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# Value through diversity: A systematic literature review to understand diversity and inclusion in consumer research

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## Abstract

Embracing diversity and promoting inclusion is a critical challenge for marketers to meet the diverse consumers' needs and have a positive social impact. Despite increasing attention to diversity and inclusion, and calls to address inequalities, there appears to be a lack of a thorough understanding of diversity and inclusion in consumer research, and how marketing can effectively contribute to an inclusive and equity-oriented society. Previous reviews and conceptual articles often focus on specific types of diversity or contexts. This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of diversity and inclusion in consumer research through a systematic literature review of 52 articles combined with the theory, context, characteristics, and methodology (TCCM) framework. Our findings highlight that companies can actively foster inclusion and enhance equity through their policies, also by addressing stigmatization and marginalization. A conceptual framework outlines the impacts of these policies on individuals, society, and company performances, followed by a detailed research agenda for future studies. This article emphasizes the role of marketing in fostering inclusion but also stimulates practitioners to contribute through policies beyond representation and advertising, such as service and product design, and ensuring vulnerable consumers access to resources.

## KEYWORDS

consumer, diversity, equity, inclusion, stigma, systematic literature review, vulnerability

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

*"Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance"*

Verna Myers

Sarah is a young woman with a visual impairment. She decides to enter a popular electronics store to buy a new headphone. While navigating the aisles, she notices the product demonstrations are all visual without any tactile or auditory descriptions. She feels isolated

and overlooked, constrained in terms of accessing information that others take for granted. Sarah's experience is not just a personal inconvenience but reflects a broader issue in consumer marketing practices: the lack of inclusive actions to meet all customers' diverse needs. In a world rich with diversity, individuals like Sarah often face barriers that limit their full inclusion in buying and consumption activities. These barriers are not just physical, as in this example, but also extend to communication, product design, and companies' overall marketing strategies. Indeed, Sarah is not the only consumer struggling with companies' marketing practices. Paul, a member of

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the LGBTQIA+ community, feels invisible when noticing that most of the advertisements only show heterosexual couples. As an older driver with limited buying power, Harold feels frustrated when he realizes that many automobile manufacturers focus their marketing efforts and technological advancements on features that primarily cater to younger, more tech-savvy drivers rather than the safety and comfort he requires. Jasmine, a black woman, feels disappointed when walking into a beauty store and seeing rows of foundation shades for lighter skin tones, while options for darker skin tones are scarce and poorly formulated. Numerous other examples could be cited to demonstrate that consumers demand diversity consideration and inclusion practices from companies. Recent research shows that 36% of US and UK customers have boycotted a brand due to diversity and representation issues in its practices (roboBusiness Wire, 2022). A famous example is Starbucks, which faced public criticism and boycotts following a 2018 racial profiling incident at one of its stores. Since COVID-19, consumers are more focused on businesses' social impact and scrutinize organizations' inclusion initiatives. For example, most American consumers, particularly young ones, expect companies to include more voices in their communications. As of spring 2023, 70% of adult Gen Z (born between 1997 and the mid-2000s) and 75% of millennials (1981–1996) thought brands with a large target audience should promote diversity and inclusion (Statista, 2024).

Alongside customers' growing demand, societal, ethical, and social justice issues, including diversity and inclusion, have become increasingly relevant in marketing and public policy (Andrews et al., 2022). Governments around the world are crafting legislation and regulations aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion; consequently, companies' practices strive to align with these measures and gain consumers' preferences. This trend aligns with several of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as a framework for addressing global challenges and promoting sustainable development. Addressing diversity and inclusion could contribute to: promoting gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10) more generally; building peace, justice, and institutions' effectiveness (SDG 16); promoting decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); driving innovation and sustainable development within industries (SDG 9). Despite this progression and potential contribution to SDGs' diversity and inclusion practices, the United Nations emphasizes that global inequalities nevertheless persist and are based on factors like income, sex, age, disability, and others, with a significant portion of the world's population—one in six people—facing some form of discrimination (United Nations, 2023).

Consequently, understanding diversity and inclusion is a critical challenge for marketers wanting to meet consumers' needs. Since manufacturers involve consumers in their value creation, they are interested in understanding how customers' concern about inclusion impacts their buying choices and experiences (Thakur & Dhar, 2022). Firms therefore recognize the importance of supporting diversity and inclusion in various ways, such as inclusive advertising, product and service innovation, and channel restructuring, to serve a broader, more inclusive customer base (Henderson et al., 2023). This

imperative to address inequalities is also echoed by Shultz et al. (2022), who note that marketing scholars could play a crucial role by proposing actionable policies and good marketing practices that might contribute to a more inclusive and fairer world. Similarly, Madera et al. (2023) argue that research could help businesses comprehend diverse consumer segments' needs and preferences, thereby fostering an inclusive environment and leading to enhanced customer satisfaction and company revenue.

