Inclusive Social Marketing: Representation and Diversity in Brand Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, many marketing strategies have emerged around the world, as sales professionals have been searching for a universal language that millions of potential buyers can understand. Inclusive marketing has become a real breakthrough in this area, combining the social and consumer needs of the target audience in advertising campaigns. That is why today companies use inclusive marketing tools in order to attract the attention of various audiences and form a friendly target audience. The purpose of the study was to substantiate the peculiarities of inclusive marketing and to assess the possibilities of using the inclusion to create a positive image of a brand. In the course of the study, it was proved that, a necessary condition for modern companies' development is the creation of a friendly and inclusive marketing campaign that would take into account the specifics of the entire target audience and allow them paying attention to each potential client. Inclusive marketing has been proven to present products, services, or applications in a context that evokes a deep emotional response from people and makes them feel noticed and understood. It can emphasise or address issues related to ethnic, gender, and socio-cultural differences. The goal of inclusive marketing is to understand and meet the needs of the target audience, attract potential buyers by increasing empathy, and solve life problems. At the same time, each member of the target audience should feel in the centre of attention and feel that their needs can be met, and their wishes can be taken into account, without focusing on their characteristics or disabilities.

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Introduction

The inclusiveness or inclusion is a principle of organising social life when there is no inequality between people, no matter how an individual look, dresses, believes in, or associates with a gender. They participate in education, art, and business on an equal footing with everyone else.

Most often, the inclusiveness is understood as the provision of equal opportunities and rights to people with disabilities, physical developmental, and mental differences, otherwise known as disabled people.

The main principle of inclusiveness is equal access to the social process for people who have been historically, traditionally, or prejudicially excluded from life. But there may be situations when average people also need inclusivity. For example, an employee of the company became pregnant and found it difficult to climb to the upper floors of the office. If the environment is not ready for inclusivity - for example, a business centre does not have an elevator - it faces inconveniences and limitations.

With the growth of the awareness, more attention is payed to inclusive marketing by users. Long gone are the days when brands didn't care about individuality in their advertising messages.

For example, companies need to make sure that their website is adapted for people with poor eyesight. And if the company has an offline store, it needs to make the space convenient for people with disabilities and mothers with children.

Literature review

The essence and purpose of inclusive marketing

Inclusive marketing recognises the rich diversity of the world by highlighting, celebrating, and giving voice to people and their unique identities (Assenza et al., 2021).

Inclusive marketing leads to greater brand awareness, customer loyalty, and customer recommendations, and rightly so (Cherniaieva et al., 2023; Cambier & Poncin, 2020).

All brands that want to reach a wider audience and offer solutions to broader markets should prioritise inclusive marketing strategies.

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. It recognises that real people have multiple identities (Petrescu & Krishen, 2021; Tobal & Menna, 2020).

Inclusive marketing differs from earlier forms of diversity-based marketing in what it takes into account (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Bluhm & Cutura, 2022): appearance; age; gender identity; sexual orientation; ethnicity; race; marital status; religion; physical and mental abilities; socio-economic status; It tries to reach all groups of people.

Inclusive marketing campaigns are designed to address the complexity of the needs of different consumer groups and aim to bridge gaps by reaching audiences from all walks of life. Inclusive marketing strategies started as a digital marketing trend and are now a philosophy that supports social change.

The inclusivity is evident in all industries and is ubiquitous in marketing efforts for major brands and products such as apparel, luxury goods, food, tech, higher education, financial services, automotive, and other widely used services. It can be seen on social media, on brand websites, and in marketing content.

The importance of using inclusive marketing to build a company's reputation
The inclusiveness is a requirement of modern marketing. The experience of Microsoft is interesting. Inclusive marketing helps the Microsoft brand to establish a genuine connection with customers to stimulate their love, loyalty, and trust (Dyba et al., 2020; Kovalenko, 2018).

While many companies once viewed inclusivity as an add-on to their marketing campaigns, they have realised that customers want it to be at the centre of their brand experience. And for good reason - using inclusive marketing techniques helps brands reach those they've missed.

Inclusive marketing invites underrepresented and marginalized people to get to know a brand and establish a genuine connection with it.

Inclusivity is the "imperative of modern marketing," and brands that fail to embrace inclusive marketing will be left behind as these trends continue over time (Ardito et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2023).

