and sell their products only to the selected, profitable segments. But do companies really have to do this in practice? By targeting one group of consumers, they miss the others. The world nowadays requires companies to address all consumers, regardless their demographic, physical, emotional, psychological features. Inclusive marketing helps companies to respect, value and represent all the people. This paper strives to illustrate the discrepancy between theory and practice regarding the inclusion of all types of consumers in companies' marketing.

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1. Introduction

According to Apple Inc. (Bourke, J., Dillon, B., 2018), “the most innovative company must also be the most diverse!”. New ideas can come from diverse way of seeing things. Only marketers, who understand diversity, can apply it in their companies. Companies, on one side must enable people to reach their full potential and on the other side they must address all kinds of consumers. Different ideas and experiences enable growth. Companies must match their “inside with the outside!” If the companies truly respect diversity and inclusion in their frames, they will communicate with diverse consumers out of their frames. Companies, through their messages need to address people from all the backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and professional skills or otherwise. Beyond diversity, they have to hear the voices of people that are marginalized or underrepresented. Companies have to appreciate and understand the various identities, differences and histories and approach people equally.

The truth is that while companies have prioritized workplace diversity over customer diversity, both are equally important to business success. Moreover, customers are often more ready to support diversity and inclusion than companies perhaps realize. But one has to mention that this is not about “vacuous marketing”. Commercials that lack authenticity will be disrespected by the very customers they seek to approach.

Also, most companies need to transform their entire culture to become fully inclusive. Researches show that 71% of companies aspire to have an “inclusive” culture in the future (Bourke, J., Dillon, B., 2018), but results have found that actual performance levels are very low. Why companies cannot translate their intentions into meaningful progress? The main reason is that companies frequently underestimate the depth of the change required, adopting a compliance-oriented or programmatic approach to diversity and inclusion. They only declare that they “work” on diversity and inclusion, but in reality they do not want to leave their traditional way of working and the comfort zone. They make statements that are “inclusive” just to attract customers’ attention and make profit.

Diversity & inclusion

Diversity is about our individual differences and acknowledging the unique blend of knowledge, skills and perspectives people bring to the workplace. Diversity can include characteristics such as cultural background and ethnicity, age, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, language and education. Diversity also includes professional skills, working style, location, and life experiences. The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing individual differences. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each

other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. Diversity (Cambridge Dictionary) is defined as a “condition or fact of being different or varied. Diversity is also the mixture of races and religions that make up a group of people.” Diversity is a statement that we are not alike.

Diversity gives companies access to a greater range of talent, not just the talent that belongs to a particular world-view or ethnicity or some other restricting definition. It helps provide insight into the needs and motivations of all of the customers, rather than just a small part of it. Diversity makes companies more effective, more successful, more profitable.

An inclusive culture is one where everyone feels valued and respected and is able to fully contribute. It is about removing barriers to make sure everyone can fully participate in the workplace and have equal access to opportunities. Inclusion is about empowering people to contribute their skills and perspectives for the benefit of organisational performance and business outcomes. (GCSB, 2019) Inclusion means putting “diversity into action”!

Deloitte’s research (Bourke, J., Dillon, B., 2018) reveals that a holistic definition comprises four related yet discrete elements:

1) **Fairness and Respect** - people feel included when they are treated “equitably and with respect.” Participation without favouritism and stressing the differences is the starting point for inclusion.

2) **Valued and Belonging** – people feel included when they are valued and feel that belong to a group. Inclusion means that people have a chance to be heard, they are valued because of their uniqueness and someone cares and trusts in their abilities. They have a sense of connectedness or belonging to a group.

3) **Safe and Open** – people feel included when they are “safe” to speak up without fear of embarrassment or retaliation. They like to be heard when talking about their ideas, expectations, likes and dislikes. They want companies to know about their needs and wants. They want to be asked what they prefer and what they do not like.

4) **Empowered and Growing** - people like to feel “empowered” to grow and do one’s best work.

The truth is that only when companies are clear about the objective can they turn their attention to the drivers of inclusion, take action, and measure results.

