

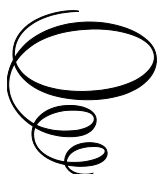
Inclusive Marketing, Value Creation Strategies, and Social Sustainability

Inclusive Marketing, Value Creation Strategies, and Social Sustainability

Edited by

Barbara Masiello, Francesco Izzo
and Enrico Bonetti

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Inclusive Marketing, Value Creation Strategies, and Social Sustainability

Edited by Barbara Masiello, Francesco Izzo and Enrico Bonetti

This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2026 by Barbara Masiello, Francesco Izzo, Enrico Bonetti
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-6093-8

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-6094-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
About the Authors	xi
Contributors	xiii
Introduction	1
Inclusive Marketing and Value Creation Strategies <i>Masiello B., Izzo F. and Bonetti E.</i>	
Part I – Developing Inclusive Marketing Strategies: Foundations, Applications and Evidence	
Chapter 1	23
Mapping the Theoretical Landscape of Inclusive Marketing <i>Masiello B., Garofano A. and Celestino S.</i>	
Chapter 2	55
Deepening Inclusive Branding: A Managerial Perspective <i>Vernuccio M., Patrizi M. and Ceccotti F.</i>	
Chapter 3	87
Inclusive Marketing of the LGBTQ+ Community <i>Han X. and Wu R.</i>	
Chapter 4	105
Sustainability Dimensions, Inclusive Marketing, and the Tetrad-Value Theory: The Generation Z Perceptions <i>Carvalho J.M.S. and Nogueira S.</i>	
Chapter 5	131
Young LGBTQ+ Customers’ Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Friendly Advertising Hotels <i>Ro H.</i>	

Chapter 6	149
Crucial Linkage between Inclusive Marketing and Multi-Stakeholder Engagement: A Case of the UK’s Islamic Mortgage Industry <i>Bilal A. and Al Bashir M.</i>	
Chapter 7	173
Championing Diversity in Technology Enhanced Museum Services <i>Marti P., Recupero A. and Reichinger A.</i>	
Chapter 8	193
Towards more Inclusive Recruitment Strategies: Evidence from Neurodiverse People and Organisations <i>Cummins D. and Marks C.</i>	
 Part II – Bringing Inclusive Marketing to Life: Case Studies, Practices and Stakeholder Perspectives	
Chapter 9	223
Promoting Inclusion by Bridging Gaps through “Story-Making:” The Fastweb Case <i>De Laurentiis L., Guidi B., Artuso R. and Masiello B.</i>	
Chapter 10	231
The Shades of Beauty and Inclusivity in Cosmetics: The Fenty Beauty Case <i>Masiello B. and Izzo F.</i>	
Chapter 11	245
From Communication to Action: The Ben & Jerry’s Strategy to Foster Inclusion <i>Cammarota A. and Maggiore G.</i>	
Chapter 12	257
Moving Beyond Inclusive Marketing and Unleashing the Power of Culturally Relevant Marketing Using Tolu Oke’s “DEI Pyramid.” A Conversation with Tolulope Oke <i>Oke T., Bonetti E. and Masiello B.</i>	

Chapter 13 267
Communicating Disability from a Non-Profit Perspective:
A Cultural Revolution for an Inclusive Society
Perniciaro V.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Editing a book is always a long journey. A journey of encounters, discoveries, sharing experiences. When we started working on inclusive marketing a few years ago, this topic was still in a nascent stage. Very few companies were adopting marketing strategies based on an authentic approach to inclusion and taking into account the heterogeneity of the diverse audience they came into contact with. Now, a few years later, we can say that understanding the dimensions of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has become crucial both for the success of a marketing strategy and for aligning the company's ethical principles with the expectations of its stakeholders. In this perspective, and considering the evolution in corporate strategies, now in all industries, it is possible to argue that being inclusive for a company is not only a matter of social responsibility but a source of competitive advantage, a strategic imperative.

Changes in the cultural landscape and the competitive landscape clearly show the growing need for marketing strategies that reflect the diversity of the world. Recent market research shows that an increasing share of consumers value diversity, equity and inclusion in their choices. For a brand, engaging authentically with diverse target audiences and communities has become a critical success factor. Establishing a deep and genuine relationship with its customers, celebrating cultural diversity, demonstrating awareness of the social impact of its choices allow the company to seize market opportunities, strengthen customer loyalty, and connect with new generations, especially with Gen Z and, soon, with Gen Alpha, the first to be born entirely in the 21st century.

There is no shortage of risks and pitfalls. Tokenism is just around the corner. That is why it is crucial to learn to communicate in a language that resonates with the values of multicultural consumers, to break stereotypes and connect with different audiences, and to encourage positive social change.

The research is still in its infancy, but it is already clear that addressing these issues requires a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach. That is

why we invited scholars from different disciplines, with different backgrounds, different research interests, from different countries and cultures, to join us in this book. Ours was also an inclusive marketing strategy!

We have tried to combine theory and practice, concepts and experiences, to offer the reader new insights into these as yet little-explored fundamental topics. That is the reason why we would like to thank all contributors: Mamoon Al Bashir, Roberta Artuso, Awais Bilal, Antonella Cammarota, João M. S. Carvalho, Federica Ceccotti, Sabrina Celestino, Darryl Cummins, Luciana De Laurentiis, Antonella Garofano, Barbara Guidi, Xiaoqi Han, Giulio Maggiore, Cara Marks, Patrizia Marti, Sónia Nogueira, Michela Patrizi, Annamaria Recupero, Andreas Reichinger, Heejung Ro, Tolulope (Tolu) Oke, Maria Vernuccio, Ruomeng Wu.