While the academic marketing literature pays increasing attention to these issues, consumer research in marketing still seems to lack a state-of-the-art understanding of diversity and inclusion. Specifically, there is a need to comprehend the impact of corporates' diversity considerations and inclusion policies on consumers' responses (van Bommel et al., 2024; Khan & Kalra, 2022). By adopting the consumer's point of view, our study aims to contribute by exploring how the marketing literature has dealt with customers' reactions to companies' diversity and inclusion efforts, pointing out their impact on individuals, society, and companies.

We conducted a domain-based systematic literature review (SLR) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature (Palmatier et al., 2018) on diversity and inclusion in consumer research. The SLR allowed us to use an organized approach to analyze the contributions published in this area to date. By considering only the highest-ranking journals and through the most authoritative literature, we aim to systematize what efforts are being made for diversity and inclusion in marketing, which are the effects for companies that adopt them, and the consequences for the individual and society. Following a qualitative approach, which involved a detailed analysis of the articles, the results are an expression of a relevant, valid, and insightful group of contributions, for a state-of-the-art on the topic. Specifically, this article contributes to the diversity and inclusion literature's knowledge within the marketing literature by providing (Palmatier et al., 2018): (1) a systematization of the diversity and inclusion literature in consumer research; (2) a conceptual framework that organizes the impacts of companies diversity and inclusion policies on the individuals, the society as a whole and the companies themselves; and (3) a comprehensive research agenda for future marketing studies on diversity and inclusion.

## 2 | LITERATURE BACKGROUND

### 2.1 | Diversity and inclusion conceptualization

The concepts of diversity and inclusion in the marketplace are multifaceted and encompass a range of dimensions. In line with Henderson et al. (2023) and Arsel et al. (2022), we define diversity as recognizing individuals' physical and sociocultural distinctions, while inclusion focuses on integrating and valuing diverse groups within a setting to promote a sense of belonging and counteract exclusion and marginalization. Diversity is about acknowledging and valuing people or groups' distinct characteristics and identities (Campbell et al., 2023). Patrick and Hollenbeck (2021) emphasize identity's multidimensional nature, which comprises age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, disabilities, indigenous heritage, and national origin. This view aligns with that of Arsel et al. (2022), who discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion through various lenses such as: gender, age, and body; race and ethnicity; social class and social status; and religion and cultural identity. Shultz et al. (2022) broaden the scope of diversity even further to include additional dimensions: sexual orientation, nationality and language, disability, religious commitment, and political perspective. They also emphasize that inclusion is not just about welcoming diversity but also about ensuring full participation in decision-making and having equal access to a system's opportunities (Shultz et al., 2022).

Khan and Kalra (2022) offer another perspective on diversity by delineating between surface-level differences (such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age) and deep-level differences (like attitudes, expertise, and personalities). Interestingly, they note that surface-level differences often serve as initial indicators of deeper-level variances.

Diversity and inclusion are often linked to equity, which refers to fairness when treating people in terms of opportunities and outcomes (Arsel et al., 2022). Equity involves actively ensuring justice, fairness, and impartiality in a system's processes, procedures, and allocation of resources to all, while acknowledging that, historically, certain individuals might have enjoyed greater privileges than others (Shultz et al., 2022). Equity therefore ensures that all individuals have the same opportunity to succeed, irrespective of their background or any elements that could lead to unequal conditions (Campbell et al., 2023).

Furthermore, consumers might encounter a range of challenging circumstances that lead to different forms of vulnerability (Hill & Sharma, 2020), which in turn translates into the need to be included. These challenges could stem from personal attributes (like age, race, or physical abilities), societal factors (such as stereotypes or discriminatory treatment), or business-related practices (including store designs and marketing tactics).

Discrimination, prejudice, and bias encompass negative attitudes and behaviors directed at individuals or groups and based on various characteristics. These reactions are linked to stigma, which refers to an adverse belief, a perception, or a stereotype associated with certain traits. These traits are characterized as a standardized and simplified representation that certain individuals and the larger community associate with shame. Furthermore, being associated with a stigma could mean people's societal exclusion due to attributes related to their identity (Campbell et al., 2023; Milfeld et al., 2021). This process could culminate in the discrimination and marginalization of such stigmatized individuals by excluding them from important societal activities. Marginalization is a process whereby specific groups are relegated to society's outskirts and denied access to mainstream opportunities and resources in the social, economic, and political spheres.