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. According to a consumer survey conducted by Google in 2019, it was found that 64% of respondents took some action after viewing an ad that they recognised as diverse or inclusive (Austin et al., 2021; Lima et al., 2020). The main task for marketers is to help society accept different people from the real world by meeting their needs.

Diverse and inclusive marketing tries to reach as many potential customers as possible, regardless of appearance, age, gender, health, background, or any other characteristics. It is created at meetings of marketing teams that study inclusive culture and find solutions to the problems of special groups of customers. According to the survey, 69% of black consumers are more likely to buy products from a brand who's advertising positively reflects their race or ethnicity.

Summary of the main material
Features of inclusive marketing
While the terms inclusive marketing and diversity marketing are sometimes used interchangeably, there are subtle differences. While inclusive marketing is about representing and marketing to the broadest, most diverse customer base, diverse marketing specifically focuses on specific demographic segments.

Inclusive marketing is the development of a company's marketing plans to meet the needs of everyone, and diversity marketing is how brands target specific identity groups. It is logical to consider inclusive marketing as a parent category and diversity marketing as a sub-process (Cambier & Poncin, 2020).

Given that real-life communities are infinitely diverse and complex, marketers must create initiatives and branding that can attract them to such diverse target customers.

Social good and progress are at the heart of inclusivity. But it can also have a significant impact on the bottom line, brand value, and customer experience. From a reputational standpoint, no one wants to be labelled as a non-inclusive brand, either in terms of offering or corporate culture. With this diversity of opinion, a commitment to an inclusive culture also attracts more talent with unique perspectives.

For modern brands, the goal should always be to work with a more realistic understanding of their target audience. But all the audience research in the world can be misinterpreted without recognising unique life paths and how they affect audience connection.

When diversity is understood and inclusive marketing begins, brands can reach more people. Then, based on feedback from their new customer base, they can improve their offerings or even introduce new products and services to meet newly identified needs.

The end result is a significant increase in your target audience, which can boost revenue while gaining valuable insights into your diverse customer base. What brand doesn't want to do something good by attracting more customers?

Thus, inclusive marketing is an approach to creating marketing campaigns and strategies that takes into account and incorporates the diversity of consumers, including people of different ages, genders, races, ethnicities, abilities, and physical disabilities. The main features of inclusive marketing include the following components, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Features of inclusive marketing

Specifics of inclusive marketing	Characteristics
Diversity and inclusion	Inclusive marketing recognises the diversity of consumers and tries to include all groups of people, regardless of their identity, abilities, or limitations
Creating diverse content	Inclusive marketing involves creating content that reflects different types of consumers. This can include different family structures, different body perceptions, gender identities, and ethnicities
Support for different languages and cultures	Inclusive marketing takes into account linguistic and cultural diversity by prioritising the intercultural and multilingual content. This may include translations and adaptation of content for different audiences
Use of different models and representatives	Inclusive marketing uses a variety of models and representatives in marketing materials that reflect many different body types and appearances
Social responsibility	Inclusive marketing is aimed at supporting social issues and includes support for various charitable organisations and initiatives
Active interaction with the audience	Inclusive marketing involves active engagement with the audience, listening to their needs and feedback to improve marketing strategies
Rejection of stereotypes	Inclusive marketing avoids the use of stereotypes and generalisations that may offend or exclude certain groups of consumers

Compiled by the author based on (Arslanalp et al., 2019; De La Peña, 2021; Hrynchyshyn, 2021; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020)

Inclusive marketing not only helps to increase the profitability of businesses but also contributes to a better social climate and contributes to a more equitable society.

Creating an inclusive marketing campaign requires attention to various aspects and consideration of audience's needs. Table 2 provides some recommendations to help a company develop an inclusive marketing strategy.

Table 2.