Each author has freely adopted her or his own approach, choosing the words and language preferred and considered most suitable for the chosen content. Each contribution reflects the culture and values of the authors. Inclusive marketing is still very young, and while it borrows much from the DEI, it does not coincide with it and has yet to consolidate a common language of its own.

A special thanks must also be offered to our colleagues Antonella Garofano and Sabrina Celestino. They are co-authors in some of our works and their collaboration was invaluable in the realisation of the book, both in the preliminary stages, in the selection of cases, and in the final revisions.

Thank you to Adam Rummens and Cambridge Scholars Publishing for initiating the project and allowing us to tackle it in our way. And thank you Adam also for your patience and encouragement!

This book is intended to be used both in the classroom and in marketing practice. For that we would like to give special thanks to the many academic colleagues with whom we discussed our early work on inclusive marketing, the many students and especially the managers, entrepreneurs and experts whose involvement allowed us to refine our ideas.

As someone wrote, inclusive marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. We are only at the first mile. Have a good journey!

Barbara Masiello, Francesco Izzo, Enrico Bonetti

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Barbara Masiello is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the Department of Political Science, University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, Italy, and also teaches Strategic Marketing and Sustainable Business Models at the Department of Economics.

She earned her PhD from Luiss Guido Carli University, Rome, and was a Visiting PhD Student at Warwick Business School (UK). With over 20 years of experience, her research has focused on local system marketing and events, innovation networks in creative industries, social capital, and SME innovation and internationalisation. In recent years, she has led multiple research projects on inclusive and socially sustainable marketing. She has widely published on these and other topics, including articles in leading academic journals as well as books with national and international publishers. Her research has been widely presented at national and international conferences. She has been a Visiting Professor in postgraduate and MBA programs across Italian and European universities and has contributed as a researcher and consultant to numerous public and private sector projects.

Francesco Izzo is Full Professor of Strategic Management of Innovation at the Department of Social Sciences, University of Naples Federico II, Italy, where he also teaches Digital Economy and Social Entrepreneurship. PhD in Management, he is a Faculty member of the National PhD program in Design for Made in Italy and PhD program in Entrepreneurship and Innovation at University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli and University of Naples Parthenope, Italy. His research interests include innovation management, international strategy of SMEs, innovation in creative industry, cultural entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship. He published over 130 articles and books concerning these topics. He has been a Visiting Professor in postgraduate and MBA programs and has headed as principal investigator many research projects. He is a board member of a philanthropic foundation and for over 30 years served as a consultant for public institutions, industry associations and social enterprises.

Enrico Bonetti is Full Professor of Marketing at the Department of Economics, University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, Italy, where he also teaches Communication and social media marketing.

PhD in Management and corporate governance, at the School of Management, University of Naples Parthenope, Italy. Faculty member of the PhD program in Communication, social research and marketing of the University of Rome, Sapienza, Italy. Member of the board of SIM - Società Italiana di Marketing (Italian Marketing Society) and President of Premio Marketing per l'Università (University Marketing Award).

Member of the editorial board of several journals and editorial series. He published over 90 articles and books concerning services management, place marketing, tourism marketing, destination management, fashion industry, branding, food marketing, event marketing and management. Visiting professor of Marketing, Services Marketing and Tourism Marketing in various MBA and executive courses in Italian universities and business schools. He presented papers and was chairman in several conferences.

He has been a strategy and marketing consultant for over 30 years for both private business and public institutions, in many industries, such as: banking, insurance, retailing, fashion, media, transportation. He held seminars and workshops for numerous firms and public institutions.

CONTRIBUTORS

Mamoon Al Bashir

Dr. Md Mamoon Al Bashir is a multi-award-winning academic and the Graduate Research Director at Hull University Business School. With over 12 years of academic and research experience in the UK and globally, Dr. Bashir's accomplishments include the "Inspired in Hull Award 2022" and the "40 under 40 Smart Bangladesh Award 2023." His expertise lies in supply chain management, sustainability, marketing, and digitalisation, with his research published in leading peer-reviewed journals. He holds a PhD from the University of East Anglia and is a Fellow of Advance HE. Dr. Bashir contributes extensively to academia and industry, serving as a board member, keynote speaker, and research project lead. Beyond academia, he is active in community service and international advisory roles. Dr. Bashir's commitment to advancing global business education and research makes him a distinguished voice in his field.

Roberta Artuso

Manager of Brand Empowerment at Fastweb, I have a background in Communication Sciences and a post-graduate master's degree in Branded Content and Entertainment. I have been working for almost twenty years in Communication and Brand Marketing in the telecommunications sector. I have always been involved in Communication, covering Brand & Corporate Image, Below the Line, Territorial Events, Social Media Marketing, and finally Brand Empowerment. I coordinate research institutes that monitor brand health, developing special initiatives aimed at enhancing brand positioning.

