D&Ivertising: Lifestyle Brands & Gen Z Loyalty

Student Name: Camila Natalia Meraz
Student Number: 693434

Supervisor: Dr. Lijie Zheng

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) in marketing have become crucial factors that affect consumer behavior and brand loyalty trends. This study looks at the interactions between D&I representations through racial diversity and gender inclusion in advertising and consumers' subsequent purchase intentions and brand loyalty. This is the context of Gen Z consumers in Western cultural contexts. Gen Z believes brands should incorporate social responsibility and D&I initiatives into their advertising and business practices due to their strong belief systems and tendencies to hold brands accountable (Lutrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 29). Gen Z specifically was selected as the focus of this research due to their unique consumer behavior trends and their rising purchasing power within today's marketplace (Thangavel et al., 2019, p. 2; Wang, 2021, p. 73). There is little research on how D&I representation impacts brand loyalty and purchase intent among Gen Z consumers in the West. This study seeks to close this gap by exploring how D&I representation in advertisements influences Gen Z consumers' perceptions and loyalty toward lifestyle brands.

We chose a quantitative survey experiment as our methodology, where data was collected from Gen Z consumers across Western countries to understand their perceptions of genuineness and authenticity concerning advertisements featuring diverse forms of racial representations as well as inclusive representations based on gender. Our insights show that advertisements containing gender inclusion do not result in increased attributions of authenticity and genuineness. However, racial diversity does play a significant role in attributing genuineness and authenticity to a brand, thus increasing individuals' purchase intentions and loyalty to the brand. These insights are very useful for marketers, brands, and academics, as they uncover the significance of D&I in advertising and their subsequent implications. This study allows for a more in-depth understanding of the internal cognitive processes that take place when consumers engage with advertisements. This is valuable for academics in the fields of consumer psychology and marketing, as it allows for deeper insights into the psychological processes that lead Gen Z to certain attributions and perceptions of said advertisements. Future research could expand upon the types of diversity that are assessed, we advise more diverse demographics, such as sexual orientation, gender, or disabilities to allow for more progressive findings. We would also recommend future researchers to expand beyond Western cultural contexts, this could offer insights regarding today's globalized marketplace and the realities of shared meanings and their variations within cross-cultural contexts. This research is a valuable tool for furthering one's understanding of modern marketing, consumerism, Gen Z, lifestyle brands, and D&I, all of which are relevant topics in today's globalized marketplace.

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1.   Introduction

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) in marketing today, has become a crucial component affecting consumer behavior and brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 30). As companies strive to obtain a relevant global position within the market, it becomes necessary to understand the interaction between D&I representation in advertisements and brand loyalty among consumers. In this study we will define brand loyalty as a repeated inclination to purchase from and support a specific brand instead of other brand options (Chaudhry et al., 2021, ch. 2.2). Considering this, our study intends to investigate the effects of D&I representation in advertising on consumer perceptions of brands and their loyalty across Western cultural contexts concerning Gen Z consumers. This research seeks to examine how D&I representation impacts brand loyalty amongst Gen Z consumers who have shown preferences towards lifestyle brands and are entering an era of increased purchasing power (Thangavel et al., 2019, p. 2; Wang, 2021, p. 73). With digital branding environments becoming increasingly relevant and diverse populations growing among these digital spaces, brands must ensure that their virtual presence reflects real-world adherence to Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) values and practices (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 468; Wang, 2021, p. 74). The preferences of Generation Z highlight the significance of inclusiveness, transparency, and corporate social responsibility, thus advertising strategies should be tailoring their messaging to match these values (Wang, 2021, p. 74-75). This study will define Gen Z as the generation of people born in the mid-1990s and early 2010s (McKnight & Hoefel, 2018, p. 4). The rapidly evolving world Gen Z has grown up in has made them "digital natives" (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 97), as this period of time coincided with the emergence of social media platforms and increased widespread use of smartphones. This has exposed Gen Z to digital culture and the concept of self-branding (Lutrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 31). Considering Gen Z has been building their brands since very young ages; hence they expect even more responsibility and accountability from companies' brand messages than earlier generations.

The reasoning behind focusing on Western cultures lies in the fact that Western societies specifically those in the Americas and Europe have implemented initiatives to prioritize diversity and inclusivity both at the conceptual and practical levels (De Meulenaer, 2017, p. 896). These areas are also characterized by a greater degree of racial and cultural diversity compared to other countries in Asia for example where homogeneity is more prominent, thus providing a different context for evaluating the impact of D&I in advertising. Furthermore, political and societal climates within Western societies play a larger role in discussions regarding D&I as well as inclusion meaning that customers usually anticipate brands that share their values (Jungblut & Johnen, 2021, ch. 2).

This topic is increasingly relevant; however, there has been a lack of extensive research that specifically focuses on brand loyalty and consumer behavior of Gen Z regarding D&I representations in advertising. In the context of D&I, diversity refers to differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other sociocultural factors that determine one's uniqueness in specific settings (Cox

& Blake, 1991 as cited by Mohideen et al., 2024, p. 2148). Transparency and advocacy for social justice and environmental sustainability are what Gen Z expects from brands; there are deep expectations of practicing humility and ensuring your business practices are ethically sound (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 70; Wang, 2021, p. 73). When we discuss inclusion in this paper, we are referring to efforts made intentionally to create an atmosphere where different demographics of people can feel a sense of belonging and unity thus making it possible for everyone involved to feel welcome regardless of their differences (Arsel et al., 2022, p. 920).

This study focuses on lifestyle brands specifically because their marketing strategies aim to create and harness relationships with consumers and intentionally design brand perceptions that resonate with the target market's lifestyles, especially among young consumers such as Gen Z (Limelight Marketing, 2023, para 5). It is considered essential that marketers take into account the values and preferences of Gen Z since this could make or break the success and reputation of brands (Alqvist & Klaus, 2018, p. 23). Additionally, there is little research available regarding how Gen Z acts and behaves as consumers concerning D&I attribution within the Western context of advertising (Mooij, 2019, p. 102). This holds particularly true when taking into consideration that more purchasing power will soon come into the hands of Gen Z as they become adults (Wang, 2021, p. 72). Another characteristic found among members of Gen Z is that they spend significant amounts of their income purchasing goods from lifestyle brands (Wang, 2021, p. 72; Thangavel et al., 2019, p. 3-4), furthering our reasoning for focusing on lifestyle brands.

Considering these factors, the current study aims to address this gap in the current literature by proposing the following research question:

To what extent does diversity and inclusion (D&I) representation in advertising impact Gen Z consumers' brand loyalty and purchase intent across a Western cultural context, within the realm of lifestyle brands?

1.1 Practical Relevance

From a practical standpoint, marketers, advertisers, and businesses partaking in global business practices can gain valuable information from the current study. This research provides insights that encourage strategic decisions regarding advertising and content creation which help facilitate companies' engagement with diverse customer segments. Today, consumers appreciate respectful, genuine, and inclusive representations from the brands they support (Wang, 2021, p. 73). This presents a major opportunity for businesses to outperform their competitors. Brands that get involved in D&I projects and implement authentic portrayals of diversity in their advertisements and corporate practices tend to be more successful and favorable than ones that do not. Notably, when a company does not consider D&I as a factor affecting its market profitability the company is 29% less likely to achieve above-average market profitability (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p. 5).

Among various organizations across the United States in particular, D&I initiatives are being given precedence towards making them better aligned with evolving social norms and expectations of markets as well as internal employees' well-being goals (Hamacher, 2022, para 1). This strategic incorporation of diversity and inclusion from an internal and external perspective is vital and has been proven to increase organizational well-being and business performance (Hamacher, 2022, para 5). Businesses today are becoming more aware of the importance of D&I when an employer of choice; for example, improving consumer brand relationships; thereby promoting community stakeholder support around the world; this has led these businesses to see the importance of such practices.

This study could help in the education and installation of more inclusive marketing campaigns that not only reflect the diversity of their market but also make them feel a greater sense of belonging and acceptance, deepening consumer-brand relationships. Therefore, through building emotional bonds with consumers, brands can increase customer brand loyalty.

Customers who are familiar with or emotionally attached to a brand are more likely to interact with branded content, this leads advertisements to better tolerance of negative information spread about a given brand (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020, p. 3). Having said this, marketers positioning themselves well in the marketplace in terms of consumer-brand relationships such as D&I usage in advertising campaigns need to take steps towards socially responsible business practices if they want to keep their positions within the industry (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020, p. 300). It is for this reason that implementing ethical practices will better position brands among other competitors within the market who are delivering what consumers need today. This approach opens the door for practical relevance to understanding that ethical practices need to be embedded into modern business practices, thus coinciding with the evolving demands of the current market.

1.2 Academic Relevance

This research has beneficial insights for academia considering it fills a gap in recent literature focusing on the potential impact of D&I representation in advertising on brand loyalty in the context of Gen Z customers across Western cultural contexts. This study makes important contributions to multiple academic fields by exploring the intricate dynamics between racial diversity representation, gender inclusion, advertising strategies, and consumer psychology.

To begin, this research explores consumer psychology as a discipline, that observes the emotions and perceptions held by consumers and how these influence their purchase intentions of goods and services (Cherry, 2023, para 2), by exploring how diversity in advertising campaigns affects people's thoughts about brands and purchase habits. Subsequently, marginalized consumers have been found to deeply affect overall well-being defined as "a positive emotional, mental, physical, social state of being experienced by culturally diverse market actors" (Kipnis et al., 2021, para 4). When consumers feel a sense of being represented and included it provides them with a sense

of positive well-being, thus improving their perceptions, attributions, and loyalty towards a particular brand.

As such, this research will explore the interactions between advertisement characteristics, Gen Z attribution, and subsequent brand loyalty and purchase intent to help answer our research question. This research makes us better understand why different individuals perceive certain characteristics of advertisements differently than others using consumer psychology and previous academic studies.