## 2.2 | The need for a thorough understanding of diversity and inclusion in consumer research

We conducted a preliminary search to identify previous relevant reviews and conceptual articles and better position our study (Snyder, 2019); Appendix A provides a synthesis of this search. All the studies presented

in Appendix A represent relevant advancements in the diversity and inclusion literature but focus either on a specific type of diversity or a specific context within consumer research. Previous literature reviews focusing on a specific type of diversity considered, for example, LGBTQ communities (Minton et al., 2017; Montecchi et al., 2024), race and ethnicity (Grier et al., 2022; Licsandru & Cui, 2018), or gender (Kanwal et al., 2022). Other literature reviews linked to diversity and inclusion focused on a specific context, either a marketing area—such as diversity representations in advertising (Campbell et al., 2023), product design (Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021), or employees' diversity training (Thakur & Dhar, 2022)—or a specific sector, such as hospitality and tourism (Madera et al., 2023). Notably, van Bommel et al. (2024) found that management literature has mostly developed on three research streams, namely diversity management, board diversity, and team diversity. The authors called for future research on the relationship between diversity and inclusion and its effects on society. Since a systematic understanding of the marketing research on all diversities and inclusion practices in different contexts is lacking, our paper aims to fill this gap by providing a broader overview of the state-of-the-art of diversity and inclusion integration into the consumer research literature.

More specifically, by performing a SLR of the studies on diversity and inclusion within consumer research, our study addresses the following questions:

**RQ1.** *Which is the state-of-the-art of exploration of diversity and inclusion in consumer research literature and what are the main theoretical basis, research contexts, characteristics, and methodologies of those studies?*

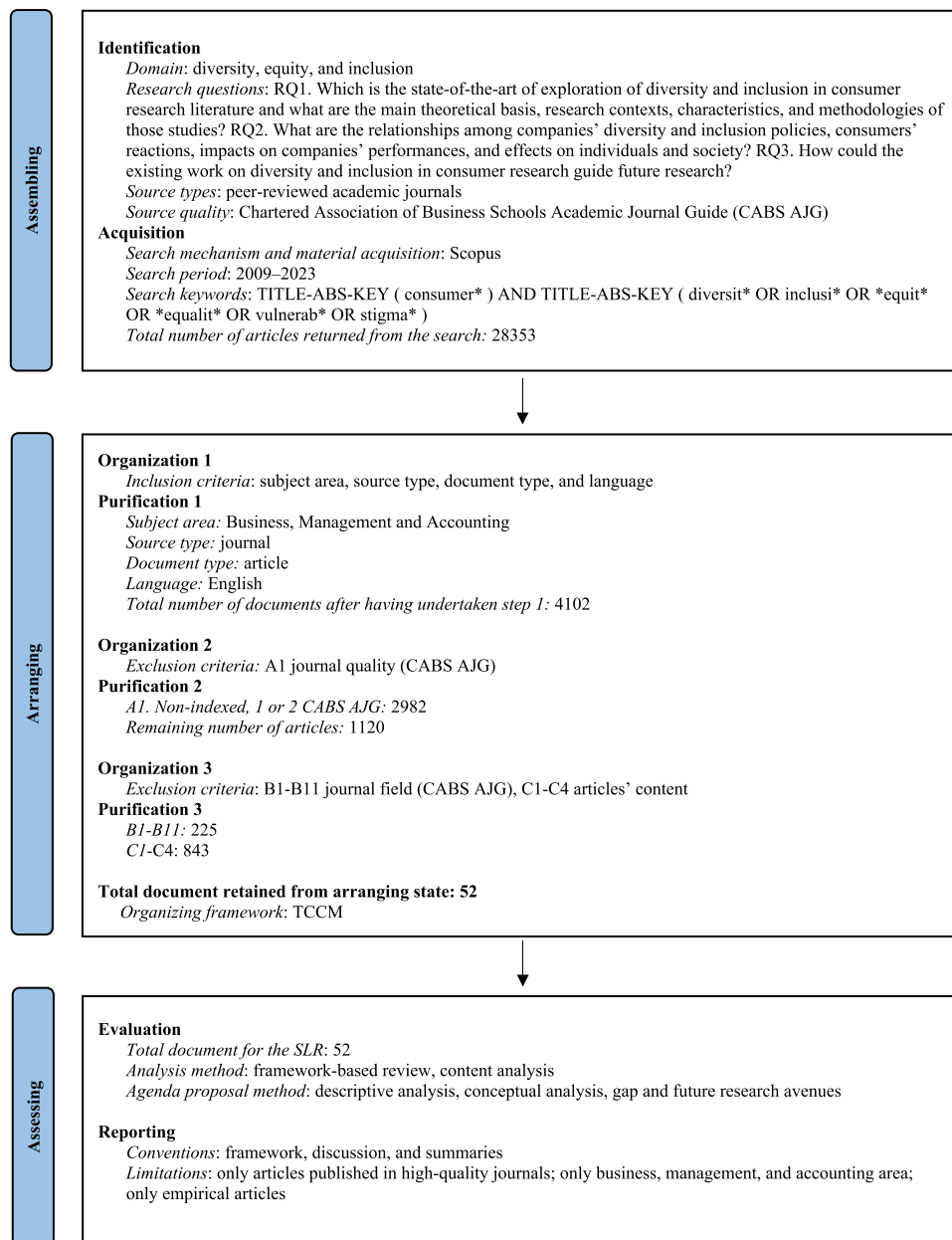
**RQ2.** *What are the relationships among companies' diversity and inclusion policies, consumers' reactions, impacts on companies' performances, and effects on individuals and society?*