Awais Bilal

Awais Bilal is a seasoned professional with over 15 years of experience in marketing, sales, business development and research. He has a proven track record of driving business growth, managing complex projects, and fostering strategic partnerships. Currently pursuing a PhD in Marketing at the University of Hull, Awais combines academic rigor with practical expertise. His career spans roles in diverse industries, including his current position as a Mortgage and Protection Advisor, where he excels in client relations and financial consulting.

Antonella Cammarota

Antonella Cammarota earned her PhD in Marketing and Management in June 2024 from the University of Sannio, Benevento, Italy. She was a Visiting PhD Student at Drexel University in Philadelphia, USA. Her primary research interests focus on political branding, consumer behaviour, and the social role of businesses. In 2023, she published the first systematic literature review on brand activism in the *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, and in 2024, she introduced the first conceptualisation of university activism in *The International Journal of Management Education*.

João M.S. Carvalho

João M.S. Carvalho is an Associate Professor with Habilitation at the Prince Henry Portuguese University. He is Head of the Department of Economics and Management, Coordinator of the Master in Management, Research Coordinator at REMIT – Research in Economics, Management and Information Technologies (Portuguese University), and Researcher Collaborator at CEG – Global Studies Centre (Open University), and InED – Center for Research and Innovation in Education (Higher Education School of Porto Polytechnic University). He has a Degree in Business Management, a postgraduation in Social Gerontology, a Master's Degree in Economics, and a Doctorate and Habilitation in Business Sciences. He worked for 15 years in the pharmaceutical industry. He also supports the social sector as a researcher, consultant, and trainer. Nationally and internationally, he has published several books, book chapters, and articles in scientific journals.

Federica Ceccotti

Federica Ceccotti, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Management at Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Economics, where she teaches Corporate and Marketing Communication and Tourism Marketing. She serves as a member of the President's Council of the Italian Marketing Society (SIM – Società Italiana Marketing), contributing to initiatives focused on education and communication strategy. Additionally, she coordinates the Master in Marketing Management (MUMM–www.mumm.it). Her research focuses on innovation in branding, integrated marketing communication (IMC), digital transformation, and the evolution of business models. She has published over sixty scientific papers and books in these fields.

Sabrina Celestino

Sabrina Celestino holds a PhD in “Entrepreneurship and Innovation” from the Department of Economics at the University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli,” Italy. Her main research areas focus on Inclusive Marketing, Innovation Processes, and Event Marketing. Over the years, she has presented her work at various scientific conferences, including the Academy of Marketing, SIM (Italian Marketing Society), SIMA (Italian Management Society), IRNIST Conference, and CIRCLE Conference. She is a junior member of the Italian Marketing Society (SIM) and a contract lecturer for the Digital Marketing course at the University of Campania, “Luigi Vanvitelli.”

Darryl Cummins

Darryl is a Senior Lecturer in Business Strategy at Ulster University in Northern Ireland. He has published widely in international journals in the areas of SME decision-making, entrepreneurial education and crowdfunding (especially in relation to SMEs and the attitudes of entrepreneurs and banks). He is also keenly interested in the topic of inclusive marketing and has supervised a number of Postgraduate projects in this area. His teaching areas are in Strategy, Competitiveness and Marketing, particularly at Postgraduate and Executive Education level. Darryl has held a number of leadership roles in Ulster including Head of Department and Course Director, while he has completed a PhD in strategy and marketing and SMEs. Prior to joining Ulster, Darryl was Associate Director at an international market research agency, working for a number of clients across the public, private and third sectors.

Luciana De Laurentiis

Passionate about words and people, Luciana De Laurentiis is a coach, trainer, and communication expert. She currently holds the position of Head of Corporate Culture & Inclusion at Fastweb, with a particular focus on engagement, inclusivity, language evolution, and professional relationships in the ever-changing world of work. She loves creating connections between ideas, projects, and people. She is the author of the book “Smart Working: The Second Season”, published by Franco Angeli.

Antonella Garofano

Antonella Garofano, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Management at University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, Department of Economics, where she teaches Marketing, Digital Marketing and Strategic Analysis in graduate and undergraduate programs. Her main research interests include Business Longevity, Heritage Marketing, Brand Heritage and Corporate

Museums. More recently, she has devoted increasing attention to Inclusive Marketing. Her work has been published in national and international journals and presented at numerous conferences, in Italy and abroad.

Barbara Guidi

My name is Barbara and I am passionate about people and their stories. A wife and mother of three children, I firmly believe that every person is unique and can enrich my life both personally and professionally. I like to think that people, with their multiple facets, are the driving force of the world and make the surrounding environment a welcoming and respectful place. At Fastweb, I am part of the Corporate Culture & Inclusion Team, we deal daily with internal communication, engagement, corporate volunteering, and issues related to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. My goal is to create authentic connections, learn from diverse experiences, and thus foster my personal and professional growth as well as that of others. My passion for human relationships and my dedication to work give me the energy to promote a respectful work environment, where those who work there feel valued and respected for who they are.

Xiaoqi Han

Xiaoqi Han holds a PhD Degree in Marketing from the University of Cincinnati. She is now a Professor of Marketing at Ansell School of Business, Western Connecticut State University. Her scholarly interests include consumer information processing, social exclusion, persuasion, consumer inference, consumer bias and techniques of debiasing.