However **diversity without inclusion** is not enough. Diversity is central to innovation. It brings forth new and better ways of doing things, helps companies harness the benefit of technology and improve the efficiency and quality of services. Inclusion is the key to unlocking this potential. Companies that value workplace diversity and inclusion, reap benefits such as higher employee engagement, improved performance, greater innovation, retention of talent, improved employee wellbeing, lower levels of poor behaviour such as harassment and bullying and increased attractiveness to potential

employees. Increased diversity and inclusion offers potential improvements to performance, innovation, recruitment and retention, understanding and public confidence.

Diversity & inclusive marketing

Inclusive marketing strives to create a visual culture that is more representative. It endeavours to appreciate and understand various identities, differences and histories. Simply speaking, it's creating an advertising campaign mindfully, to respectfully include and relate to the complex individuals who make up the target audience. However, as the population becomes increasingly media and communications savvy, achieving a connection with an audience to create an authentic feeling of inclusivity is increasingly difficult to manage.

Recently, lots of companies have addressed their messages to a **prototypical consumer**: white, heterosexual, middle-class, white-collar Christians. (Hendricks, B., 2019) Nowadays, the consumer market has changed. Globally, customers are increasingly more diverse with different values, beliefs, experiences, expectations, and ways of interacting. Even within a country, apparent are differences between subgroups - not just ethnicity, but also age, gender, profession, religion, family size, physical environment, and more. While there may be many differences between people, there's always at least one similarity, everyone is a consumer! Everyone is a consumer in search of products and services that best fit their needs, and generalized marketing can easily miss more than a few of these consumers. Inclusive marketing involves acknowledging that marketing must offer new ways of communicating to diverse consumers. With that knowledge, diversity marketers aim to develop a mix of different communication methods, in order to reach different people present in the market. This way, diversity and inclusion marketing, designed to target consumers of all diversities and backgrounds, won't miss them and can provide greater benefits to both the buyer and seller.

Smart marketers have to be more attentive, with a focus on diversity marketing. **Diversity marketing** (inclusive marketing, inclusion marketing, or in-culture marketing) is a way to connect with the different individuals in the market. Diversity marketing is more a new way of communicating to diverse people. This may include using different methods or marketing channels to appeal to various groups based on cultural differences, ethnicities, races, genders, religious beliefs, and more. Marketers who work for McDonald's know that a menu item and message that appeals to the American consumer will not work for the patrons of their restaurants in France or the Middle East, and vice versa (Campain Creators, 2019).

Diversity marketing realizes the markets vast differences and the market/consumers have different tastes may it be values, beliefs, interaction type and lifestyle choices. Such vast differences are then tackled by customized marketing strategies. (Wikipedia)

Companies should first develop a thorough **understanding of diversity**, its challenges and benefits before embarking on a strategy that targets a specific audience. For example, marketers should conduct extensive **market research** to avoid grouping target customers who share the same gender, race or ethnicity. Companies must evaluate environmental, economic and social factors within ethnic groups to shape and refine marketing strategies. Recognizing that consumers have unique qualities that extend beyond elements such as race and valuing these differences through various advertising and communications channels help make marketing campaigns a success. Companies should also ensure their marketing messages to diverse target groups are authentic and accurately reflect cultural norms and traditions.

Some examples of good & bad practices

Varied audiences respond to different forms of messaging, which leads to the implementation of diversity marketing. Many recognizable brands have found success by utilizing diversity marketing to reach new audiences. The following companies have successfully used diversity and inclusive marketing to reach into new demographic markets: (Marketing Schools, 2019)

- **McDonald's** has done extensive market research on ethnic perspectives, and how such insights impact mainstream communication. Their "I'm Loving It" campaign is one well-known product of their investment.

- **Proctor and Gamble** has invested a great deal in the black community, and commercials for products such as Tide, Oil of Olay, and Pantene regularly feature black families (and fathers, particularly) that resonate with African-American consumers.

- **Target** similarly has released commercials that show black families according to their own values and ideals, as opposed to stereotypical or pop-cultural depictions.

- **Saturn** has reached out to the LGBT market, sponsoring LGBT events and developing advertising specific to that community ("Does your ride reflect your pride?") that resonate with its values.

- **Harley Davidson** started marketing to women by creating classes to teach women to ride.

- **AT&T** finds marketing to diverse racial and ethnic groups important enough to have an executive position devoted entirely to such campaigns.