**RQ3.** *How could the existing work on diversity and inclusion in consumer research guide future research?*

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

The SLR (Fink, 2009; Tranfield et al., 2003) follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Literature Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Furthermore, in line with recent examples in the literature (e.g., Ameen et al., 2022; Basu et al., 2023; Cammarota et al., 2023; Reshadi & Fitzgerald, 2023), we adopted the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for SLR (SPAR-4-SLR) (Paul et al., 2021). As summarized in Figure 1, the SPAR-4-SLR comprises three stages: assembling, arranging, and assessing (Paul et al., 2021). Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

We obtained the data from the Scopus online databases. Considering previous relevant literature (e.g., Arsel et al., 2022; van Bommel et al., 2024; Campbell et al., 2023; Henderson et al., 2023; Madera et al., 2023; Montecchi et al., 2024; Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021; de Ruyter et al., 2022; Shultz et al., 2022; Thakur



**FIGURE 1** Authors' elaboration, adapted from the SPAR-4-SLR (Paul et al., 2021).

& Dhar, 2022), we screened titles, abstracts, and the keywords to identify potentially relevant articles:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (consumer\*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (diversit\* OR inclusi\* OR \*equit\* OR \*equalit\* OR vulnerab\* OR stigma\*)

Through this selection of keywords, we focused on diversity, equity and inclusion in a broader perspective, and not on specific types of diversity.

The search was further refined to exclusively include articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals. We only retained scientific articles written in English, excluding other types of publications (e.g., conference proceedings). We applied the subject

area filter “business, management and accounting” in Scopus (Basu et al., 2023), considering articles published in any country between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2023 and accessible online. We obtained 4102 records based on these criteria. This 15-year period was specifically chosen because of the rising attention on the topic (van Bommel et al., 2024; de Ruyter et al., 2022), but also considering the significant increase in the number of records (in line with Mir et al., 2023) and to focus on the current knowledge (in line with Júnior et al., 2023). Moreover, widely resonant events have helped bring attention to diversity and inclusion issues in the period under consideration, influencing the debate on these topics. Similarly, in this timeframe, brands have increasingly engaged in concrete actions beyond just representation and advertising. Considering the broad spectrum of the theme, some diversity- and inclusion-related

**TABLE 1** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	(Number of items)	Exclusion criteria	(Number of items)
<i>Step 2</i>			
3 CABS AJG	(765)	A1 Non-indexed CABS AJG	(1006)
4 CABS AJG	(123)	1 CABS AJG	(1056)
4* CABS AJG	(232)	2 CABS AJG	(920)
<i>Step 3</i>			
General Management, Ethics, Gender, and Social Responsibility	(234)	B1 Accounting	(9)
Innovation	(35)	B2 Business and Economic History	(4)
Marketing	(483)	B3 Economics, Econometrics and Statistics	(38)
Operations Research and Management Science	(38)	B4 Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management	(8)
Psychology	(2)	B5 Finance	(36)
Sports, Leisure, Tourism, and Sector Studies	(90)	B6 Human Resource Management and Employment Studies	(9)
Social Sciences	(8)	B7 International Business and Area Studies	(11)
Strategy	(5)	B8 Information Systems	(41)
		B9 Operations and Technology Management	(53)
		B10 Organizational Studies	(10)
		B11 Public Sector and Health Care	(6)
		C1 Review, conceptual articles	(95)
		C2 Curation, commentary, introduction, editorial	(23)
		C3 Other than consumer approach	(18)
		C4 Not related, out of scope	(707)