Giulio Maggiore

Giulio Maggiore is a full professor of Management at the Unitelma Sapienza University of Rome, where he holds various courses regarding the governance, management and marketing of public and private organisations. For seven years, he was President of a Master's degree in Management of public and healthcare organisations, while currently he is the director of a Master in Management and coordination functions for healthcare professions and of a Master in Management and organisation of healthcare companies. His recent research interests refer to digital marketing, tourism management, consumer vulnerability and marketing ethics. In Unitelma Sapienza, he is the director of a research laboratory specializing in digital marketing (DiMALab). He has collaborated for many years with the National Research Council of Italy (CNR), with which he has developed numerous research projects and edited various editions of the Report on Italian Tourism. Before starting his academic career, he worked for years as a consultant in the areas of business

development, marketing and IT services. He is the author of many publications on the topics of strategic development, service innovation, consumer behaviour, digital marketing and tourism.

Cara Marks

Cara is a Senior Business Director in a Global Recruitment Agency. As part of Cara's role, she is focused on strategies for attracting and retaining talent and advising clients on workforce planning strategies, helping to implement these to gain competitive advantage. Cara returned to study later in life and graduated from Ulster University with a Master's in Business Development and Innovation, where her dissertation was entitled, "An Empirical Analysis of Inclusive Recruitment Strategies", for which she received a Distinction. Cara co-founded Neurodiversity SPARK in early 2024; SPARK is a community and networking organisation for neurodivergent adults, offering peer support, access to resources, and is focused on building awareness and lobbying activities in Northern Ireland. Cara is herself neurodivergent and regularly speaks at events and on radio shows about the experiences of the neurodivergent community.

Patrizia Marti

Patrizia Marti is Associate Professor of Experience Design at the University of Siena, with a PhD in Interaction Design. She is the director and rector's delegate of Santa Chiara Fab Lab (<https://scfablab.unisi.it>), where she manages interdisciplinary innovation projects with national and international partnerships. From 2013 to 2019, she was full professor at the Dpt. of Industrial Design at the Eindhoven University of Technology. She is a member of the SID board of directors, the Italian Society of Design. She has extensive research experience in designing technological systems in sectors such as health and inclusion, cultural heritage, and food. She studies the impact of these technologies on humans, society and the environment.

Sónia Nogueira

Sónia Nogueira is an Assistant Professor at the Prince Henry Portuguese University and Minho University. She is the Coordinator of the Marketing Degree, Senior Researcher at REMIT – Research in Economics, Management and Information Technologies (Portuguese University). She has a Degree in Management, a Master's Degree in marketing, and a PhD in Marketing and Strategy. She worked for 17 years in the Automotive sector as Marketing Director, and Quality Customer Service Coordinator. Nationally and internationally, she has published several book chapters and articles in scientific journals.

Michela Patrizi

Michela Patrizi is a Tenure-Track Researcher in the Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, Sapienza University of Rome, where she teaches courses in Business Economics and Management as well as Retail Marketing. She holds a PhD in Management, Banking, and Commodity Sciences from the same institution. Michela is also an active member of SIMA Next Gen, the junior committee of the Italian Society of Management, which fosters the development and collaboration of early-career scholars in management studies. Her research focuses on digital marketing and brand management, with particular attention to the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence technologies. She is especially interested in how these innovations reshape branding strategies and influence consumer-brand relationships. Her work has been published in leading journals, including the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, and *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.

Valentina Perniciaro

Valentina Perniciaro is founder, spokesperson, and member of the Board of Directors of the Tetrabondi Foundation Onlus. Author and blogger, always connected to the world of activism and independent information. She became a caregiver in 2013 with the birth of her second son, Sirio, diagnosed with cerebral palsy and spastic tetraparesis, following a cardiac arrest at one month old. Since 2018, she has been actively sharing the daily experiences of disability and the reclaiming of autonomy and happiness on the pages of @tetrabondi. In May 2021, she published her first novel “Ognuno ride a modo suo” with Rizzoli Editore.

Annamaria Recupero

Annamaria Recupero, PhD in Psychology, is a researcher at the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive sciences, University of Siena (Italy), where she teaches communication design. She collaborates with the Santa Chiara Fab Lab (<https://scfablab.unisi.it>) in research and development projects at national and international levels. Her research interests are focused on the psycho-social processes involved in the interaction with technologies and services, and on the design methodologies to ideate user-centred solutions, especially in the field of cultural heritage and healthcare.

Andreas Reichinger

Dipl.-Ing. (FH) Andreas Reichinger studied media technology and design and is currently working on his dissertation on Visual Computing for Tactile and Auditive Senses at Vienna University of Technology. He is Senior Research Engineer at VRVis GmbH and was involved in over 15 national and EU-funded projects in the field of visual computing, ranging from object tracking, 3D data acquisition, modelling, rendering and virtual reality. Since 2010 he is working on inclusive design and he has created over 40 tactile interpretations of paintings, photographs and other artworks, shown at 19 museums and cultural institutions, helping especially blind and visually impaired people. His research interests include accessibility in art, 3D modelling, touch tool creation, 3D computer vision, computational photography and virtual reality.

