PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE ADVERTISING
BY REPRESENTATIVES OF GENERATION Z

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to find out how inclusive advertising is perceived by representatives of Generation Z, whether it makes them more trusting and whether it influences their purchasing behavior and attitudes.

Design/methodology/approach: The basis is focus research using the focused group interview (FGI - Focus Group Interview) method. The method of critical literature analysis and descriptive analysis were also used.

Findings: Generation Z is becoming an important consumer group, and its preferences and values will shape the future of marketing. A key trend is inclusivity, and understanding how it is perceived by younger generations can contribute to more effective communication with society.

Research limitations/implications: Topics related to diversity and inclusion evoke emotions, which leads to extreme reactions from participants. These types of emotional reactions may have made it difficult for respondents to objectively evaluate inclusive advertising. Another limitation was the group dynamics. Strong personalities dominated the discussion, and some study participants were less willing to express their own opinions. Yet another looming limitation is the evolution of attitudes, which in the case of Generation Z may change in response to social and cultural changes. The research conducted may not reflect long-term trends or future purchasing attitudes, which may change in the long run under the influence of various factors.

Practical implications: Understanding the aspects examined in the article can help companies/brands adapt their marketing strategies to the needs and values of the identified age group. Generation Z is becoming an important consumer group, and its preferences and values will shape the future of marketing.

Social implications: The research results may inspire and sensitize advertising creators and their recipients to the need to respect everyone, regardless of age, appearance, gender or sexual orientation, as well as to the need to listen empathetically to social needs. Inclusiveness is a key trend and understanding how it is perceived by the young generation can contribute to more effective communication with society.

Originality/value: The approach to the meaning and value of inclusive advertising presented in the article organizes this area and identifies opportunities to better use the potential of knowledge in this area in practice.
Keywords: inclusive advertising, generation Z, marketing communication, consumer relations.
Category of the paper: research paper.

Introduction

The image of companies and their ability to adapt to a changing environment determines the quality of their relationships with customers, and thus maintaining or gaining market advantage. Researchers agree that one of the factors facilitating such an advantage is inclusive marketing communications. A lot of inclusive advertising is appearing in the media and real space, which, it can be judged, is an important trend, especially in the context of the global social changes taking place, as well as increasing consumer awareness of diversity and corporate responsibility. A feature of inclusive advertising messages is that they move away from idealized images to show the authentic world. They no longer feature only people of admiration and popularity - stars or celebrities - but people from different social and ethnic backgrounds, with different physical abilities, also with different disabilities, with different facial features, skin color, sexual orientation, gender, height, or weight.

Inclusive advertising means well-meaning tolerance, as companies respect the needs and desires of social groups that were previously downplayed and overlooked. In this sense, it is the human being who comes first: Human First, regardless of origin, lifestyle, appearance, health status, religion, sexual orientation, material status, political or dietary beliefs (Pabian, Pabian, 2023). The essence of inclusive ads is to show that each person is a unique character, with an individual personality and a complex identity. Such ads therefore have ethical overtones, pro-social potential and high credibility. Their undoubted advantage is also that they allow the message to reach a larger and diverse audience.

However, there is a clear research gap regarding the perception of inclusive advertising by representatives of Generation Z, i.e. young people, born between 1997 and 2012. Synonymously, people born in this time frame are referred to as the Facebook generation, also the remote control and Internet generation orGeneration XD (X+Digital). These "digital natives" have been exhaustively described in the literature in terms of psychological and social characteristics. Researchers agree that although the subject of this generation is complex, but what is particularly characteristic is contained in the statement that their world is ruled by phones, computers and the Internet. They are able to use the media and move seamlessly through the latest technologies.

Importantly for the considerations in this article, representatives of Generation Z pay attention to issues of social justice and representation both in everyday life and in the media. Their approach to branding, advertising and media differs from previous generations (Seemiller, Grace, 2016; Dolot, 2018; Kullolli,Trebicka, 2023; Jayatissa, 2023). In the context of these findings, however, there is a need to clarify what this different approach of the younger generation to branding, advertising and the media consists of and what specifically characterizes it. This article partially fills this research gap.

The purpose of this article is to discover how inclusive advertising is perceived by representatives of the "Z" generation, whether it inspires more trust in them and whether it influences their behavior and purchase attitudes. Obtaining an answer to the research question posed in this way is important and timely, since further economic progress will depend on young people, who will soon begin to take charge of organizations and determine the direction of their development (Pabian, Pabian, 2023, p. 476). They will be the ones who will be responsible for developing the organization and communicating with customers. Finally, they will be the main consumers of goods and services.

The research used both a qualitative method in the form of focus group interviews to obtain more detailed information on the emotions and reactions to inclusive advertising of Generation Z people. A critical analysis of the literature was also conducted. The research was based on both the literature on the subject and current reports and market research on the analyzed generation and inclusive advertising. Case studies of selected marketing campaigns were also used. The descriptive analysis method was also applied.