Source: Authors' own work.

milestones and brands' initiatives are reported in Table A2 (Appendix B). Finally, conducting an SLR of the past 15 years is in line with the previous literature (e.g., Hassan et al., 2022; Paul et al., 2021).

We carried out the initial screening by starting with this data set. First, taking the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide (CABS AJG) 2021 into consideration, we filtered for journals ranked 3, 4, or 4\*, thereby ensuring our results' relevance and quality, in line with previous literature (e.g., Battisti et al., 2023; Trequattrini et al., 2023). We retained a total of 1120 articles, since 2982 were either published in journals ranked 1 (1056) or 2 (920) or not included in the list (1006).

Second, based on the CABS AJG 2021 list, we checked each journal's field for its affinity with marketing and related areas. Of these, 225 records did not meet this criterion. However, to ensure that these journals contained no potentially relevant articles, each record was checked individually. Ultimately, we included all journals labeled as *Marketing*, as well as *General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility, Innovation, Operations Research and Management Science, Psychology, Sports, Leisure, Tourism and Sector Studies, Social Sciences, and Strategy*. This

choice was made even though these journals were not directly designated as marketing-related, but they might nevertheless have published articles pertinent to our domain. For example, the *Journal of Business Ethics* is labeled as pertaining to *General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility*, while the *Journal of Service Research* is labeled as pertaining to *Sports, Leisure, Tourism and Sector Studies*.

After this process, we continued our analysis by carefully reading the titles, abstracts, introductions, and conclusions of the 895 resulting records. A paper was considered not relevant if: (a) it was a conceptual article or a literature review (C1); (b) it was a curation, commentary, introduction, or editorial (C2); (c) it did not focus on consumers (C3); and (d) it was beyond the present article's scope, that is, not related to this study's research objectives (C4). The latter group (C4) included, for example, articles focused on brand/corporate equity, vulnerabilities (e.g., data vulnerability, product vulnerability, and company vulnerability), or stigma (e.g., green stigma, stigmatized products, and industries), not related to diversity and inclusion. We excluded all articles with at least one exclusion criterion. Ambiguous cases were resolved by reviewing the article fully.

We considered an article potentially relevant if it included empirical research (Snyder, 2019), and: (a) was related to one of the diversity dimensions identified in previous literature; or, (b) was related to consumer stigmatization because of their diversity; and (c) was related to consumer inclusion; or, (d) addressed how consumers perceive diversity and inclusion's various forms and aspects in business practices; or (e) analyzed how consumers respond to companies' diversity and inclusion policies. We only focused on empirical articles, as they present evidence-based findings that enable us to observe the actual impact of marketing policies on individuals, companies, and society, thus closely aligning with our objectives.

To ensure that the analysis was highly reliable, we performed a back check of every excluded or included item. Finally, we read all the articles in full to ensure the record selection's validity. Ultimately, we had a cluster of 52 articles. Appendix C shows the entire list of selected articles.

Among the different types of SLR, such as meta-analytical reviews, meta-systematic reviews, and theory-, method-, and domain-based reviews, the latter focus on the development of a specific area, outlet, or topic (Paul & Criado, 2020). Our SLR is a domain-based review. According to Palmatier et al. (2018, p. 3), domain-based review articles “review, synthesize, and extend a body of literature in the same substantive domain”. This approach is useful in providing state-of-the-art knowledge and identifying avenues for future research. Moreover, among the different types of domain-based review, our SLR can be classified as a framework-based review, according to Paul and Criado (2020), since we also employ the theory, context, characteristics, and methodology (TCCM) framework, which we will describe in the next section. This framework was chosen for the review process because it ensures a high level of clarity and coverage (Paul et al., 2021).