Heejung Ro

Dr. Heejung Ro is an Associate Professor in the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida. Her research centres on the evaluation of service encounters that involve customer perceptions and behaviours, as well as frontline employee interactions with customers. Her specific research interests include customer complaint behaviours, service recovery and organisational complaint management, and employee empowerment and citizenship behaviours. Another stream of her research focuses on LGBT customers' perceptions of hospitality services, including service discrimination, self-concepts and identity, and LGBT-friendly brand management. Her work appears in leading journals, including International Journal of Hospitality Management, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, and Journal of Business Research.

Tolulope (Tolu) Oke

Tolu is a multi-award-winning DEI thought leader with an insatiable passion for inclusion, diversity and equity. Graced to shift culture, she is known and respected as a pioneer. She has an established reputation for making a significant impact across various industries. She has a proven ability to envision strategically, produce tactically, build operationally, and lead collaboratively, which makes her an asset to all. Tolu endeavours to strike a healthy balance by leaning into curiosity and seeking feedback. Tolu has a commitment to developing others, and builds high-performing teams. She relentlessly pushes herself to grow professionally which allows her to provide bar-raising experiences that maintain high standards. In her personal time, she is a Non-Executive Director and Chair of the Board for Leadership 2025, a leading organisation driving greater leadership

diversity in the housing sector. She is also a school governor and sits on the Local Governing Body of a UK based Primary School. She coaches early careers professionals to help them understand the unwritten rules of the workplace, and provides senior and executive leadership with support to lead their businesses inclusively. She also runs an organisation delivering programmes providing food, solar lights, clean water and sponsoring children internationally. To date projects have been self-funded for the most part and delivered in Nigeria, Uganda, Thailand, Cambodia, and Tanzania to name a few.

Maria Vernuccio

Maria Vernuccio, PhD, is a Full Professor of Management at Sapienza University of Rome, where she teaches Digital Marketing and Marketing Research in the Faculty of Economics. She serves on the Faculty Board for the PhD program in “Management, Banking, and Commodity Sciences,” where she has mentored numerous doctoral students and contributed to developing advanced research initiatives. As the Director of the Master in Marketing Management (MUMM–www.mumm.it), Prof. Vernuccio combines academic expertise with practical insights, preparing students for successful careers in marketing leadership. She is a former Presidential Council member of the “Società Italiana Marketing” and currently acts as the Placement Delegate for the Faculty of Economics, strengthening connections between students, academia, and industry. With over 100 scientific articles and six books on Marketing, Business Communication, and the digital revolution, Prof. Vernuccio has received numerous national and international awards. Her research focuses on AI-driven Marketing and Branding, addressing some of the most dynamic and impactful trends shaping the discipline’s future.

Ruomeng Wu

Dr. Ruomeng Wu is currently an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Western Kentucky University. Her research focuses on consumer behaviour, digital gaming, and consumer well-being, with her work published in peer-reviewed journals. She enjoys fostering critical thinking in her students and connecting theoretical concepts to practical applications. Dr. Wu values collaboration and strives to contribute to meaningful advancements in the field of marketing.

INTRODUCTION

INCLUSIVE MARKETING AND VALUE CREATION STRATEGIES

BARBARA MASIELLO¹, FRANCESCO IZZO²
AND ENRICO BONETTI³

*Inclusive marketing is a process,
not an event.
(Rossman, 1994)*

Inclusive Marketing: Antecedents and Definitions

In recent years, growing attention from academics and marketers has been devoted to “inclusive marketing” or “diversity marketing” as a means to create value for the organisation, the market, and society in general by reflecting the diversities of consumer groups with a “socially inclusive approach”. Driven by changing consumer expectations and social movements, brands have been increasingly required to meet Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) themes while maintaining business profitability.

In the wake of the importance that DEI has recently assumed in the political and social debate, an increasing number of companies are showing attention towards the definition of offerings that are attentive to so-called “vulnerable populations” (women, people with disabilities, children, the elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, etc.). This is a trend fuelled, on the one hand, by the demands of supranational organisations, in line with the “social sustainability” goals set out, for example, in the U.N.

¹ Department of Political Science, University of Campania, Luigi Vanvitelli, Caserta, Italy.

² Department of Social Science, Federico II, University of Naples, Italy.

³ Department of Economics, University of Campania, Luigi Vanvitelli, Capua, Italy.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and, on the other hand, by a change in society's sensitivity to these issues.

New generations of consumers who are more sensitive to diversity are forcing companies to take a much broader and more inclusive approach than before, allowing everyone, each in their uniqueness, to enjoy a satisfying and personalised purchasing and consumption experience.

In particular, younger Generation Z consumers have changed the way they relate to brands, demanding social responsibility, respect, and appreciation of diversity. Many studies show how the inclusion of the "vulnerable" has an increasing impact on the effectiveness of marketing programmes in terms of purchase intentions and brand loyalty.

Indeed, many differences, including ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and disability, among others, characterise society. The lack of acceptance or outright discrimination based on these factors can occur in various settings. Inclusion means eliminating all forms of discrimination while respecting diversity. It is an ongoing process that values the potential of every individual and engages all those involved. In other terms, inclusion addresses the environmental antecedents and features to create a more equitable, fair and supportive context. The concept of "social inclusion" has been defined as a process toward a society where every individual has an active role to play. According to Licsandru and Cui (2018: 332):

Social inclusion can lead to positive conviviality of diverse groups in a society, through enhanced belongingness, respect and social participation, and to promote vulnerable individual's wellbeing, happiness and life-satisfaction.