- **Dove** - challenged the beauty industry's standard of beauty with an all-inclusive campaign by featuring women of all ages, races, shapes, and sizes

- **Coca-Cola** succeeds in so many areas of advertising that it's often easy to overlook one of its simplest messages. Its Super Bowl 2017 ad was designed to celebrate the idea that "together, we are beautiful." It featured a cast of diverse individuals singing various lines of the patriotic tune "America the Beautiful." The song, which started in English and included portions sung in Hindi and Arabic, also featured imagery of a gay

couple, Latino family, women in traditional Middle Eastern attire, and Jewish men wearing yarmulkes.

- **Guinness' Wheelchair Basketball**- touching on another group that is often overlooked in traditional advertising, Guinness put the spotlight on individuals who need the assistance of mobility devices. The commercial was styled to look like a group of friends playing wheelchair basketball, only to reveal at the end of the ad that only one of the men actually needed the device. The spot, called "Friendship," ended with the group finishing its game and heading out together for beer.

On the other hand there had been some companies' attempts to point out diversity or inclusion that turned into failures. Some of them are: (Robinson, K., 2018)

- **PepsiCo's 2017 ad**, featuring Kendall Jenner presenting a police officer with a can of the famous soft drink. Many argued that the ad trivialised important social justice movements, and the resulting protests and social media outrage caused PepsiCo to pull the advertisement entirely and issue an apology.

- **Protein World's infamous "Beach Body Ready" ad**, which depicted a woman in a bikini with the question 'Are you beach body ready?' also received swift public backlash, with an online petition calling for the ad to be banned gathering 60,000 signatures. So deep-seated was the outrage, that some even defaced the ads in situ, adding footnotes such as "Each body's ready" and "You are fine as you are."

- **Popular fashion company H&M** drew the ire of millions of people in 2018 over a controversial children's ad campaign, which depicted a boy of African descent in a hood emblazoned with a racially insensitive slogan. This prime example of unnecessary diversity marketing by H&M was blasted by the world's biggest celebrities, including LeBron James and Diddy, which undoubtedly damaged its brand among a multitude of different ethnicity groups.

These few examples show that achieving marketing diversity and inclusion in practice has turned out to be far more difficult than anticipated. Why is this so? Where companies are making mistakes?

Firstly, it seems that too many companies make the fundamental error of failing to align their diversity practices with their organizational goals. And in such situations, no matter how much good will there is towards the concept of diversity, the harsh realities of running the business on a day-to-day basis, of keeping customers satisfied, of selling and delivering the product or service will keep undermining it.

And secondly, there is often a mismatch between how organizations design diversity policies and how they implement them. Or to put it another way, what looks good on paper too often falls apart in practice.

So what measures need to be taken by companies to achieve diversity and inclusion in their work? **Ensuring diversity within companies** is a crucial starting point, so that different voices are represented from the outset and throughout campaigns. Further to this, **knowledge and education** is essential, and marketers should be mindful when

conducting **market research** to ensure the use of participants who reflect the ever more diverse world.

The key to successful and effective in-culture marketing is adjusting the brand's message to the target. This entails doing market research before developing an advertising campaign to determine the buying habits, values and favored communication methods for the targeted consumer. As the campaign develops, companies need to consider how it looks, sounds and reads from a different perspective—this may call for focus group testing, implementing A/B testing or creative testing within the campaign to gather additional data.

At the end of the day, **it better to have an authentic story than forced diversity**. (Lacy, L., 2017) Diversity marketing doesn't necessarily mean that every single advertisement needs to include various cross sections of society. But, what matters is that marketing should be honest and represent the society.

CONCLUSION

In order to make diversity and inclusion reality, companies must continue to adjust their marketing strategies to stay competitive and abreast of the latest trends and technologies. Likewise, marketers should constantly assess how their target market is evolving and changing over time. Companies should ask themselves whether their business resembles the communities and customers they serve. Diversity is important not only from a corporate responsibility standpoint but also for viability in an increasingly heterogeneous market. Moreover, diverse organizations perform better at marketing and selling to diverse audiences than organizations that are more homogenous.

Some important takeaways and conclusions are as follows:

- Consumers align with brands because they can identify with who appears in ads and the messaging,
- They relate to a brand because of an accurate representation of their race, gender, ethnicity and culture.
- Isolating customers by just featuring one type of person when a brand appeals to many groups can be just as damaging as insincerely injecting diversity into marketing without thought.

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