This study draws from several scholarly articles that are centered around marketing practices, D&I in advertising, Gen Z brand loyalty, consumer psychology, and political branding. It is vital to understand the evolving market of today is becoming increasingly diverse and globalized, therefore brands have to deal with complicated marketing situations so that they can reach out to their audiences effectively. By delving into Gen Z's cognitive responses to D&I advertising, our study seeks to examine the factors influencing perceptions of genuineness and authenticity that lead to the formation of brand loyalty within advertisements for this demographic group. In addition, we hope to determine the major influences generating brand authenticity perceptions among Gen Z customers as well as their values, which will help gain a deeper insight into consumer behavior within marketing environments today.

The research furthers the field of consumer behavior by taking a deeper look into the specific attitudes and preferences of Gen Z, a demographic that has been in recent discussions due to their distinct traits and increased market power (Wang, 2021, p. 72; Thangavel et al., 2019, p. 1). It is vital to comprehend these aspects of consumer psychology in order to practice marketing strategies that resonate with Gen Z consumers. This study acknowledges and explores the portrayal of diverse demographic groups in advertising and the implications this has on Gen Z consumers, and subsequently how this impacts brands themselves. Current literature has found that gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age when presented in advertising inclusively can lead to favorable brand images (Eisend et al., 2022, p. 54), with this we can guide our research by delving deeper into understanding this phenomenon.

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2. **Theoretical Framework**

The structure of the theoretical framework in this research provides insights concerning Gen Z consumer behavior regarding lifestyle brands, particularly in the context of D&I in advertising. We will be using theories as a guide to further understand our reasoning. Beginning with how Gen Z's formative years were influenced by significant historical world events and the realities of growing up with rapidly evolving technology. We want to further examine our understanding of their sensitivity to social justice and inclusivity that subsequently affects their consumer preferences and behaviors. To continue, this framework will introduce lifestyle brands, discussing their role in shaping aspirational stories that resonate well with Gen Z's values and are relevant to this study. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model will be presented in this study to assist us in understanding the cognitive responses and processes taking place within consumers when they interact with visual stimuli, in this case, inclusive D&I advertisements. The SOR model helps us explain how external stimuli trigger internal cognitive and emotional responses, which ultimately lead to certain opinions, interpretations, and attributions. Additionally, the article uses Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) which reveals the underlying factors leading to specific interpretations and attributions of consumers when interpreting cultural or shared meanings within advertisements. This includes culture in terms of shared meanings not simply by traditional definitions of culture (e.g., American culture) in this context we will be looking at Gen Z in the West and their shared meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). We will utilize Attribution Theory in this study to help us define the specific attributions interpreted by Gen Z toward lifestyle brands based on their responses to the advertisements. Attribution theory will also allow us to uncover how consumers interpret the motives of a brand and what associations they make towards a brand, in this study we focus on Gen Z and their interpretations of lifestyle brand advertisements, focusing on the D&I component of their advertisements.

All in all, these theories provide us with a comprehensive theoretical framework that allows us to further understand D&I advertising and its impact. Once we have an understanding of these theories we will address the hypotheses we formulated based on the relationships between D&I advertising, consumer perceptions and attributions of genuineness and authenticity, and their impacts on brand loyalty and purchase intent.

2.1 Generation Z in the West: Digital Natives and their History

Generations are formulated and categorized based on significant events that occur during their formative years, which influence generations significantly, such as their values, beliefs, and attitudes (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 4). Considering that Gen Z was brought up in the same era of time as smartphones and social media, this generation has been raised in an era completely dominated by technology, thus significantly shaping their perspectives and interactions, particularly with brands (Alqvist & Klaus, 2018, p. 12). This study focuses on Gen Z within the Western cultural context due to the relevance to D&I and the articles used for this paper being predominantly concerning Western

society (Mooij, 2019, p. 102), therefore we will focus on the factors that have impacted Gen Z in the Western context.

For Gen Z, growing up amidst many turbulent times such as continuous conflicts in the Middle East, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States, combined with the growing presence of the internet, these individuals have had the unique experience of growing up in a period where many major disastrous events have taken place and have notably been recorded to then be replayed and relived over and over again (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 21; McKnight & Hoefel, 2018, p. 16) this can have long-lasting effects on any human being let alone developing children. Several political events in the West have caused shifts in cultural norms and society such as important and influential political elections and social movements (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 21). Such movements like Black Lives Matter have helped Gen Z see that they should care about diversity issues and police brutality, they have learned the importance of speaking up from such events. The MeToo movement has exposed Gen Z to the reality that women are still not as equal as they may sometimes appear, both in workplaces and in society as a whole, thus necessitating action and change. The birth of these movements as well as their regular interaction within media has assisted in normalizing D&I in advertisements to a certain extent exemplifying the progression of this very environment Gen Z was brought up in (Fogarty & Riley, 2022, p. 67). The September 11, 2001 attacks became a turning point for the world in regards to what we view in the media and the precautions that must be implemented to ensure the public's safety, at this time Gen Z were very young children, and many were not yet born. Consequently, these events exposed this generation to racial tensions and discrimination from an early age as well as the violence of the world having viewed the attacks in media throughout their entire lives (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 21). Their experiences of racism towards Muslim communities due to Middle East conflicts among other tensions affecting marginalized groups have left an undeniable mark on their lives (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 29). As a result, this generation has become well-known for their commitment to strong moral and political values that hold themselves along with other generations and especially organizations accountable for maintaining morality and ethical values (Jungblut & Johnen, 2021, ch. 2).

Social responsibility, diversity, and inclusivity are important characteristics of Gen Z. Unlike previous generations; this generation expects brands to address social and political issues as well as be accountable for their actions and explicitly communicate to their consumers the actions they are placing to improve social and political issues, this is something unique to Gen Z so far due to the role the media plays in our lives today (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 31, 50). Gen Z carefully selects what brands they support and which they scrutinize ensuring that these enterprises express values similar to their own displaying a conscientious approach to consumerism. This generation's strong moral values influence their brand loyalty and purchase decisions, placing genuineness and authenticity at the forefront of priority for any form of media communication from brands. From

their early childhood until now Gen Z has grown up watching traumatic and historical events, environmental disasters, and civil unrest in media. These experiences have long-lasting impacts on young people and have brought about a generation of people yearning for positive change.

2.1.1 Gen Z's Expectations of Diversity and Inclusion

Gen Z's interest in diverse and inclusive advertising is not simply a preference but an expectation. Thus, this market demographic demands brands go above and beyond tokenistic displays of social responsibility, or performative activism, as they want brands that are genuinely committed to D&I practices and initiatives (Wang, 2021, p. 74-75). Consequently, emotional connections developed through advertisements that exhibit authenticity can create greater levels of brand loyalty and purchasing intentions (Thangavel, 2019, p. 3). On the contrary, any perceived lack of genuineness could lower engagement levels leading to negative word-of-mouth, thus necessitating honesty and transparency from brands from verbal claims to action (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 465).

In summary, the specific attributions of Gen Z and their desire for authentic representation embody the importance of honest D&I practices in advertising. Due to this generation's expectations, organizations are presented with opportunities and challenges in terms of their potential to gain more market share as well as benefiting from corporate social responsibility and the long-lasting relationships with consumers and brands that can be created.

2.1.2 Gen Z's Alignment with Lifestyle Brands

The stories that lifestyle brands design and create are those that build happiness and belonging among their consumers by visually presenting their ideal lifestyles. Lifestyle brands do not simply sell products or services; they sell stories (LimeLight Marketing, 2023, para 10). In this study, lifestyle is defined through consumers' activities, attitudes, interests, and opinions as these link them to particular lifestyle groups (Wulandari & Augustini, 2019, p. 303). Lifestyle brands focus their marketing on building deep emotional connections with their consumers, creating relationships with them to build long-lasting loyalty (Hazari & Sethna, 2022, p. 502), rooted in emotional appeal and consumer's self-image or ideal self-image. A lifestyle brand takes a step further than traditional branding techniques by associating themselves with consumers' identity thus creating a sense of attachment to the brand and the lifestyle they strive to create. With this, lifestyle brands are striving to become part of the existing life or potential aspirational lifestyle of the target market (Hazari & Sethna, 2022, p. 502).

Amongst other factors that distinguish lifestyle brands from regular brands is their long-term connection to their customer's core identity. As opposed to other brands that make use of emotional storytelling in advertising campaigns, lifestyle brands concentrate on what their users feel about as well as what they aspire for instead of focusing on the product itself

(LimeLight Marketing, 2023, para 2). This in-depth understanding of how consumers want to live enables lifestyle marketers to develop more engaging narratives that resonate on an individual level, thus creating strong emotional connections and desires for such advertised lifestyles. This way they make their customers feel supported in terms of their ambitions and values (LimeLight Marketing, 2023, para 5). The lifestyle advertisements in this study were created with Gen Z consumer's priorities in mind, such as racial diversity, inclusivity, and self-expression.

Gen Z is particularly inclined towards lifestyle brands as they appreciate more emotional connections with the brands they support. Consequently, targeted advertising is a successful strategy among Gen Z consumers in the context of lifestyle brands indicating their preference for commercials that mirror their lifestyle wants and needs (Hazari & Sethna, 2022, p. 505). Conversely, a study conducted by Vanarli (2021, p. 7) found that incorrect targeting of certain lifestyle advertisements may foster negative brand attitudes. This helps us explain why some Gen Z individuals can strong attributions toward a brand based on tedious details, this only goes further to solidify our beliefs on how branding and advertising should be well-researched and strategic (Hazari & Sethna, 2022, p. 505; Vanarli, 2021, p. 6). Since Gen Z consumes an abundance of media regularly it becomes naturally difficult to capture their attention or interest in content, making it important to have successful and well-researched marketing strategies. As digital natives, Gen Z individuals can be heavily influenced by social media hence more likely to follow companies on social media and highly value that the companies reflect their desired lifestyles (LimeLight Marketing, 2023, para 2; Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 29; McKnight & Hoefel, 2018, p. 4). This generational preference demonstrates the relevance of lifestyle brands in marketing strategies by increasing consumer loyalty and purchase intent through these tactics. Lifestyle Brands help consolidate consumer relationships on a deeper emotional level by associating them with aspirations and ideologies common to their target demographics.