In particular, social inclusion aims to lower economic, social, and cultural boundaries and embrace diversity by making sure that everyone is "visible" in society, has one's needs taken into account in policy-making, is given access to social interactions, and enjoys rights and resources enabling full participation in society (Cloquet et al., 2018).

In its most recent meaning, diversity concerns a broad set of characteristics that make each person unique and that relate to different areas, variously classified, but mainly referable (though not limited) to the following: gender and gender identity, physical and mental abilities, age, ethnicity, sexual and affective orientation, general appearance, socio-economic status, religion or belief. The word's meaning generally refers to the

willingness and ability to include, represent and value individual differences, avoiding stereotypes and ghettoisation and allowing everyone to feel represented. As it has been written by Hollenbeck and Patrick (2023:143), then:

Inclusive marketing orientation strives to include all potential users of a product or service. Therefore, marketing is *exclusive* when the focus is on the average consumer, and marketing is *inclusive* when the focus is on meeting the needs of the most diverse set of consumers that comprise the target market.

An inclusive approach is, therefore, an opportunity for marketing to combine business and ethics, creating both social value and value for brands, thus fully realising the role that the American Marketing Association (2017) attributes to the function in the organisational context:

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, *and society at large* (Added emphasis).

Of course, there is a risk that the actions put in place by companies could take the form of mere “diversity and inclusion washing”, or “woke washing” or “tokenism”: namely, practice of organisations that publicly adopt socially inclusive messaging without taking meaningful actions to support those causes; or superficial actions that involve hiring, promoting, or featuring a small number of individuals from marginalised groups without providing real opportunities for equity and representation (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Such cases clearly attempt at opportunistic exploitation of emerging trends, which occur, for example, when the vulnerable are included (we might say, “exploited”, “manipulated”) in communication campaigns, without the company investing in achieving concrete inclusion objectives in the medium to long term, or without acting in any way to create inclusive offerings, or without any change towards respecting and promoting DEI at the various stages of the value chain or even in company recruitment policies.

Instead, companies that are willing to support and integrate an inclusion-driven approach into their corporate culture can turn diversity into a powerful competitive advantage. By adopting a win-win strategy that aligns ethical values with market value and profitability, they can achieve both social impact and business success, as will be further explained in the following sections.

Why Inclusion Matters for Marketers

Why is the inclusion of vulnerable, underrepresented and marginalised groups significant for marketers?

Because brands are cultural agents, which shape cultural norms, ideas, and values that characterise a society and its “common sense” (Hall, 1977). At the same time, consumption is both a byproduct and an expression of culture, often serving as a means through which cultural values take material form. Culture shapes our social needs, which, in turn, drive patterns of consumption (Ferraro et al., 2023; Gabriel, 2024). As a matter of fact, marketing professionals play a key role in shaping the experiences people encounter in their daily lives. They help construct the narratives that society talks about itself, address the needs and demands of consumers, and influence the way people experience, enjoy, and access products and services.

The demand for socially responsible and inclusive marketing is not a new nor a recent phenomenon. The marketing research field has a long tradition of examining the struggles of various subpopulations, often referred to as “disadvantaged” or “vulnerable” (Andreasen, 1975; Baker et al., 2005), who may experience troubles and difficulties in their role as consumers.

Among others, in 1994, in the article “Inclusive Marketing Shows Sensitivity,” published in *Marketing News* by the American Marketing Association, Marlene Rossman—then president of Rossman, Graham Associates marketing consulting firm and author of the book “Multicultural Marketing: Selling to a Diverse America”—insightfully framed the issue in the following terms:

As marketers, we often seem to drift from one promising segment to another, allotting perhaps 15 minutes to see whether we’ve hit our target. Because we are close to an age of micromarketing in which we try to reach increasingly tiny segments, it’s certainly time we began reaching out to segments other than those of the overtapped and increasingly oversaturated “mainstream” market. *What’s needed, however, is inclusive marketing, not target marketing.* The difference is that in inclusive marketing we are involved for the long term. It means including from the outset Africans-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, gays, lesbians, etc., rather than adding them *as an afterthought* to a mainstream marketing campaign. (...) Although it’s a start, it’s not enough to spend some money on advertising

just during Black History Month or at the Gay Games or the Chinese Harvest Moon Festival (Added emphasis).

Thirty years later, these statements still appear highly relevant and current.

However, while the issue is not new, the widespread attention shown by businesses in recent years certainly is. The practice of inclusive marketing is rapidly evolving and is supported by various initiatives, such as awards (Inclusive Awards, Diversity Brand Summit) or indices (FTSE Diversity and Inclusion Index). Surveys from consulting firms and reports from organisations like the OECD (2020) highlight the importance of inclusivity. At the same time, from a research standpoint, the number of publications focusing on inclusivity within the corporate and management sectors has grown exponentially in recent years.

Indeed, current market demands and increased societal awareness have made it crucial for companies to take these issues seriously. Beyond ethical considerations, the significance of inclusive marketing has become a business imperative.

Recent surveys provide compelling evidence of this shift. Among others, a study conducted in 2021 by Microsoft on Generation Z showed that inclusive advertising has an impact on purchase intentions and brand loyalty; in particular, 70% of respondents said they trust brands that represent diversity in their advertisements more, while 49% admitted to having stopped buying products from companies that do not respect such values (Microsoft, 2021).