Recommendations for creating an inclusive marketing campaign

General recommendation	Tips for implementing and creating an inclusive marketing campaign
Avoid symbolism	A symbolic measure refers to superficial efforts to be inclusive. For example, putting one gay person, one black person, or one disabled person in a group photo and thinking that's enough. It's superficial and careless, which is unacceptable. A company should not do something just to show other people that the brand is inclusive.
Work with your team	A company cannot show that it is inclusive without applying it to its team. It should have a diverse team from different demographics and backgrounds. The diverse experiences that these people bring will help grow and succeed. If possible, a company can even recruit people from all over the world. Technology has made remote work possible. If a manager is not sure how to find a diverse team, here are some tips: offer comprehensive benefits; use different platforms for job postings; add your diversity statement to a job posting; Ensure partnerships with multicultural institutions
Update your content	The content should represent different customer segments and be targeted to different target groups. If not, then marketing strategists need to work with their editors and writers to come up with guidelines that will make it easier to incorporate inclusivity into advertising content. One of the most important aspects of ensuring content is inclusive is not to make any assumptions. You should always do your research and remember to cite reliable sources. Thus, the inclusive content should be one of the priorities for business development.
Receive feedback	One of the most effective tips may be to hire different people in the marketing team and find out what they like and what changes they would like to see. For example, to make sure a company doesn't discriminate against people with disabilities, you need people who can help check it out. Inclusive marketing is crucial for companies, customers, and the world. It can be used to create relevant messages that apply to everyone and connect with current and new customers

Compiled by the author based on (Cong et al., 2021; Martinovych, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Lucato et al., 2019; Prathapan et al., 2019; Stahl et al., 2020)

In general, creating an inclusive marketing campaign is important not only from a moral and ethical standpoint but also from a business perspective, as it can attract more diverse customers and ensure a positive image of your brand. An inclusive marketing campaign should be honest, authentic, and open. It should reflect your true support for inclusivity and diversity in your brand.

Brand inclusiveness as a component of marketing strategy

According to the WHO, about 1 billion (or 15% of the world's population) people worldwide have disabilities, more than 100 million of whom are children. The rights of people with disabilities are protected by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the UN in 2006 (Furmanets et al., 2019). According to this document, signatory countries must ensure equality, accessibility of the environment, education and employment, participation in cultural life, and individual mobility for people with disabilities.

The main principles of the convention include: respect for human dignity and freedom of choice; non-discrimination; effective involvement in society; respect for the characteristics of people with disabilities; equality of opportunities; gender equality.

In September 2015, the UN adopted a new sustainable development agenda consisting of 17 goals to be achieved by 2030 (Li et al., 2021). All of them can be called inclusive because they

are intended to ensure equality of opportunity. Seven of them are directly related to people with disabilities, such as universal access to healthcare and education.

The world is becoming more diverse every day, and consumers have more and more choices. In such circumstances, you can look at inclusive marketing, which will allow standing out from the competition. Today, ordinary companies will not achieve results with a neutral position.

According to research, consumers today are beginning to pay attention not so much to the profitability of the purchase as to the sharing of common values with the brand. Target audiences - especially millennials - are setting new standards for brands and expect them to take a proactive stance on the most important issues (Hasan & Uddin, 2022; Jaas, 2022). This trend should not be underestimated - without it, you will not be able to win the hearts of most consumers. You are expected to make global changes that are consistent with your brand identity.

The success of a brand undoubtedly depends on understanding the needs of the audience. However, in the era of social media and active online communication, this will not be enough - you also need to learn how to determine their worldview and core values. A very global approach may sound insincere, and the main message may be lost in it. Paying attention to only one narrow issue is also unlikely to lead to the expected results. You should start by identifying the areas that still need comprehensive change, where the market has not yet had time to respond to the changing views of its audience.

For example, if considering the latest collection of Barbie dolls. The new dolls of the iconic brand have more realistic figures, imperfect hair, and skin, and some represent people with disabilities (prosthetics), reflecting the inclusive approach to creating the Barbie brand (McAlinn et al., 2020).

When striving for brand inclusivity, the most common mistake is to produce advertising content that discriminates against people with disabilities. This applies to pity stories that create the image of a dependent. And the opposite - where people with disabilities are exclusively heroes. Inclusivity is precisely about not focusing on features. The lives of people with special needs should be shown without being overwhelming.

A new study by a consumer preference expert shows that more than three-fifths (63%) of Americans are attracted to cosmetic brands that showcase diversity in their advertising. And the majority of those who would like to see diversity in cosmetics and skincare advertising want it to "reflect real life" (68%) and "show that there are different ways to be beautiful" (56%). Moreover, almost half (47%) of consumers of cosmetic products and services say that in the past year, they sought out products from brands that offered diversity or inclusivity; and a quarter (24%) of respondents purchased products from cosmetic brands. Noting the growing desire for change among cosmetic brands, almost three-quarters of adults agree that the beauty industry plays on women's insecurities (73%) and that society's idea of beauty is too rigidly defined (72%) (Prokopenko, 2021; Sapiński, 2022). This points to the need for cosmetic brands to get rid of the perceptions that consumers associate with negativity, inspire people, and empower them.