2.2 Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) Model

The SOR model is a framework in psychology, that claims external stimuli (S) initiate internal processes, represented as the organism (O), leading to a specific behavioral response (R). This model shows the interaction and relationship between external factors, internal cognitive, and emotional states, and what actions come about as a result (Collins, 2023, p. 1). External stimuli are specific cues or signals that one encounters in a given environment.

Building upon the SOR model, our research seeks to clarify how exposure to D&I representation in lifestyle brand advertisements influences Gen Z consumers' subsequent brand loyalty and purchase intention. We are aiming to explore how inclusive advertisements are interpreted and reacted upon by Gen Z while taking into account their life experiences and values.

Recent findings on color-blind racial ideology among people of color have provided important insights into how cognition works concerning individuals awareness of internalized racism (Cox, 2021, p. 774). For example, a study examining personal diaries and interviews with 48 Latine, Asian, Black, and multiracial college Millennials shows mixed uses of color-blindness among POCs (Cox, 2021, p. 770-774). This shows how external stimuli interact internally with triggered cognitive processes influenced by race/ethnicity leading to responses in specific beliefs or behavior patterns. Consequently, our research design is based on the SOR model considering we hypothesize that exposure to inclusive advertising stimuli can alter cognitive and emotional states, thus influencing their behavior towards brands that they prefer over others.

2.4 Consumer Culture Theory (EJ Arnould, 2005)

According to E.J. Arnould, Consumer culture theory can be used to understand how different representations in advertisements impact brand loyalty among consumers. This theory is based on the fact that consumers are not passive recipients of advertising messages but rather they actively interpret and negotiate cultural meanings embedded in them. Thus CCT explains the role cultural meanings have in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior (Askegaard & Scott, 2013, p.141). In terms of D&I representation in lifestyle brand advertisements, these cultural meanings are exceedingly important to be aware of and consider. The people and stories depicted through these advertisements have a significant symbolic value that either resonates with or contradicts dominant cultural values and expectations toward consumers (Zong, 2024, p. 31). Similarly, as D&I issues gain more prominence in our societies today it should be recognized that these shifts are changing rapidly, and the speeds at which these changes are taking place vary from country to country. We observe this when considering that D&I initiatives have been prioritized more in Western societies due to the more diverse populations within them, resulting in our cultural focus for this study (De Meulenaer et al., 2017, p.896).

CCT allows us to look into a lens through which we can uncover how consumers attribute certain meanings to brands' social and political positions, and how these meanings impact their brand loyalty and purchase decisions (Matos et al., 2017, p.128). This also speaks to the importance of authenticity and genuineness as these attributions can create deep consumer-brand relationships (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010, p. 839). Many brands who communicate their stances on political issues often do so based on direct responses to customer demands, this can explain customers yearning for authenticity from brand communication (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010, p. 849). Conversely, when a brand's political standpoint does not match that of their consumers it erodes the trust in the relationship subsequently decreasing purchase intentions (Matos et al., 2017, p.128). This aspect must be recognized because Gen Z individuals are highly politically involved; therefore, their attitude toward brands directly influences their inclination to buy (Lutrell & McGrath, 2021, p.30).

With the use of CCT, we want to further examine how perceived genuineness and authenticity are interpreted by consumers and how this affects their loyalty towards brands. In

addition, the SOR model suggests that external stimukali such as D&I advertisements produce cognitive-emotional states within an individual that shape their behavioral response (brand loyalty and purchase intent) (Collins, 2023, p.2). Therefore, we strive to bring together these theories and understand how they interact to understand various viewpoints concerning Gen Z consumer's brand loyalty in the Western world.

2.4.1 Consumer Interpretation and Engagement

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a combination of theoretical perspectives on markets, consumer behavior, and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). In CCT culture is regarded as intricate and diverse; thus we categorize culture around common shared meanings rather than the traditional ways of classifying culture (e.g., American culture). This approach enables us to observe the dynamics of consumer-brand interactions and further explore how cultural meanings and identity shape individuals' consumer behavior (Askegaard & Scott 2013, p.141).

In terms of D&I representations in lifestyle brand advertisements, CCT offers an important lens for exploring how Gen Z consumers actively interpret and engage with such content. In the U.S., Gen Z individuals have been found to be more sensitive to brands' social-political stances leading to many Gen Z individuals having a strong willingness to disassociate from brands that advertise and promote macho, homophobic, or racist behaviors (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p. 5). This indicates that it is important to understand the various ways in which Gen Z understands and responds to D&I portrayals.

This research framework heavily borrows from different studies that explored advertising's effect on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions by looking at branded content videos, and attitudes towards a brand. One significant research study borrows its ideas from The Theory of Reasoned Action by Hill et al., (1977), where they argue that behavioral intentions are influenced by both attitudes toward behavior and subjective normative beliefs (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020; p.2). Specifically, Mackenzie and Lutz's (1989, p. 54) study noted that a positive attitude towards the brand is a vital determinant of purchase intent. This supports our H1 and H2, considering consumer attributions of genuineness and authenticity in advertisements, such as those featuring racial diversity and gender inclusion, are likely to positively increase their attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions. Moreover, a company should consider these insights to retain their Gen Z customer base as it explores the effects of diversity and inclusion representations on brand loyalty among this demographic from the standpoint of CCT.

The processes for understanding these trends can identify what factors lie behind Gen Z's engagement with D&I representations in lifestyle brand advertisements. This includes assessing how brand communication is regarded as authentic and inclusive. Furthermore, we want to understand how Gen Z interprets certain cues, what attributions are made, and how

this impacts brand loyalty and purchase decisions. It is important to examine how Gen Z interacts with D&I portrayals in advertising for a clear picture of their loyalty, preferences, and brand perceptions. Thus, we have formulated hypotheses that support positive attributions made by Gen Z on genuineness or authenticity based on D&I representation in advertisements:

> *H1a (Racial diversity Advertisement à Genuine Attribution):* The presence of racial diversity in the advertisements of lifestyle brands increases Gen Z consumers' positive attribution of genuineness, controlling for previous experience with D&I in advertising.

> *H1b (Gender Inclusion Advertisement à Genuine Attribution):* The presence of gender inclusion in the advertisements of lifestyle brands increases Gen Z consumers' positive attribution of genuineness, controlling for previous experience with D&I in advertising.

> *H2a (Racial Diversity Advertisement à Authentic Attribution):* The presence of racial diversity in the advertisements of lifestyle brands increases Gen Z consumers' positive attribution of authenticity, controlling for previous experience with D&I in advertising.

> *H2b (Gender Inclusion Advertisement à Authentic Attribution):* The presence of gender inclusion in the advertisements of lifestyle brands increases Gen Z consumers' positive attribution of authenticity, controlling for previous experience with D&I in advertising.

2.5 Attribution Theory (Fritz Heider, 1958)

Attribution theory is important for this study as it enables us to improve our understanding of consumer's cognitive processes of attributing motivations and intentions to brands (Malle & Korman, 2013, p. 10). This theory explains how people make sense of the behaviors of others including brands by inferring underlying reasons or causes. It is explained that the theory merges two main aspects; causal attribution which explains behavior, and dispositional attribution which is essentially one's assumptions of traits based on observable behavior (Malle & Korman, 2013, p. 10).

The study informs consumer behavior, particularly by exploring how consumers attribute motives or intentions to brands in relation to diverse advertising efforts. For example, when a brand implements D&I initiatives into their campaigns, some consumers may attribute genuine inclusivity motives while others interpret these actions as mere tokenistic or performative (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 465). This also helps us reveal how dangerous brand communication can be when their messaging lacks authenticity. In this regard, Gen Z largely dominates social media platforms and actively

engages with different brands making their perception of authenticity and honesty important in terms of the relationship between a brand and a customer. If Gen Z consumers perceive a campaign as being insincere or performative; negative attributions regarding the intention or motive behind the campaign will have extreme effects on consumer behavior and potentially lead to negative responses toward the brand (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 464).

2.6 Authenticity and Genuineness Attribution

When it comes to the authenticity and genuineness of D&I efforts in advertising for lifestyle brands, the theory of attribution becomes rather pertinent. Consumers tend to attribute significantly to a brand's commitment to D&I, with many studies providing evidence on how this impacts their brand loyalty (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 468).

This is uncharted territory in the existing literature that seeks to understand how past exposures to D&I representations in advertising affect consumers' beliefs regarding a brand's authenticity and dedication as it relates to D&I, especially among Gen Z consumers. Building on previous research, there have been findings that claim advertisements promoting inclusivity elicit positive perceptions among consumers which we project will increase purchase intention (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p. 2; Thangavel et al., 2019, p. 15).

2.6.1 Impact on Brand Loyalty

Attribution Theory supports our hypotheses by exemplifying how consumers' attributions shape their choices of lifestyle brands among Generation Z demographics. Based on the concepts of Attribution Theory, it is expected that positive attributions of credibility as well as authenticity (Malle & Korman, 2013, p. 11) in relation to D&I would help drive higher affinity toward lifestyle brands concerning Gen Z consumers. With these attributions being made, higher levels of brand loyalty should be implemented leading to increased purchase intentions and brand loyalty.

It has been found through research that authentic and diverse images used in advertisements have great significance for consumers particularly in Gen Z (Lutrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 30; Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 468). The need for Gen Z consumers to view themselves as well as their communities in brand messaging has led to a rise in successful campaigns where customers can relate and connect with the media. Therefore, brands have an opportunity to utilize these practices and implement more inclusive advertising that will enhance consumer engagement and organizational well-being, this also can contribute to long-lasting consumer brand relationships (Hamacher, 2022, para 3). Advertising that is genuine and authentic leads to a positive impact on consumer attributions towards brands. Brands that embrace customer values and perspectives can form stronger bonds with Gen Z customers leading to increased loyalty and purchase intentions.