Inclusive advertising in light of the latest scientific findings

The genesis of inclusive business is closely linked to the evolution of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) towards shared value creation, and the rise of emerging markets and the population at the base of the income pyramid. Since 1990, the Bottom of the pyramid/Base of the pyramid (BOP) concept has been evolving. In the BOP 1.0 concept, the poor were treated solely as consumers, but already in the BOP 2.0 concept, they were treated as business partners who co-create the business model and participate in the production and distribution of goods and services (Teneta-Skwiercz, 2016). Thus, in the previous thinking about inclusive business, the need to counter poverty came to the fore. Gradually, the scope of the concept broadened to include everything related to the process of change and the change in mentality that has taken place in the information society.

The scientific research strictly on inclusive advertising covers both ethical and commercial issues, especially in terms of the impact of diverse representations on the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. After all, inclusivity in a business model involves a value proposition

for the customer (Eyring et al., 2011). Researchers agree that inarguing inclusivity is now a popular marketing imperative to which companies, policies and individuals are paying increasing attention (Grieco, 2024).

Nowadays, inclusive marketing is all about reaching out to different groups in society, so in short, seeing the potential in diversity and respecting each person. This also applies to multicultural environments. For example, "multi-ethnic embedded marketing communications can be an effective means of communicating more inclusively with ethnic individuals for the benefit of consumer welfare and marketing effectiveness" (Liscandru, Chi Cui, 2018).

Accenture Strategy's 14th annual Global Consumer Pulse Research - *From Me to We: The Rise of the Purpose-led Brand* - surveyed 30,000 consumers from around the world to gauge their expectations of brands and companies. It found that 62% of them expressed the belief that companies should take a stand on social, cultural, environmental, and political issues that are close to their hearts (Davis, 2018). According to a recent IAS survey of US consumers, 45% of consumers would be likely to switch or boycott brands that have low value.

Recent published research shows that inclusive advertising, compared to non-inclusive advertising, improves both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Qayyum et al., 2023), as well as being a key factor influencing purchase decisions and consumer perceptions of brands Diversity and Inclusion: D&I (IAS TEAM, 2023).

A series of McKinsey reports *(*Why Diversity Matters, 2015; Delivering Through Diversity, 2018; Diversity Wins, 2020) reveal what the financial benefits of implementing more diverse and inclusive advertising campaigns can be (McKinsey&Company, 2020). While some researchers question the claim that business benefits exist for organizations with more diverse leadership (Gardner, 2023), according to most, the formula of *diversity + inclusion = better financial performance works across the board.* People, in turn, feel included when they are treated "fairly and respectfully" Bourke, 2018).

The literature also extensively discusses ways and means of adapting democratic legitimacy and inclusivity to place branding. Here, there is the important issue of the need for representation and advocacy for marginalized groups, such as migrants (Bisani et al., 2024), as well as socially silenced or discriminated against groups, such as communities with a different sexual orientation or gender identity LGBTQIA+ (McKenzie et al., 2024). It also underscores the need to continuously raise awareness of the need for inclusivity, not only by adequately saturating *European entrepreneurship curricula* (Henrya et al., 2024), but already at the level of teacher preparation training.

Methods

In the literature one can find research results on consumer perceptions of inclusive advertising, but without dividing them into age groups, which can lead to falsification of results and creation of generalizations. This is because seniors will react differently to specific images and messages, and differently to representatives of the younger generation, i.e., people just entering adult and responsible life. Taking this into account, the purpose of this article is to discover how inclusive advertising is received by representatives of the "Z" generation, whether it inspires more confidence in them and whether it influences their behavior and purchase attitudes. Accordingly, a research problem was formulated, which took the form of the following question: how does inclusive advertising affect the attitudes and purchasing decisions of Generation Z in Poland?

For the purpose of achieving the above-mentioned goal, three research tasks were formulated, including, in turn:

a) *analyzing the level of interest of Generation Z representatives in inclusive advertising,*

b) evaluation of the impact of inclusive advertising on the perceived authenticity of the product/brand,

c) assessing the impact of diversity in advertising on the preferences and consumer choices of the analyzed generation.

In addition to descriptive analysis, focus research using the Focus Group Interview (FGI) method was used to identify the issues under study in relation to Generation Z. This is a qualitative research technique, which involves soliciting the opinions of groups of people, in our case students from Generation Z, about the phenomenon under study. The opinions, gathered during a discussion involving 5 to 10 students, were conducted by a moderator (one of the authors of the article), who guided the conversation, using a specially prepared script. The research was conducted over a period of two months: June and October 2024. A total of 70 people participated.

At the beginning of the interview, the moderator defined the concept of inclusive advertising and then asked open-ended questions according to a developed questionnaire. Each question in the interview was preceded by a brief introduction and their problem content was derived from the adopted stages of the research tasks, hence section I included questions related to the analysis of the level of acceptance of inclusive advertising by Generation Z students, section II - questions on the impact of inclusive advertising on the perceived authenticity of the product/brand, and section III (the final section) - questions aimed at assessing the impact of diversity in advertising on the preferences and consumer choices of the analyzed generation.