To create a culture of equality, acceptance, and diversity, a comprehensive approach is needed. HR experts need to analyse data and understand the needs of society.

It is particularly necessary to determine the ratio of male and female employees, generations, ethnic groups, employees with physical or mental disabilities in the organisation as a whole and

by positions/departments/levels of the organisation. If the results show that a social group does not exceed 30%, additional attention should be paid to it.

The next step is to compare salaries between men and women. It happens that men's salaries are higher. The reasons for this may be not only that the company offers men a higher salary. But also, because job seekers of different genders have different expectations. In any case, it is important to find out the reason and eliminate it.

Next, you should analyse the staff turnover and evaluate the dynamics of dismissals over the past 3 years. After what period do employees leave more often and why? You may be able to see some patterns and trends. This will be a signal for a thorough analysis of the reasons.

Measure the level of employee engagement. Conduct an engagement survey among employees to understand if there are any factors that hinder productive work. This is a very important point because engagement directly depends on the internal culture of the company.

It is a modern corporate culture management system that helps HR receive regular feedback and monitor engagement metrics. Analytics are displayed in a convenient dashboard format with tips for managers and a database of HR practices. All this helps to make decisions quickly.

The next step is to logically move on to identifying the areas of implementation of inclusive marketing in the activities of companies and to specify which areas of inclusive marketing require the maximum attention of specialists.

For a reasonable selection of priority areas for the implementation of inclusive marketing, it is proposed to apply the hierarchy analysis method. For this purpose, it is proposed to build a hierarchical model. The decomposition of the hierarchy analysis task reflects the key tactical goal of the enterprise's activity - development of market presence, which are the tools for achieving the strategic goal, and the criteria - indicators (or groups of indicators) by which the feasibility of choosing a particular alternative is assessed. The decomposition of the problem of the hierarchy of choosing the optimal alternative to overcome the signs of crisis at an enterprise is presented in Fig. 1.

Figure 1.
Decomposition of the task of the hierarchy of choosing the direction of inclusive marketing implementation to strengthen the company's presence in the market
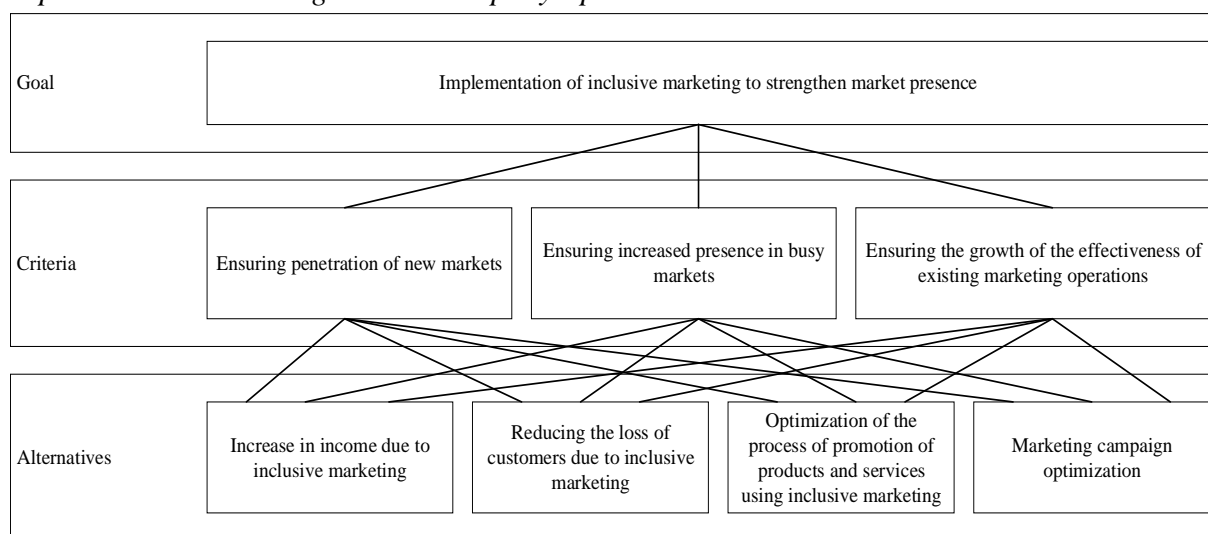
Alternatives are tools for achieving a strategic goal through the implementation of a tactical goal. Such alternatives are: increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1), reducing the

loss of customers due to inclusive marketing (A2), optimisation of the process of promotion of products and services using inclusive marketing (A3), marketing campaign optimisation (A4).