Attribution Theory allows us to better understand the reasoning behind our hypotheses, we explain this using the process where Gen Z consumers are exposed to diverse and inclusive advertisements– formulate their views about those advertisements– and this increases their brand loyalty. Positive Attribution of genuineness and authenticity in D&I representation is predicted to lead to higher identification with lifestyle brands; this will ultimately increase brand loyalty and therefore drive purchase intent (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020, p.3). In addition, we introduce the concept of purchase intent which implies that positive D&I representations in advertisements result in enhanced brand loyalty and increased purchase intention. By fostering a culture of inclusivity as well as sincere engagement, organizations can also enhance consumer perceptions while driving internal engagement and organizational well-being (Hamacher, 2022 para. 2). This approach coincides with the marketing focus on understanding how effective D&I representation will alter customer attitudes as well as behaviors. Thus, H3a and H3b were developed.

> *H3a (Genuine Attribution à Loyalty):* The positive attribution of genuineness positively affects brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers, controlling for previous experience with D&I in advertising.

> *H3b (Authentic Attribution à Loyalty):* The positive attribution of authenticity positively affects brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers, controlling for previous experience with D&I in advertising.

2.6.2 Impact on Purchase Intent

Drawing from the Attribution Theory framework, the relationship between D&I representations and purchase intent is a crucial component to consider in this study. In this regard, positive consumer attribution of genuineness and authenticity in D&I advertisements is anticipated to enhance brand loyalty and significantly influence purchase intention among Generation Z individuals (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020, p. 3). Two articles revealed that authentic and diverse imagery in advertising speaks deeply to Gen Z creating a sense of connection and inclusion (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 464; Lutrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 137). Lifestyle brands depend on emotional connections because they increase their market share through long-term customer relationships. It is suggested that increased purchasing intentions will be a result of positive D&I representation in advertisements thus leading to increased brand loyalty (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020, p. 3). This creates sustainable growth enabling organizations to improve both external consumer perceptions and internal organizational well-being by aligning with the values of Gen Z and promoting inclusivity within their company culture. This led us to our fourth and final hypothesis.

> *H4 (Loyalty à Purchase Intent):* Brand loyalty positively affects purchasing intent.

2.7 Conclusion

Our study utilizes the SOR Model, Consumer Culture Theory, and Attribution Theory to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the complex interactions between D&I representation in lifestyle brand adverts and its impact on brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers. This framework guides us deeper into understanding consumer engagement, attribution processes, and sequential relationships contributing to positive brand image. Our research presents an in-depth analysis of customers' perceptions of D&I advertisements from lifestyle brands and their relationship to brand loyalty and purchase intent. Consequently, we will have randomized visual stimuli, gender inclusion/exclusion, and three types of racial diversity in advertisements followed by brand loyalty and purchase intent as measures.

White people, Non-White people (e.g., Asian, Latine, Mixed, etc.), and Black people for racial categories stem from historical race trends that acknowledge systemic racism's influence across different communities (Cox, 2021, p. 771). Our classification of these racial dynamics is also distinct in the sense that we acknowledge racism does not stem from one race nor is it directed at only one race. The research also focuses particularly on race and gender diversity which highlights the main stereotypes found in advertising which can deter consumers from buying products or services (Eisend et al., 2023, p.1-3). In taking this route, we hope to provide a more diverse understanding of racial diversity and take into account the differences between race and ethnicity.

Our theoretical frame provides a foundation for investigating consumer behavior regarding D&I representations in marketing. This enables us to derive useful insights from consumer responses and marketing strategies through hypothesis testing to measure the effect of inclusive advertisements on Gen Z loyalty within Western cultural contexts. Our research aims to add valuable insights to marketing knowledge and buyer conduct with educated suggestions relevant to D&I advertising strategies.

Word Count: 4,408

3 Research design and methods

3.1 Justification of Methods

The research design we chose is an experimental survey, which is a structured approach to collecting quantitative data. Conducting quantitative research will help to precisely measure and analyze the variables such as racial diversity and gender inclusion within advertisements. The reason why this research design involves an experimental survey is that it allows for objective comparisons between responses made by participants, thus bringing out patterns and relationships between perceptions of authenticity and genuineness. An experimental survey was selected in order to control and manipulate variables completely. As part of this research project, six visual stimuli were employed under different conditions based on varying racial diversity and gender inclusion factors. By using this experimental survey technique, the study examined how advertisements impact Gen Z attributions of genuineness and authenticity, and the subsequent variation in brand loyalty and purchase intention. A between-subjects design was chosen which enables each participant to encounter just one advertisement eliminating possible order effects or biases that may interfere with their answers. This methodology increases the reliability of the results as respondents are not exposed to multiple conditions. Furthermore, randomizing the presentation of the advertisements reduces systematic bias which enhances our validity.

3.2 Population and Sampling Strategy

For this study, Gen Z adults aged 18 to 27 years old from Western backgrounds were selected as the target participants because they align with our objectives for this research which in turn will help ensure that the findings are relevant. The target sample size for this research was 180 participants; this number was chosen in order to ensure a more holistic understanding of the effects of each individual stimulus (Lakens, 2022, pg. 2,11).

Four sampling methods were used for recruiting participants: convenience sampling; quota sampling; snowballing technique and Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Convenience Sampling targeted individuals who were easily reachable, while Quota sampling was applied to ensure demographic characteristics of Gen Z were rightfully represented. Snowball Sampling involved asking existing participants if they know any other person(s) who could also take part in this research, further improving our study with more diverse perspectives (Jones et al., 2013, p. 5). MTurk acted as an additional means where more responses could be obtained if previous methods proved insufficient.

3.3 Data Collection

The survey link was distributed across social media platforms (e.g., Instagram and Facebook) from April 26 to June 5, 2024. Stories were used along with main posts to encourage sharing the link to

reach as many people as possible. These two platforms were used because they are popular among Gen Z (Wang, 2021, p. 77).

An additional 150 participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) due to insufficient numbers per stimulus group after data cleaning, the use of MTurk allowed for every stimulus group to have a minimum of 30 participants.

The survey was released and created using Qualtrics and offered in English offering other languages for translation; however, we acknowledge that translation inaccuracies may have affected certain language groups. This was designed to collect information about attributions toward D&I representation in lifestyle brand advertisements and variables related to brand loyalty and purchase intent.

3.4 Operationalization

In this study, a 2 by 3 contingency table significance test was used to measure Gen Z consumers' interpretations of D&I in advertising (visual stimuli), and how genuineness and authenticity were attributed or not. This table tests hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b concerning attribution. The five-point Likert scale measured brand loyalty and purchase intention for H3a, H3b, and H4. The reason why this response scale was chosen is because according to Mount (2019, p.1), the Likert Scale designed by social scientist Rensis Likert has been widely adopted in survey research due to its ability to capture subtle nuances contained within responses reflecting attitudes, which coincides well with the aim of our study. The five response options are ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). They were selected because they can assist us in measuring the level of attachment one has with a particular brand; interpret genuineness and authenticity in different advertisements; and indicate the degree of loyalty one may feel. The brand loyalty scale is made up of ten items, all statements pertain to brand loyalty and are as follows, "This brand is honest", and "This brand's success is my success". One item from this scale was omitted: "I would consider sharing my good experiences with this brand on social media.", it was omitted since it does not pertain to the relevance of our objectives. We added another statement to measure the extent to which purchase intention changes after seeing an advertisement featuring D&I components. This statement is: "Based on the previous advertisements, I would be inclined to purchase products from this brand."

A manipulation check was inserted into the survey, placed after participants viewed the visual stimuli. This was added to measure if participants had been correctly manipulated or not, the respondents were required to respond by selecting one of the statements such as, "I believe the advertisement portrayed racial diversity inclusively." and "I believe gender diversity was inclusively depicted in the advertisement." The reason behind using 'inclusively' in these items is to emphasize the importance of respectfulness and accuracy when displaying such representations. We validated the survey during the pre-testing phase and made changes as required. The research instrument aimed to get feedback on D&I representation in lifestyle brand advertisements and variables linked with brand loyalty. Responses from the pre-test were excluded from the study, these were identified under

the "What is your cultural background?" question, where they responded with "test", "TEST", or "Test".

Independent Variables

Our independent variables for this research are racial diversity (RD) and gender inclusion (GI) in the context of lifestyle brand advertisements. The variables are displayed in the table below to provide a visual aid, check Appendix A. Gender Inclusion had two 'levels' which are the presence and absence of gender inclusion, these are then put into context against three types of racial diversity, featuring type 0 (White people, no RD), 1 (Non-White people, RD), and 2 (Black people, RD), both types 1 and 2 feature at least one White person to serve as the control for the visuals.

IV1: *Racial diversity*
IV2: *Gender inclusivity*

Table 1.

Contingency Table Significance Test (Race & Gender Identity)

	White	Non-white	Black
Gender inclusion	1	2	3
Gender exclusion	4	5	6

The table above shows the six experimental conditions we are using in this study, with each number being of a specific condition. We created these images using Adobe Firefly (AI) as documented in Appendix A. Readers can view the exact visual stimuli produced and used in this study, by looking at Appendix A.

Dependent Variables

Our study utilizes four different dependent variables, for H1a and b we use *genuineness* attribution which serves as a measure for our participants' perceptions of the level of honesty and genuine motives a brand has toward implementing D&I efforts as seen in the (fictional) lifestyle brand advertisements in the survey. We will measure genuineness by stating, "I would likely perceive this brand to be genuine.", participants will respond on a 1 to 5 Likert scale. Our second dependent variable is *authenticity* attribution which was used to measure participants' perceptions of the level of sincerity and true commitment to D&I efforts of the lifestyle brand in the survey. This will be measured using a statement, such as "I would likely perceive this brand to be authentic." measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Our third dependent variable is *brand loyalty*, as previously discussed this will be measured using a *brand loyalty* scale (see section 3.4 for further details on *brand loyalty*). In this context brand loyalty is a variable used to measure participants' emotional

attachment, level of trust, and commitment to the (fictional) lifestyle brand featured in the survey. This will be measured using a nine-item scale. Our final dependent variable is purchase intent, this variable is selected to measure the level of inclination participants feel toward purchasing products or services from the (fictional) lifestyle brand after viewing the advertisement. This will also utilize a five-point Likert scale, participants will be given the following statement, "Based on the previous advertisement, I am inclined to purchase this product or service."