Furthermore, the 2021 Deloitte Global Marketing Trends Executive Survey, which included responses from 11,500 consumers worldwide, revealed that the youngest participants (aged 18 to 25) paid more attention to inclusive advertising when making purchasing decisions (Brodzic et al., 2021). Furthermore, when the results were analysed by ethnicity and race in the U.S., respondents who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic American, Native American or Alaska Native, or multiracial or biracial were up to two-and-a-half times more likely to notice a brand prominently promoting diversity when making decisions about purchasing products or experiences. Moreover, Deloitte's data indicates that high-growth brands (defined as those with annual revenue growth of 10% or more) are more likely to set key performance metrics for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) than their slower-growing competitors (Brodzic et al., 2021).

Similar results, showing that practicing inclusive marketing has measurable and meaningful benefits for organisations, emerged from research shared by Google, which in 2021 released its “All In” toolkit for inclusive marketing (Twohill, 2021). For instance, data show (Google research, 2023): that consumers are six times more likely to purchase a product or service if an ad is perceived as inclusive, and that an ad perceived as inclusive is also 63% more likely to be shared; and, that 62% of Black, Latino and Native Americans are much more likely to purchase if their race/ethnicity is featured. Moreover, 63% of consumers said that ads with their primary language increases likelihood of purchase.

More generally speaking, the “rise of inclusive consumers,” as defined by McKinsey & Company (Charm et al., 2022), is compelling organisations to integrate diversity and inclusion into the conversation.

Therefore, inclusive marketing has increasingly become a key tool for building and enhancing a company’s corporate identity and values regarding social sustainability. It helps differentiate a brand from its competitors by adopting a new narrative that aligns the organisation’s goals with the broader aim of creating a better society. Ultimately, it represents a market opportunity, as long as it is *authentically inclusive marketing*. According to Deloitte, for instance, it’s not enough to just “market inclusiveness or diversity” (Brodzich et al., 2021). Their research shows, in fact, that 57% of consumers are more loyal to brands that *commit* to address social inequalities, then taking tangible actions. To build loyalty with future customers, brands must demonstrate their commitment to equity across all areas, including hiring, retention, supplier diversity, and marketing products for people with varying abilities.

In fact, there are not a few cases of companies being accused of instrumentalising DEI issues to obtain positive feedback in terms of brand equity without committing to significant inclusive marketing strategies. Or the cases of projects born on paper to enhance diversity that have had unhappy outcomes, ending up feeding stereotypes rather than breaking them.

The risk of backlash is real, linked to the mistrust that has been developing in the market in more recent times and the accusations of woke washing that many companies have faced in more recent years, as witnessed by the spread of the “Get woke, go broke” trend with its emphasis on the instrumental use of inclusiveness. Cases like that of Victoria’s Secret—due to the lack of credibility in its overall strategy—or Heinz—due to

mistakes in operational actions, particularly in communication (both examined in this book)—demonstrate the need to address the issue with rigour, seeking, perhaps, more questions than clear answers. Not to mention, of course, the “ideological positions” surrounding the topic, also fuelled by confusion and ignorance, further challenge experts to put in the effort to build a truly more inclusive but equally effective marketing strategy that is as economically and socially sustainable as possible.

Overall, this scenario emphasises the urgent need to scientifically tackle inclusive marketing, considering the confusion and occasional superficiality surrounding the topic as well as the changing competitive landscape due to political pressures. For instance, in an executive order dated 21 January 2025, the newly elected USA President Donald Trump, after ordering the closure of government programs dedicated to DEI and ordering the dismissal of all officials dealing with such initiatives, also requested that the US Attorney General’s Office draw up within four months a document of unspecified ‘recommendations’ for DEI programmes to be discontinued also in the private sector, over which the federal government has no direct control. Some prominent private companies, including Meta, McDonald’s, Citigroup, Boeing, Target, and Walmart, have already discontinued their DEI programmes (Schneid, 2025), but others, such as Apple and Cisco, have decided to keep their initiatives alive (Murray and Bohannon, 2025). While PepsiCo is scaling back its DEI commitments, in line with demands from US President Trump, Coca-Cola reaffirms its support for DEI, warning of potentially negative impact from DEI changes (Pulley, 2025), stating in an annual filing that abandoning DEI could hurt business because its diverse employee base “helps drive a culture of inclusion, innovation and growth,” and if the company’s employees don’t reflect the “broad range of consumers and markets we serve around the world, our business could be negatively affected.” (Williment, 2025). Disney is expected to change its DEI approach, shifting its “Diversity & Inclusion” performance metric used to evaluate employees to “Talent Strategy,” which should focus more on business outcomes. The company will stop its “Reimagine Tomorrow” initiative—launched to highlight stories and talent from underrepresented communities—and remove content disclaimers that run before movies such as *Dumbo*, because it includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of peoples or culture: a practice that began at Disney in October 2020 (Fischer, 2025).