Inclusive advertising in the opinion of respondents – research results and discussion

In order to determine the respondents' level of acceptance of the type of advertising studied, they were asked about their viewership. The majority of Generation Z representatives confirmed the viewing of inclusive ads, expressing their positive reception. When asked what emotions inclusive advertising evokes in them, students mentioned most often:

a) acceptance - this trait indicates that Generation Z representatives value diversity and inclusiveness, so ads that show people with different skin colors, gender identities or sexual orientations may inspire a sense of acceptance and belonging;

b) empathy - Generation Z can empathize with and better understand the challenges faced by other social groups;

c) inspiration - advertisements that promote values such as equality inspire Generation Z to take action, engage socially and fight for a better world;

d) confidence - students show confidence in brands that focus on inclusivity and diversity;

e) motivation - students said that inclusive advertising campaigns motivate them to take action, especially in the context of fighting for human rights and equality.

The next interview question sought to determine: Does inquisitive advertising deepen brand trust with Generation Z? Respondents unanimously confirmed this fact, stating, among other things, that: "inclusive advertising has the potential to deepen brand trust among Generation Z".

As can be judged, these opinions are the result of the fact that the generation under analysis has grown up in an era of diversity and equality and is therefore more sensitive to issues of inclusiveness and diversity. Therefore, advertisements that reflect diversity in culture, ethnicity, gender, etc., can build positive brand associations. Respondents further stressed that inclusive advertising could attract more attention because "it shows real human experiences, which is often more compelling than traditional homogeneous images". As a result, brands that invest in inclusive campaigns can build stronger and more positive relationships with Generation Z consumers.

Respondents were then asked about the issue of the impact of inclusive advertising on their perceived authenticity of the product/brand. The results of this part of the interview showed that representatives of the surveyed generation show significant interest in authenticity, presented in advertising campaigns. Advertisements that depict diverse groups of people, including ethnic differences, gender differences, sexual orientations, and disabilities, attract their attention and build trust in the brand. Respondents' answers thus indicate that a realistic portrayal of society is particularly important to Generation Z. Therefore, ads that show real stories and real people, rather than idealized images, are more compelling to them. They gain their trust and are more likely to be viewed.

The purpose of the next part of the interview was to determine: Does diversity in advertising influence the preferences and consumer choices of people representing Generation Z? Therefore, respondents were asked what type of diversity in ads they find most compelling and influential in their consumer decisions? In asking respondents about this question, it was determined that they showed specific preferences for diversity in ads, and the most frequently mentioned were:

a) ethnic and cultural diversity: respondents said that advertisements that depict people from different ethnic and cultural groups are particularly appreciated by them;

b) gender and identity diversity: respondents expressed acceptance in ads of images of people with different gender identities and sexual orientations, and appreciated the actions of brands representing diversity in this regard - indicating the openness of Generation Z to LGBTQ+ issues;

c) age diversity: according to respondents, ads that show people of different ages are well received - a fact that indicates that Generation Z sees the value of experience and that everyone should be represented in ads;

d) themes of social responsibility: respondents unanimously stressed that ads that address socially important issues, such as equality, climate change or human rights, are particularly important to them, and they want brands to be involved and act accordingly;

e) representation of the body and health: representatives of Generation Z appreciate diversity in the representation of bodies in ads, which includes models of different sizes, as well as people with disabilities.

Conclusion

New trends in marketing communications are a response to new consumer needs and social challenges. These are mental, intellectual changes that are taking place especially among the younger generation. In the context of the dynamism of technological change, the implementation of the principles of corporate social responsibility and the development of the concept of sustainable development, the philosophy of inclusive (inclusive) marketing deserves special attention. Understanding the aspects of inclusive marketing explored in the article, the reception of inclusive advertising and its impact on the young generation can help companies/brands adapt their marketing strategies to the needs and values of the identified age group. Generation Z is becoming an important consumer group, and their preferences and values will shape the future of marketing. Inclusivity is a key trend, and understanding how it is perceived by younger generations can contribute to more effective communication with the public.

In approaching the discussion of the results of the presented focus studies on the reception of inclusive advertising by Generation Z, it is also worth addressing the issue of various weaknesses and limitations that may affect the results obtained. The discussion on this topic is usually undertaken by researchers and experts in the fields of marketing, social communication, and psychology. In the literature, one can find analyses of focus research methodologies that point to their specific weaknesses and limitations (Roller, Lavrakas, 2015; Almeida et al., 2017; Basnet, 2018). The most important of these with regard to researching Generation Z, according to the authors of the article, include:

    a) subjectivity - can affect the interpretation of the responses obtained; survey participants may also feel social pressure to present opinions in line with popular trends, which can distort actual sentiments;

    b) representativeness of the sample - the number of participants in a focus study is usually limited, which may affect the ability to generalize the results to the broader Generation Z population.

However, the research conducted by the authors of this study is a pilot study. Further in-depth research is planned on this issue, taking into account varied qualitative techniques.

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