DV1*: Genuineness* Attribution

DV2: *Authenticity* Attribution

DV3*: Brand Loyalty*

DV4*: Purchase Intent*

Control Variable

To evaluate past experiences with D&I in advertisements and their subsequent brand perceptions, we included a control variable named "*Previous Experience* with D&I in Advertisements." Attribution theory views consumers as attributing motives or intentions to brands depending on various signals or cues within an advertisement. Participants, "Previous Experience with D&I in Advertisements" is the control variable as it measures potential prior encounters with this type of representation in advertising and the impact the *previous experience* has on brand perceptions. The control variable will be used for H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b.

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis

The quantitative data collected using the survey was analyzed using IBM SPSS software. Initially, descriptive statistics were used to summarize responses from the participants' surveys which gives us an overall idea regarding the sample's characteristics.

Inferential statistics were applied to examine relationships between independent variables and dependent variables. Two analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) tests were performed to see how genuineness attribution impacts authenticity while controlling for *previous experience* with D&I among participants. We also conducted two one-way ANOVAs for both H1 and H2, as well as post hoc analyses using pairwise tables to verify our findings of the ANCOVAs. Then simple linear regression analyses were conducted to measure the relationship between genuineness and authenticity as well as brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Word count: 1,582

4   Results

Sample Description

Initially, 380 participants took part in the study. To ensure our criteria were met, a screening process was put in place. Participants who failed to meet these criteria were excluded from our analyses, thus our final sample size was 240 participants.

The criteria implemented were as follows: participants were required to complete at least 80% of the survey and remain active for at least 30 seconds. Some respondents did not answer any questions following the visual stimuli, with few answering up to only four questions past the same point. Thus these participants were removed due to incomplete responses, as without the data relating to the visual stimuli and brand loyalty, their data became irrelevant. Finally, two additional participants were eliminated as they did not view any visual stimuli. Participants who did not answer questions regarding their age were omitted from the study due to a lack of certainty on whether or not they met the age requirements (18 to 27 years old). Considering this criterion after data cleaning we were left with a sufficient sample size.

4.1 Hypothesis 1a and 1b: Impact of Racial and Gender Inclusion on Genuineness

We conducted a two-way ANCOVA to determine the differences between H1a and H1b, with perceived *genuineness* as the dependent variable, and *gender inclusion* (GI) and *racial diversity* (RD) as independent variables, whilst controlling for *previous experience* with GI and RD in advertisements. The results showed us that while controlling for *previous experience* with D&I, there was a statistically significant effect between *racial diversity* and perceived *genuineness*, $F(2, 227) = 6.96, p = .001$), partial $\eta^2 = .05$, this shows that including *racial diversity* makes an advertisement perceived as more *genuine* compared to advertisements featuring no *racial diversity*. However, according to our findings interaction effects were not significant between *gender inclusion* in advertisements and perceived *genuineness*, controlling for *previous experience, $F(1, 227) = .00, p = .992$. We found that the interaction between gender inclusion and racial diversity was insignificant while controlling for *previous experience, $F(2, 227) = 1.12, p = .326$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Thus, we accept H1a and reject H1b. Refer to Graph 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 for a visual representation of the interaction effects between *racial diversity* type and *gender inclusion* on perceived *genuineness*.

A post-hoc test using pairwise comparisons was conducted. The post hoc analysis results showed us that advertisements featuring Black and White people (type 2 of *racial diversity*) were not perceived as significantly more *genuine* than those featuring only White people (type 0 of *racial diversity*), with a mean difference of 0.42, $p = .009$. Advertisements with Non-White and White people (level 1 of racial diversity) were not perceived as significantly more genuine than those with White people only, with a mean difference of 0.44, $p = .003$. The difference between advertisements with Black and White people and Non-White and White people was not found to be significant, with a mean difference of 0.01, $p = 1$. With this, we find that the significant difference in perceived

genuineness is mainly between advertisements containing Black and White people (type 2) and only White people (type 0), and Non-White and White people (type 1) and only White people (type 0).

An additional one-way ANOVA was conducted to verify the validity of the pairwise post hoc assessment. There was a statistically significant difference between *genuineness* attribution and *racial diversity* groups $(F(2, 236) = 5.74, p = .004$. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that *genuineness* is statistically significant with advertisements of White people only and Non-White people $(3.38 \pm 1.14, p = .007)$, Black and White people $(3.82 \pm .91, p = .018)$, while Black and Non-White people showed no significance with $(3.83 \pm .84, p = .997)$.

Table 4.1.1

Descriptive and Estimate Statistics for Genuineness Attribution

Means and Standard Deviations for Racial Diversity and Gender Inclusion for
Inclusion for *Genuineness* Attribution

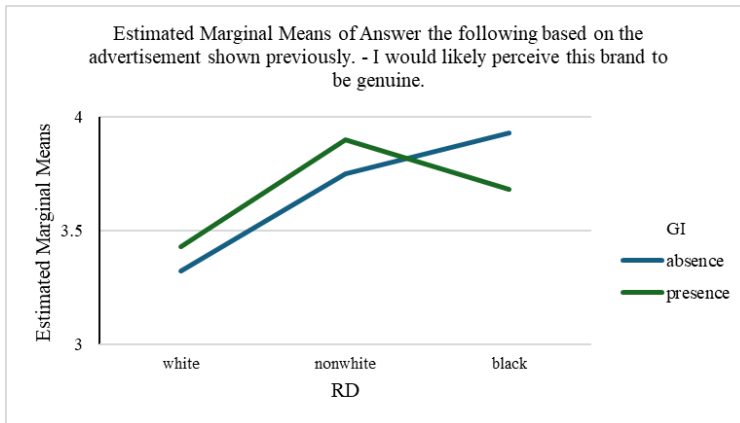| Gender Inclusion	Absence			Presence		
Racial Diversity	White	Non-White	Black	White	Non-White	Black
M	3.22	2.76	3.91	3.49	3.89	3.73
(SD)	1.19	0.87	0.81	1.12	0.83	1
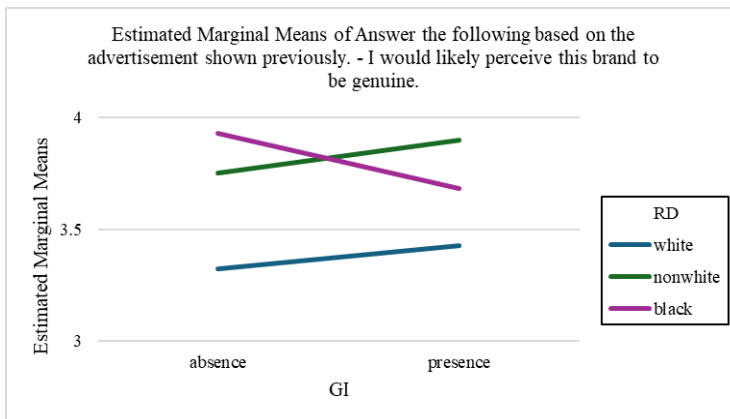
Figure 4.1.2

Plot Graph of Perceived *Genuineness* and *D&I* Interaction

Note: This graph shows the interaction between gender inclusion (x-axis) and racial diversity (y-axis) when asked about perceived genuineness.

Figure 4.1.3

Plot Graph of Perceived *Genuineness* and *D&I* Interaction

Note: This graph shows the interaction between gender inclusion (x-axis) and racial diversity (y-axis) when asked about perceived genuineness.

4.2 Hypothesis 2a and 2b: Impact of Racial Diversity and Gender Inclusion on Perceived Authenticity

We conducted a two-way ANCOVA to find the differences between H2a and H2b, with perceived *authenticity* as the dependent variable, and *gender inclusion* (GI) and *racial diversity* (RD) as independent variables, controlling for *previous experience* with GI and RD in advertisements. The results showed that whilst controlling for *previous experience* with D&I, there was a statistically significant effect between *racial diversity* and perceived *authenticity*, $F(2, 227) = 5.65$, $p = .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, this shows us that including *racial diversity* makes an advertisement perceived as more *authentic* compared to advertisements featuring no *racial diversity*. However, according to our findings interaction effects were insignificant between *gender inclusion* in advertisements and perceived *authenticity*, controlling for *previous experience*, $F(1, 227) = .07$, $p = .783$. We found that the interaction between *gender inclusion* and *racial diversity* was insignificant while controlling for *previous experience*, $F(2, 227) = .59$, $p = .550$. With this, we accept H2a, and H2b is rejected. Refer to Graph 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 for a visual representation of the interaction effects between *racial diversity* type and *gender inclusion* on perceived *authenticity*.

A post-hoc test using pairwise comparisons was conducted. The post hoc analysis results showed us that advertisements featuring Black and White people (type 2 of *racial diversity*) were not perceived as significantly more *authentic* than those featuring only White people (type 0 of *racial diversity*), with a mean difference of 0.55, $p = .007$. Advertisements with Non-White and White people (level 1 of *racial diversity*) were not perceived as significantly more *authentic* than those with White people only, with a mean difference of 0.39, $p = .027$. The difference between advertisements with Black and White people and Non-White and White people was not significant, with a mean

difference of 0.1, *p* = 1. With this, we find that significant differences in perceived *authenticity* are mainly between advertisements containing Black and White people only (type 2).

An additional one-way ANOVA was conducted to verify the validity of the pairwise post hoc assessment. There was a statistically significant difference between *authenticity* attribution and *racial diversity* groups *(F* (2, 236) = 5.67, *p* = .004. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that *authenticity* is statistically significant with advertisements of White people only and Non-White people (3.63 ± 1.26, *p* = .051), Black and White people (4.2 ± .83, *p* = .004), while Black and Non-White people showed no significance with (4.01 ± 1.03, *p* = .533).