The impact of government policies in the USA cannot, of course, be without consequences for corporate strategies about this topic, as with any

other issue. However, in the long term, the effect will likely be one of “natural selection,” which, in the opinion of the authors, will ultimately benefit both the market and society. After the initial phase we have witnessed so far, characterised by widespread but sometimes relatively “aprioristic” adherence to diversity and inclusion issues (to follow the trend) by many companies, the current scenario will likely lead to a selection in which not all brands will align their values with DEI principles. However, those that align, will be forced to do so with a much deeper, more committed, and long-term approach, as will be discussed through the book.

Still, a clear and consistent definition of inclusive marketing is lacking, leading to overlaps, ambiguities, and conceptual gaps that need to be addressed. Implementing inclusive marketing practices that respect diversity and promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups remains a topic of debate. As a result, companies often navigate this territory through trial and error.

Precisely, the news increasingly reports DEI initiatives that emerge in contexts lacking a long-term strategy for enhancing diversity and the inclusion of more vulnerable groups, as well as the cultural and organisational context necessary to support them. It should therefore come as no surprise that such initiatives fail or are perceived as “woke” initiatives, which tend to exploit the sensitivity of certain market demand segments to “inclusion issues” without intending to bring about significant change. In this way, rather than advancing the “cause of inclusion,” they contribute to trivialising the approach to the topic, mixing up (incorrect) application with (correct) principles. This also fuels opposition between social categories, which feel “others” compared to the “vulnerable”, and, in a backlash, begin to associate negative connotations with a theme that should instead lead to greater overall well-being for society.

It is undeniable that some companies “exploit” the general DEI trend for profit objectives, but even if this is the case, in a “win-win perspective” (for the organisation and society), is it the responsibility of management to make an ethical assessment? Or is it perhaps better to leave the examination on a more strategic level and, regardless of the ethical motivations (wherever such motivations might be ascertainable), assess whether a truly inclusive strategy exists, one that in the medium to long term, through well-designed strategies and well-implemented actions, combines company profits with more inclusive and diversity-respecting

offering systems? The author believes that the second point is what really matters. But then the focus shifts.

The focus shifts to understanding which models, supported by accurate and reliable scientific literature and empirical research, can guide and steer the design of effective inclusive marketing strategies. Models that cannot provide one-size-fits-all solutions for every context, but that, with a scientific approach backed and complemented by the experience of businesses, should be tailored to specific goals and contexts.

Building on these premises, in the following paragraph, we will summarise a proposed interpretative model that aims to address the need to reinterpret—both strategically and operationally—the processes of marketing management with an inclusive approach.

The Foundations for Inclusive Marketing Value Creation Strategies: An Inclusive Marketing Model

As a result of previous research (Masiello et al., 2024), we developed a model for inclusive marketing, which has been subsequently adapted in light of what will be presented later in this volume (Figure I.1). This model is intended to contribute to the emerging stream of inclusive marketing literature and help marketers conform to a socially inclusive approach, enhance the effectiveness of their marketing programs, and create both marketing value and social value. The model is structured in three different blocks, concerning:

- Strategic marketing decisions
- Operational marketing decisions
- Impact on value creation

At the *strategic marketing level*, our model shows features that are useful to develop inclusive products and services, and build consumption models that can determine effective social inclusion. More in detail, the model highlights that organisations should market “inclusive offerings” (what to market) to an “inclusive audience” (who to market to) and that the company's ability to implement an inclusive marketing strategy is related to the adoption of the following principles:

- 1) segmentation and targeting of an inclusive audience based on “transversal needs”; the firms should market new products/services via

- targeting based on personal needs and/or on distinctive elements not seen as a limitation by the target audience (e.g., skin colour as a segmentation variable in cosmetic products), rather than on a segmentation built on potentially discriminating criteria (e.g., disabilities);
- 2) adoption of a universal approach for developing and positioning offerings; inclusive approach should not be limited to the functional features of the product/service, but universally designed products and services should be integrated into comprehensive and inclusive marketing strategies, which must also enhance the symbolic and emotional aspects of the product/service, along with the various touch points of the customer journey, to develop offerings that foster social inclusion (Fisk et al., 2018; Patrick and Hollenbeck, 2021);
 - 3) reliance on co-innovation and user-led innovation in new product/service development process; firms need to leverage on collaboration and involvement of users, from the beginning of the NPD, to reach a more effective and socially desirable innovation (Banerjee et al., 2020; Patrick and Hollenbeck, 2021).

At the *operational marketing level*, our model highlights the need to promote new approaches and languages and a new relational paradigm that is capable of overcoming current stereotypes and barriers, and relating people to brands, without discrimination or marginalisation. The main drivers for the construction of an “inclusive journey” (how to deliver) are the following:

- 1) design an accessible customer experience that is free of cognitive, cultural, and physical barriers, making it enjoyable regardless of differences and/or adaptable based on individual peculiarities (Crosier and Handford, 2012; Fisk et al., 2018);
- 2) activate a set of alternative and complementary touchpoints that connect the brand with all its users, regardless of their differences, allowing each individual to choose the touchpoint set that best fits with their characteristics, thus enhancing the symbolic and emotional aspects of the product, as well as developing offerings that foster social inclusion (Patrick and Hollenbeck, 2021);
- 3) represent differences in communication and do it without stereotypes; although in advertising, differences and vulnerabilities are ignored less and less, general stereotyped portrayals are still depicted and there is still a risk of maintaining similar barriers under new shapes instead of creating inclusion. Therefore, according to Borgerson and Schroeder