The criteria for using the hierarchy analysis method are as follows:
ensuring penetration of new markets (K1); ensuring increased presence in busy markets (K2); ensuring the growth of the effectiveness of existing marketing operations (K3).

After constructing the decomposition of the hierarchy problem, the priority of criteria is determined when choosing alternatives based on pairwise judgements. The system of pairwise evaluations of judgments by the hierarchy analysis method leads to a result that can be presented in the form of an inverse symmetric matrix, presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Matrix of pairwise comparisons of judgements by the hierarchy analysis method

Factor	1 (j factor)	…	n
1 (i factor)	1		a (i, j)
…		1	
N	a (i, j)		1

The element of the matrix a (i, j) is determined by comparing the importance of the i-th factor with the j-th on an intensity scale from 1 to 9, where the scores are defined as follows:
1 - equal importance;
3 - moderate dominance of the i-th factor over the j-th;
5 - significant advantage of the i-th factor over the j-th;
7 - significant advantage of the i-th factor over the j-th;
9 - very strong advantage of the i-th factor over the j-th;
2, 4, 6, 8 - corresponding intermediate values (Sapiński, 2022).

The matrix for determining the priority of criteria when choosing an alternative to overcome the signs of crisis at an enterprise is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Prioritisation of criteria when choosing an alternative to overcome the signs of crisis at the enterprise

	Ensuring penetration of new markets (K1)	Ensuring increased presence in busy markets (K2)	Ensuring the growth of the effectiveness of existing marketing operations (K3)	Component of the eigenvector of the matrix (wi)	Normalised vector of the pairwise comparison matrix (wnorm)
Ensuring penetration of new markets (K1)	1	3	3	2,08	0,59
Ensuring increased presence in busy markets (K2)	1/3	1	1/2	0,55	0,16
Ensuring the growth of the effectiveness of existing marketing operations (K3)	1/3	2	1	0,87	0,25
∑	1,67	6,00	4,50	3,50	1,00

Eigenvalue of the matrix (λ)	3,05
Consistency index (Ic)	0,03
Consistency ratio (OC)	0,05

Prioritisation of criteria when selecting an alternative is carried out by the following formulas (3 – 4):

$$w_i = \sqrt[n]{\prod_{i=1}^{n} a_{ij}},$$ (1)

$$w_{норм} = w_i / \sum_{i=1}^{n} w_i$$ (2)

where W – component of the eigenvector of the matrix (the average value of the priority scores);

Wnorm – normalised vector of the pairwise comparison matrix (priority vector);

aij – values of matrix elements.

The assessment of the consistency of the priorities set is carried out using the following formulas (Sapiński, 2022):

$$\lambda = \sum_{i=1}^{n} a_{ij} \cdot w_{норм\,i}$$ (3)

$$I_c = (\lambda - n)/(n-1) \leq 0,2$$ (4)

$$OC = I_c / I_{cc} \leq 0,1$$ (5)

where λ – eigenvalue of the matrix;

Ic – consistency index;

Icc – average value of the consistency index;

OC – consistency ratio;

n – number of criteria (alternatives).

Next, it is logical to move on to agreeing on the criteria and alternatives for developing approaches to the implementation of inclusive marketing. The prioritisation of alternatives for each of the criteria is shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

Calculation of the priority of alternatives in terms of the features of inclusive marketing implementation