Table 4.2.1

Descriptive and Estimate Statistics for Authenticity Attribution

Means and Standard Deviations for Racial Diversity and Gender Inclusion for *Authenticity* Attribution
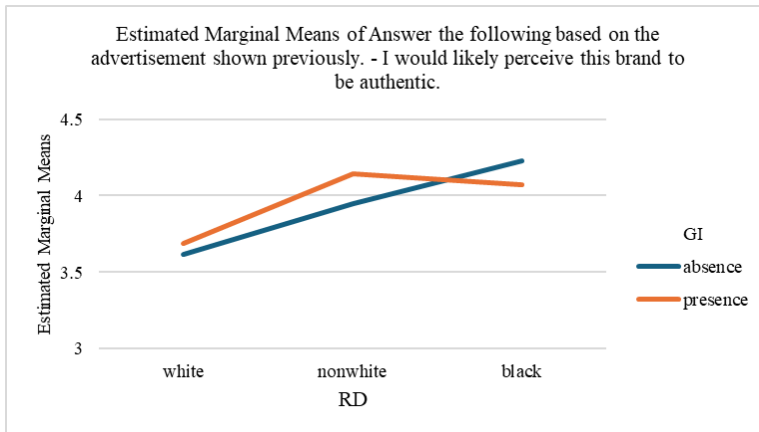
Gender Inclusion	Absence			Presence		
Racial Diversity	White	Non-White	Black	White	Non-White	Black
M	3.5	3.86	4.22	3.75	4.16	4.22
(SD)	1.2	1.13	0.65	1.31	0.92	0.97
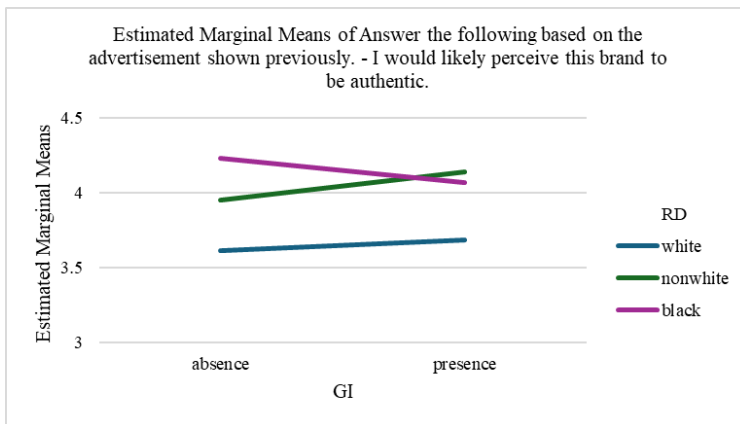
Figure 4.2.2

Plot Graph of Perceived *Authenticity* and *D&I* Interaction

Note: This graph shows the interaction between gender inclusion (x-axis) and racial diversity (y-axis) when asked about perceived authenticity.

Figure 4.2.3

Plot Graph of Perceived *Authenticity* and *D&I* Interaction

Note: This graph shows the interaction between gender inclusion (y-axis) and racial diversity (x-axis) when asked about perceived authenticity.

4.3 Hypothesis 3a: Perceived Genuineness and Brand Loyalty

A simple linear regression was conducted to help predict levels of *brand loyalty* based on perceived *genuineness*. The simple linear regression was found to be significant with $F(1, 238) = 343.26$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .59, indicating that perceived *genuineness* explained approximately 59% of the variance in *brand loyalty*. Perceived *genuineness* positively predicted *brand loyalty* ($b^* = 1.24$, t(238) = 9.4, $p < .001$), 95% CI [.98, 1.51]. In other words, for each unit increase of perceived *genuineness* on average *brand loyalty* increases by 1.24 units.

The regression coefficient (b^*) estimated the change in *brand loyalty* for one unit change in perceived *genuineness* while keeping other variables constant. The confidence interval being 95% indicates the precision of the estimate. The large t-value and small p-value suggest a highly significant relationship between perceived *genuineness* and *brand loyalty*, thus supporting Hypothesis 3a.

4.4 Hypothesis 3b: Perceived Authenticity and Brand Loyalty

A simple linear regression was conducted to help predict levels of *brand loyalty* based on perceived *authenticity*. The simple linear regression model was found to be significant with $F(1, 237) = 465.18$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .66, indicating that perceived *authenticity* explained approximately 66% of the variance in *brand loyalty*. Perceived *authenticity* significantly predicted *brand loyalty* ($b^* = 1.19$, t(237) = 10.21, $p < .001$), 95% CI [.96, 1.42]. In other words, for each unit increase of perceived genuineness on average brand loyalty increases by 1.19 units.

The regression coefficient (b*) estimated the change in *brand loyalty* per unit change in perceived *authenticity* while keeping other variables constant. The confidence interval is 95% which

indicates the precision of the estimate. The large t-value and small p-value suggest a very significant relationship between perceived *authenticity* and *brand loyalty;* thus we accept Hypothesis 3b.

4.5 Hypothesis 4: Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intent

A simple linear regression was conducted to help assess the relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intent. The simple linear regression model was found to have significance, $F(1, 237) = 297.67$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .55, indicating that brand loyalty explained approximately 55% of the variance in purchase intent. Brand loyalty significantly predicted purchase intent, ($b^* = 1.5$, $t(237) = 11.68$, $p < .001$), 95% CI [1.24, 1.75]. In other words, for each unit increase in purchase intent on average brand loyalty increases by 1.5 units.

The regression coefficient (b^*) estimated the change in *brand loyalty* per unit change in *purchase intent* while keeping other variables constant. The confidence interval is 95% which shows the precision of the estimate. The large t-value and small p-value suggest a highly significant relationship between *purchase intent* and *brand loyalty;* thus we accept Hypothesis 4.

Word Count: 1,497

5   Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings in Relation to the social-cultural Context of Gen Z

The objective of this study was to explore the interactions between Gen Z brand loyalty, purchase intent, D&I representations in advertising, and the attributions of genuineness and authenticity. This research focuses specifically on lifestyle brands and Gen Z from Western cultures, we found that when there is racial diversity present in an advertisement of our (fictional) lifestyle brand; genuineness and authenticity were attributed to the brand. Interestingly, we found that there were interaction effects between White and Black people as well as White and Non-White people. However, when Black and Non-White people in advertisements were compared there was no significant difference in people's interpretations of racial diversity. We can attribute this to the fact that racial diversity among Gen Z is viewed as anyone that is not White, thus any minority outside of that category is considered to represent racial diversity, which is the main priority concerning D&I efforts in the eyes of Gen Z. However, gender inclusivity did not show the same effect under the same conditions, which could suggest that over time, gender inclusion has become a normative practice, resulting in attributions and D&I interpretations of gender inclusion being somewhat diluted.

With this being the environment in which Gen Z has been brought up in, we can infer that Gen Z no longer views gender inclusion in advertising as anything particularly special, simply expected, this would align with their upbringing and the state of the world at the time combined with their constant access to inclusive media (Fogarty & Riley, 2022, p. 67). The MeToo movement which started gaining popularity in 2017, worked towards encouraging women to speak out about sexual misconduct especially those encountered within workplace settings, subsequently inspiring conversation surrounding the topic, especially among Gen Z women. With the majority of Gen Z being teenagers at this time, many young people were watching protests, trials, and other forms of feminist media online. Considering this, many organizations at the time took action in response to the MeToo movement, by implementing stricter policies in terms of sexual harassment and gender inclusion initiatives, as a result, we now find ourselves with a generation who perceive gender inclusion not as something extraordinary but rather just a requirement. At around the same time, Black Lives Matter began to gain traction with videos of police brutality against Black people going viral on social media. This contributed greatly to raising awareness regarding racism and the importance of racial diversity, thus leading Gen Z to be more susceptible to racial diversity in advertising.

The study also uncovered the attribution of authenticity in advertisements that include or exclude racial diversity and gender inclusion. According to the results, the presence of racial diversity in an advertisement is perceived by Gen Z to be more authentic. However, gender inclusion has little effect on authenticity. This mirrors our findings in regards to genuineness through which we found that for this generation genuineness and authenticity are most likely perceived through the

inclusion of racial diversity above all else. We investigated further to find any associations between perceived authenticity and genuineness regarding increased brand loyalty among Gen Z. We were able to confirm that Gen Z's attributions of genuineness and authenticity do lead to increased brand loyalty. This embodies the importance of trust and authenticity in advertising concerning D&I efforts. If brands can ensure such practices are implemented, it will allow for the creation of long-lasting consumer brand relationships with this demographic. This generation's empathetic nature is derived from their exposure to major events through media, resulting in a deep understanding of the importance of having compassion for others, regardless of their differences from oneself. This exposure to such diverse perspectives allows this generation to learn strong moral and ethical values surrounding humility, which has become the reasoning behind their need to support brands that share these values.

These findings have shown positive interactions between brand loyalty and purchase. This shows the vital role D&I plays in shaping consumer perceptions in today's globalized marketplace. The outcomes also draw attention to the need for advertisers and marketers to embrace D&I and capitalize on these strategies to create strong emotional connections with Gen Z consumers, thus cultivating long-term brand loyalty. This finding supports previous studies that uncovered that diverse inclusive advertisements do have positive effects on consumer perceptions toward brands (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020, para 4; Thangavel et al., 2019, p. 15). With this, we recognize the importance of racial diversity in increasing brand loyalty and purchase intent among Gen Z consumers.

5.1.1 Consumerism and Explanation

The rise of movements like Black Lives Matter has brought attention to issues concerning racial diversity. For example, Gen Z is the first generation after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the U.S. to grow up amid increased discrimination and violence against people of different races, religions, or nationalities (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 29). This includes witnessing racism directed towards Muslim communities in relation to conflicts in the Middle East as well as other problems faced by other marginalized groups. Such events occurred during an age when most people, including children, were beginning to have access to almost all forms of media due to the rapid increase in the use of the internet. Consequently, Gen Z has been subject to watching several traumatic historical events such as civil unrest and environmental disasters, take place online, repeatedly in school or on their own,

According to Luttrell and McGrath (2021, p.4) as well as McKnight and Hoefel (2018, p. 16), being exposed to so much adversity and crises has led many members of Gen Z to yearn for positive change, for themselves and the rest of the world. They have strong moral compasses; and hold themselves accountable along with other generations when encouraging others to maintain and implement morally sound standards for themselves and the brands

they support. This commitment becomes particularly apparent when it comes to branding, as Gen Z is particularly selective with what brands they support and do not support concerning their consumption. This practice demonstrates their conscious approach to consumerism, they are not easily convinced by performative activism, and simply demand that brands have genuine and authentic commitments to D&I initiatives, internally and externally. Brands can earn the trust and loyalty of Gen Z by recognizing what Gen Z stands for and by genuinely embodying these values themselves. Marketers can benefit greatly from these findings, so they know how to best engage with Gen Z and gain their loyalty, trust, and ultimately business.

All in all, Gen Z's unique socio-culture demands authentic representation within advertising campaigns; failure to do so could lead marketers to fail within this market demographic. When brands demonstrate their understanding of the unique experiences had by this generation it allows them to gain trust for the brand-consumer relationship. Advertisers should incorporate diversity into all aspects of communication aimed toward reaching members of Gen Z. Considering these findings, brands have a window of opportunity to create deep long-lasting relationships with Gen Z consumers, this relationship is only continuing to increase in value due to their growing purchase power and larger share of the market.

5.2 Discussion concerning Theoretical Framework

The following section will delve deeper into the findings' relevance to our theoretical framework. We will first discuss Attribution Theory and then Consumer Culture Theory.

5.2.1 Attribution Theory

For this study, we utilized Attribution Theory to gain a better understanding of the internal cognitive processes that result in consumers making attributions to brands based on advertisements. This research adds to existing knowledge regarding Attribution Theory within the consumer psychology and behavior contexts. In our analysis, we focused on causal attribution which refers to consumers' interpretations about what causes brands to behave in specific ways through their advertisement campaigns. Perception levels regarding how authentic or genuine a particular company or product is perceived significantly predict people's loyalty toward the brand (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 464). Therefore, companies should utilize D&I advertising to enhance loyalty among consumers by reflecting Gen Z's values and expectations in their internal and external business practices, further cultivating lasting relationships with consumers. This means that advertisers must show various ethnicities, races, genders, and identities in their advertisements to ensure they are authentically representing many demographics of people, making marginalized groups feel a sense of belonging and value.

In summary, this study reiterates the need for genuine representation in modern advertising especially with regards to D&I. Brands can establish strong relationships with Gen Z consumers that cultivate trust and loyalty if they adopt authentic and inclusive marketing strategies based on the principles of attribution theory.

5.2.3 Consumer Culture Theory

In this study, we applied CCT to investigate how the unique shared meanings among Gen Z or the consumer culture of Gen Z influence their responses and interpretations of D&I representations in advertising. Gen Z has been brought up in a digital era of time where globalization and connection with millions across the globe being a tap away has become extremely normalized. These experiences have led this generation to be much more informed on world events than previous generations and have developed a strong preference towards brands that reflect their worldviews, values, and ideals (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 125). Brands can utilize this by creating and implementing proper D&I initiatives and releasing advertisements advocating for D&I while reflecting genuine portrayals of diverse identities and experiences of Gen Z consumers and lifestyle brands. In doing this, brands can attribute themselves to the qualities that Gen Z seeks, ensuring that cultural values and social responsibility practices are upheld. Considering the lens of CCT, we can observe that Gen Z values authenticity, genuineness, and inclusivity rather highly. This generation's increased awareness of social responsibility and their digital native nature have placed them in the unique position of having a very niche consumer culture. Gen Z prioritizes brands that talk about D&I, practice D&I, and promote D&I.

Brands that can successfully integrate positive and progressive company cultures into their business practices have a great advantage over companies that choose to not capitalize on this opportunity (Thangavel, 2019, p. 15). Gen Z's socially responsible culture allows brands to get ahead within the market by emulating such beliefs. Gen Z is becoming very powerful, with their strong viewpoints and increased purchasing power, companies on positive terms with Gen Z can thrive in the upcoming years.

5.3 Practical Implications

According to the results, brands that want a share in the market, relevance among Gen Z, or those that are seeking to create long-term consumer-brand relationships should give priority to genuine and authentic D&I representations in their marketing strategies. In doing so, brands can partake in bettering societal norms for the greater good, and also capitalize on the competitive advantage that comes with genuine and authentic advertising (Hamacher, 2022, para 6). The fact that this generation loves brands with the same values reveals the significance of up-to-date D&I tactics. In cultivating brand loyalty and increased purchase intent. This research also shows the risks encountered when brands release advertisements deemed as performative activism. Recent boycotts have shown how

powerful Gen Z truly is. There have been recent boycotts taking place since October 7th of 2023 against McDonald's and Starbucks due to their involvement in business activities supporting unfavorable practices, not typically in alignment with Gen Z values, this is in regard to the Israel-Gaza conflict (Lucas, 2024, para 1). These boycotts have made significant impacts on both companies, McDonald's shares have dropped by 4%, while Starbucks shares have declined by about 2% in a week as a result of these boycotts (Lucas, 2024, para 2). Gen Z uncovered the brand's associations with Israel and began to announce and encourage others to boycott across social media platforms.

This being said it is important that brands that cater to Gen Z make sure their marketing efforts have a strong emphasis on authentic D&I representation, to meet this generation's expectations. However, this should be approached with great caution because capitalizing on what a brand truly stands for is entirely different from creating outward values that do not come from the core.

No generation has been more exposed to branding than Gen Z through pressure to create your brand on social media, which has led to higher demands towards brands (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 30). Starbucks and McDonald's serve as case studies demonstrating why it is essential for businesses considering political brand communication strategies alongside wider social responsibility initiatives should be aware of the potential risks involved. Researchers have found that political brand communication when companies advocate specific political positions could prove dangerous and thus should be approached cautiously (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010, p. 839; Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 464). According to Jungblut and Johnen (2022, ch. 3), there are two kinds of political affiliations or opinions from the consumer perspective — boycotting and buycotting. Buycotting refers to consumers that go to support brands and companies because they agree with the brand's political affiliations (Kam & Deichert, 2020, p. 72), it was found that boycotting significantly outweighs buycotting, as we can see with McDonald's and Starbucks today.

This collective position shows how sincere this generation is about obtaining social justice, genuineness and authenticity matter significantly when it comes to D&I initiatives. They have had broader global exposure due to their digital native nature, which has made them more conscious surrounding global issues (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 31). This sense of belonging on a digital level has allowed Gen Z to obtain a unique and modern perspective on consumption today, and this will only continue to evolve, it is in the hands of brands and marketers today to decide how they will navigate these phenomena in the future.

5.4 Academic Implications

In the context of academia, this research contributes to consumer psychology and behavior by focusing on the uniqueness of Gen Z consumers. This research shows us how important it is to consider cultural and social contexts when shaping or understanding consumers' expectations, actions, or judgments regarding products and brands. We used the SOR model, Attribution Theory,

and CCT which presented us with a holistic framework and approach to understanding the ways Gen Z interacts with brands and D&I representation in advertisements. Our research has relevant information for marketing and consumer psychology scholars regarding how to better grasp the internal cognitive processes of consumers and how these perceptions can be further understood in other contexts.

Scholars can further this research by uncovering findings regarding these trends at different stages of consumers' lives, whether this is different generations or following Gen Z over time. This would allow for interesting insights into how there may be shifts in perceptions under varying circumstances brought about by shifts in society, politics, or age. Other fields like psychology may borrow from these results especially when looking into relationships and dynamics between buyers and sellers and what implications may come of this.

All in all, there are many academic implications from our study in regard to consumer behavior, psychology, brand strategy, and social responsibility. In focusing on the role authenticity and genuineness play in D&I representations, our research provides a baseline for researchers and academics who want to explore the different strategies possible to properly engage with and understand this demographic.

5.5 Limitations

This study may have produced interesting findings, but it is not free of limitations. The sample strived to be representative of Gen Z consumers from Western cultural backgrounds; considering this if other cultures had been included in this study it could have provided interesting findings regarding other cultural contexts and have been beneficial considering the more globalized approach to business that is present today. Future research should look into having a wider range of participants in terms of their cultural backgrounds so that they can better understand how D&I representations affect different cultures.

The survey was done in English and could be translated into other languages; nevertheless, the translations used during this process might not have been entirely accurate or clear leading to misunderstandings among respondents who are non-native speakers of English thereby creating some risk of bias. Therefore, future studies on an international scale should consider including alternative translation services alongside pretesting surveys with various language options in order to achieve maximum clarity as well as consistency.

Additionally, self-reported data was collected which naturally can lead to biases because of the nature of self-reporting not being completely reliable. To overcome these limitations, we suggest either behavioral observations or a qualitative approach in the form of interviews which could reveal a more multi-faceted understanding regarding the visual stimuli and potentially reduce biases. Furthermore, although the between-subject design used in our research helps reduce order effects we were unable to observe changes over time within individuals which would have helped establish a

deeper understanding of the development stages regarding perception towards D&I representation in advertisements thus affecting brand loyalty patterns eventually associated with them over longer periods.

Finally, we used Qualtrics because of the wide distribution options, due to its nature, some demographic groups like people without internet access or those less tech-savvy might have been excluded, thus limiting generalization ability beyond digital divide-related issues. Consequently, future researchers can consider employing various ways of gathering data including face-to-face interviews along with surveys so that they can reach more people from different contexts and obtain richer findings pertaining to certain reasonings behind responses that cannot be captured through a single method like a survey.

5. 6 Future Research

Considering the limitations of this study, there are a few suggestions that might be useful in future research to dive further into D&I representations in advertising and their effect on Gen Z consumers. It would be useful to incorporate members from various cultural backgrounds as this could unveil differences in Gen Z from a global perspective and how brands and companies running globally can optimize their marketing practices. This could also deliver intriguing insights valuable for analysts and organizations working in today's globalized marketplace.