Ensuring penetration of new markets (K1)						
	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	wi	норм
increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	1	2	1/2	3	1,32	0,27
reducing the loss of customers due to inclusive marketing (A2),	1/2	1	1/3	2	0,76	0,16
optimisation of the process of promotion of products and services using inclusive marketing (A3),	2	3	1	5	2,34	0,48
marketing campaign optimization (A4).	1/3	1/2	1/5	1	0,43	0,09
∑	3,83	6,50	2,03	11,00	4,84	1,00
Eigenvalue of the matrix (λ)						4,01
Consistency index (Ic)						0,00
Consistency ratio (OC)						0,01
Ensuring increased presence in busy markets (K2)						
	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	wi	wнорм
increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	1	3	7	1/3	1,63	0,26
reducing the loss of customers due to inclusive marketing (A2),	1/3	1	5	1/5	0,76	0,13
optimisation of the process of promotion of products and services using inclusive marketing (A3),	1/7	1/5	1	1/9	0,24	0,04
marketing campaign optimisation (A4).	3	5	9	1	3,41	0,57
∑	4,48	9,20	22,00	1,64	6,03	1,00
Eigenvalue of the matrix (λ)						4,16
Consistency index (Ic)						0,05
Consistency ratio (OC)						0,06

Ensuring the growth of the effectiveness of existing marketing operations (K3)						
	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	wi	Wнорм
increase in income due to inclusive marketing (A1),	1	3	5	5	2,94	0,56
reducing the loss of customers due to inclusive marketing (A2),	1/3	1	3	3	1,32	0,25
optimisation of the process of promotion of products and services using inclusive marketing (A3),	1/5	1/3	1	2	0,60	0,11
marketing campaign optimisation (A4).	1/5	1/3	1/2	1	0,43	0,08
∑	1,73	4,67	9,50	11,00	5,29	1,00
Eigenvalue of the matrix (λ)						4,10
Consistency index (Ic)						0,03
Consistency ratio (OC)						0,04

Table 5 shows in dark colour the best alternatives for each criterion, which should be taken into account in the process of building a marketing strategy and developing tools for applying inclusive marketing.

After developing a strategic plan for implementing and developing a Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) culture it is worth analysing the obtained data to look at the current picture in a comprehensive and objective manner, identify weak and strong areas, and set priorities. Before taking action, it is necessary to develop a strategy and identify tools for implementing a D&I culture.

For a brand, a culture of diversity and inclusion (D&I) is not just a marketing ploy, but a fundamental component of a successful business. A D&I culture is not just about looking more inclusive, but about fostering innovation, attracting diverse talent, and expanding audiences. D&I culture should be an ongoing process, not a one-time event. A brand should constantly work to improve and develop its D&I culture. Creating a culture of diversity and inclusion is a long and multifaceted process, but it can have a positive impact on your brand, contribute to its success, and attract different audiences.

If the D&I culture is implemented correctly, the business will benefit in all respects. The result is a company with employees who use their resources to the maximum. And this has a positive impact on the business as a whole.

Accordingly, the company will be able to achieve such positive results as:

- innovation in product and solution development;
- mutual learning of different groups, for example, intergenerational groups, where some teach modern technologies and others help to gain professional experience;

- expanding the scope of the possible and the idea of the norm (studying the political system, historical and cultural context, current economic, social, and political situation);
- original options for solving problems and making decisions (new ideas and solutions can be born through a culture of constructive conflict);
- reduced turnover, sick leave, and vacation time;
- increase the level of engagement;
- improving the employer's brand in the market;
- increasing profits and entering new markets.

If the D&I culture is implemented incorrectly, gathering representatives of different social groups in one company is not an end in itself. You need to work on creating a comfortable environment, otherwise, you can get the opposite effect. For example, they decided to add men to the company because there are not enough of them, but this may be a wrong decision if the nature of the work is such that women can handle it better. The atmosphere in the company can become hostile, and the results can be the opposite of what you want.

Conclusions

In marketing, the inclusiveness most often implies a company's focus on segregated groups of consumers with characteristics that differ from the main segments. Particularly, consumer groups that have different cultural characteristics or physical limitations from the generally accepted ones.

The study proved that building an audience through inclusive practices is a proactive task. Marketers need to get information from a variety of platforms and markets to see which communities they are ignoring. Expanding the campaign's reach in this way shows that these groups are interested in your brand.

Creating a culture of diversity and inclusion (D&I) for a brand can also be helpful. A culture of diversity and inclusion can significantly improve marketing and brand perception, as it creates opportunities for positive interactions with diverse audiences and increases the brand awareness and authenticity.

To summarise, a culture of diversity and inclusion not only improves marketing and brand perception but also helps building more valuable and long-term relationships with consumers, creating a favourable climate for business growth and development.

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