As stated in the limitations section, future research is highly encouraged to explore the intricacies of furthering this research in a broader cultural context. Researchers could conduct this study using comparisons of multiple cultures or simply two. This would be very beneficial practically and academically, considering how globalized society has become today. Another area worth investigating is other diversity dimensions apart from race and gender inclusion such as age, mental and physical disabilities, or the LGBTQIA+ community, since these demographics may also have an impact on how Gen Z perceives brands. More inclusive practices as we know are becoming more important for brands and companies today, this being said more diverse representations outside of racial diversity and gender inclusion are very important to be considered for businesses and would be highly valuable for research. Nonetheless, little research has been done on advertising campaigns that speak directly with various marginalized groups, doing so could guide brands and companies in how to create more inclusive and authentically representative advertisements. Such communities are often neglected an example of a marginalized group is, deaf people who cannot access many movies, advertisements, and other forms of media because they cannot hear content thus requiring more accessible modes of media. Exploring other variables such as the ones listed above could uncover interesting insights into how different marginalized groups respond to D&I representations in the advertising of lifestyle brands.

Conducting a longitudinal study could help follow changes that take place over time in Gen Z's attitude towards D&I presented through advertising. For instance, it may demonstrate whether initial positive attributes of genuineness and authenticity do eventually result in sustained brand

loyalty or purchase intent behaviors among this demographic. In addition, self-reports should be backed up with actual behaviors which would mean also looking at what these individuals buy or their behaviors on social media which may give a better understanding of customer behavior without any biases coming from an individual's report alone. Another approach could involve carrying out similar studies longitudinally, but with different generations such as Millennials or Generation Alpha which could allow us to see development trends regarding life stage and age along with shifts brought about by evolving times in one's environment, thus unveiling insights into how people change their views regarding authenticity and genuineness in branding as they grow older given various societal contexts.

Finally, utilizing quantitative research and complimenting this with qualitative research to conduct a mixed-methods approach could prove very insightful. This mixed-method approach could help in unveiling more information that pertains to context-specific perceptions and reasonings that could influence consumer behaviors. This study used quantitative methods because they provided measurable findings while reducing order bias through visual stimulus; however, qualitative methods could complement this research design quite well by addressing the limitation of not being able to see beyond multiple choice question responses, thus in-depth interviews or focus groups could allow for deeper meanings attached to brands by individuals to be revealed. Some individuals might have certain experiences or prejudices that make them view certain advertisements in a particular light without others' knowledge unless focus groups or interviews were conducted. In future investigations, researchers should therefore examine how these representations affect responses among consumers who represent different backgrounds as this will enable advertisers to better understand what appeals most to the diversified markets.

Conclusion

Our research dove into the unique relationships between Gen Z and lifestyle brands. More specifically we explored the attributions of genuineness and authenticity, and how these attributions impact people's levels of brand loyalty and purchase intention. We utilized theoretical frameworks such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, Attribution Theory, and Consumer Culture Theory (CTT) which enabled us to understand Gen Z consumers' internal cognitive processes and perceptions that resulted in specific attributions and consumer behaviors. This research uncovers the importance for brands and companies to take action and implement genuinely and authentically motivated D&I initiatives in their business practices and advertisements when marketing to the Gen Z demographic. We found that racial diversity plays a significant role in positively impacting attributions of genuineness and authenticity in D&I lifestyle brand advertisements. Considering lifestyle brands that target Gen Z, it is extremely important to understand that brands must authentically reflect the values and aspirations of this demographic group in order for them to not simply support your brand, but advocate for your brand. Our study has unveiled the importance of trust, transparency, and honesty in the context of consumer brand communication, particularly when

advertising with D&I representations. Brands should put efforts forth to better align their values with Gen Z consumer priorities and values, brands have the opportunity to cultivate long-lasting consumer-brand relationships that can ultimately lead to long-term business success, maintaining positive relationships with Gen Z from a branding perspective will only become increasingly more valuable. We highly encourage brands to consider these components of modern marketing moving forward in this increasingly globalized market.

Word count: 3,816

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Appendix A: Creation of Visual Stimuli

The stimuli used in this study were created using Adobe Firefly's AI text-to-image feature and Adobe Photoshop. Adobe Firefly was employed to generate images based on specific textual descriptions such as, "Create an image of 4 white people, 2 men, 2 women, smiling, posing for advertisement.", this was repeated for each stimulus. Subsequently, Adobe Photoshop was used to add brand logos and correct any inaccuracies or imperfections resulting from the AI generation process. This combination of tools allowed for the creation of six distinct advertisements for each condition, ensuring consistency in visual style and quality. The six conditions are detailed below:

A.1 White individuals with gender inclusion (men and women)

Prompt: "Create an image of 4 white people for a clothing ad, 2 men, 2 women, smiling, posing for advertisement.", the results came out odd, So I then asked, "Create an image of 4 white people with blonde hair and blue eyes, 2 men, 2 women, smiling, posing for advertisement."

A.2 Non-white individuals with gender inclusion (men and women)

"Create an image of 4 people for a clothing ad, 2 men, 2 women, make them of Asian, Latin, or Middle Eastern decent, smiling, posing for advertisement." Once an image was generated I then asked "Please replace one person with a blonde white person."

A.3 Black individuals with gender inclusion (men and women)

"Create an image of 4 people for a clothing ad, 2 men, 2 women, all Black people, smiling, posing for advertisement." Once an image was generated I then asked "Please replace one man with a blonde white man."

A.4 White individuals with gender exclusion (only men)

"Create an image of 4 people for clothing ad, all men, White, blonde hair and blue eyes, smiling, posing for advertisement." Once an image was generated I then asked "Please replace one man with a blonde white man."

A.5 Non-white individuals with gender exclusion (only men)

"Create an image of 4 people for a clothing ad, all men, make them of Asian, Latin, or Middle Eastern descent, smiling, posing for advertisement." Once an image was generated I then asked, "Please replace one man with a blonde white man."

A.6 Black individuals with gender exclusion (only men)

"Create an image of 4 people for a clothing ad, all men, make them all Black men, smiling, posing for advertisement." Once an image was generated I then asked "Please replace one man with a blonde white man."

Appendix B: Qualtrics Survey

DEI Survey

Q2 Dear participant,

 I am the principal researcher, my name is Camila Meraz. This research is for my thesis under the Media & Business master's program at Erasmus University Rotterdam. You are invited to participate in this anonymous survey about advertisements' and brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers. You are asked to participate in this research because your are a member of Gen Z, have awareness of lifestyle brands, and have a unique perspective! Please share with your friends! Your participation will help contribute to academic research and the completion of my master's.

Data Storage Protocol
All data collected with this survey will be stored in a secured database. Only the researchers and the faculty research advisor will have access to your data.

The survey should take 3 minutes to complete and participation is voluntary.
You MUST be on the survey for more than 35 seconds for your responses to be recorded.
Please answer each question to the best of your abilities.

Thank you for your participation!

By going to the next page (click next page arrow) I am certifying that I am 18-26 years old and I am consenting to take this survey:

Q3 Gender Identity

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary / non-conforming (3)

○ Transgender (4)

○ Other (5)

○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q29 What is your age?

▼ under 18 (1) ... over 27 (12)

Skip To: End of Survey If What is your age? = under 18
Skip To: End of Survey If What is your age? = over 27

Q5 What is your cultural background? (Please list the one you most identify with first if there are multiple)

_____

Q18 What is your race?

○ Native American or Alaska Native (1)

○ White (2)

○ Black (3)

○ Asian (4)

○ Pacific Islander or Hawaiian Native (5)

○ Prefer not to say (6)

○ Another race not listed (specify below) (7)
_____

Q20 We ask you to imagine this is advertising a Lifestyle brand named B&C, advertising clothing. Please examine the image carefully and what you assume of this brand based on the ad you see, then answer the following questions based on the advertisement. You will not be able to see this image again.

1

Please take at least 5 seconds to examine the advertisement. All the following questions will be based on this image.

2

 Please take at least 5 seconds to examine the advertisement. All the following questions will be

based on this image.

3

Please take at least 5 seconds to examine the advertisement. All the following questions will be based on this image.

4

4. Please take at least 5 seconds to examine the advertisement. All the following questions will be based on this image.

5

Please take at least 5 seconds to examine the advertisement. All the following questions will be based on this image.

6

6. Please take at least 5 seconds to examine the advertisement. All the following questions will be based on this image.

End of Block: Visual Stimuli

Start of Block: Manipulation Check

Q27 Please select the advertisement you were shown.

○ All White people including both men and women (1)

○ White and Non-white people including both men and women (2)

○ Black and White people including both men and women (3)

○ All White men (4)

○ Non-white and White men (5)

○ Black and White men (6)

○ I do not remember (7)

○ None of the above (8)

Skip To: End of Survey If Please select the advertisement you were shown. = I do not remember

Skip To: End of Survey If Please select the advertisement you were shown. = None of the above

End of Block: Manipulation Check

Start of Block: Stimuli Questions

Q14 Answer the following based on the advertisement shown previously.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I would likely perceive this brand to be genuine. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I would likely perceive this brand to be authentic. (2)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Stimuli Questions

Q16 Answer the following statements based on your assumptions from the previous advertisement shown. I think...

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
B&C is an honest brand. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
B&C is a safe brand. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I would depend on B&C. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I would say positive things about B&C. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I believe in the mission of B&C. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend B&C to my friends and family. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I am very interested in what others think about B&C. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
B&C's success is my success. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

| When someone praises B&C, it feels like a personal compliment. (9) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q17 Based on the previous advertisement I would be inclined to purchase products from this brand.

○ Strongly Disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neutral (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly Agree (5)

End of Block: Brand Loyalty & Purchase Intent

Start of Block: Previous Experience

	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
I have encountered advertisements with racial diversity. (1)	○	○	○	○
I have encountered advertisements with gender diversity. (2)	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Previous Experience

Start of Block: Closing

Q19 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) representation in advertising on Gen Z consumers' brand loyalty and purchase intent across different cultures, particularly in the context of lifestyle brands. By participating, you provided valuable insights into how diverse representations in advertising influence consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Questions?

If you have any additional questions or do not understand words or concepts at any time you are more than welcome to contact me at 693434cm@eur.nl I can explain. I am conducting this research independently: the financial contribution does not influence the outcomes of this study.

Thank you so much for participating!

Here is your ID: ${e://Field/Random%20ID}

Copy this value into MTurk.

Once you have copied this ID, please click the button to submit your responses.

End of Block: Closing