## 4 | RESULTS

### 4.1 | Descriptive analysis

Figure A1 in Appendix E shows the distribution by year, journal, and authors' affiliations. Most of the studies are recent and have been published since 2018. The number of publications has also increased, confirming marketing research's growing interest in this topic. Furthermore, the publication of the studies was rather fragmented across journals. Several journals published just one article on the topic, while the majority of the articles were published in two journals, the *Journal of Advertising* (9) and the *Journal of Business Research* (8). Finally, regarding the authors' affiliations, it is interesting to note that these scholars are concentrated in just a few countries—mostly the United States and the United Kingdom, followed by a few countries in Europe, in line with van Bommel et al. (2024). Consequently, these countries only represent a small share of the marketing academic community's plurality.

In conclusion, the first descriptive analysis shows that studies on diversity and inclusion in consumer research are mainly concentrated in terms of their temporality and the geographical distribution of these publications.

### 4.2 | Research on diversity and inclusion's current status in consumer research

To answer our RQ1, and in line with previous contributions (e.g., Ameen et al., 2022; Branca et al., 2023; Cammarota et al., 2023), we combined our SLR with the TCCM framework (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). This framework facilitates the clear and comprehensive development of insights, thereby effectively covering both the theoretical and the empirical dimensions of the research field (Castagnoli et al., 2022). By considering the breadth of current knowledge (Akhmedova et al., 2021), it provides a thorough understanding of the given research area and is particularly adept at identifying knowledge gaps and suggesting new research directions (Tsiotsou et al., 2022). It emerged as a suitable framework for highlighting the main theoretical basis, the research contexts, the diversity and inclusion themes (characteristics), and the research methodologies. Table A4 in Appendix D provides a summary of the TCCM map resulting from our analysis. We next discuss the main results of this analysis.

#### 4.2.1 | Theory

Theories that serve as the article's theoretical background are reported under the “theory” label. Table 2 presents a summary of the theories that emerged most frequently from our analysis.

Our analysis points out that the theoretical approaches used in the literature vary, as detailed in Table A4 in Appendix D; nevertheless, certain theoretical streams emerged as particularly relevant. Indeed, most contributions employed (*social*) *identity theory* to examine how individuals' self-concepts and their relationship with social groups influenced their perceptions and behaviors. Other studies relied on *stigma* to understand how societal perceptions of certain attributes affect consumer behavior. Such a theoretical perspective is crucial for understanding the challenges that stigmatized groups face in the marketplace and how marketing could intervene to alleviate these challenges. Finally, several articles (12) do not present (or explicitly mention) a reference theory as the basis of the study.

#### 4.2.2 | Context

Information such as the studies' locations, the demographics of the samples involved, the use of a specific brand, product, or service as stimuli, materials, and manipulations, as well as a focus on a specific industry, was highlighted within the framework's “context” dimension if available. Table 3 presents a summary of the most frequently analyzed industries, while Table A4 (Appendix D) presents all the other details.

Many studies focus on specific industries when exploring diversity and inclusion themes. However, *advertising* is a frequent domain of analysis and in line with the papers' distribution in the various journals shown in Figure A2 (Appendix E). Since the studies'

**TABLE 2** The reviewed articles' most relevant theoretical backgrounds.

Theory	References
Identity theory, social identity theory, common ingroup identity model	Cabano and Minton (2023), Cheng et al. (2023), Chowdhury et al. (2023), Henderson et al. (2023), Wilkie et al. (2023), Homburg and Ukrainets (2021), Licsandru and Cui (2019), Ruggs et al. (2018), Loughran Dommer et al. (2013)
Stigma, stigmatized identity, stigma theory, stigma identity management, theory of consumer discrimination	Eichert and Luedicke (2022), Jacob et al. (2022), Matson-Barkat et al. (2022), Harmeling et al. (2021), Kuppaswamy and Younkin (2020)
Morality, moral foundation theory	Boman et al. (2023), Chowdhury et al. (2023), Khan and Kalra (2022)
Empowerment	Septianto et al. (2023), Matson-Barkat et al. (2022)
Intersectionality, theory of intersectionality	Rydzik et al. (2021), Thomas (2013)

Source: Authors' own work.

**TABLE 3** Frequently analyzed industries in the reviewed articles.

Industry	Relevant examples
Advertising	Chowdhury et al. (2023), Henderson et al. (2023), Naidu et al. (2023), Nelson and Cook (2023), Milfeld et al. (2021), Lou et al. (2019), Ruggs et al. (2018), Strebinger et al. (2018), Puntoni et al. (2011), Tsai (2011)
Entertainment	Cheng et al. (2023), Chang and Kim (2022), Kuppaswamy and Younkin (2020), Russell et al. (2013)
Hospitality and tourism	Song and Park (2023), Yang (2023), Rydzik et al. (2021), Cloquet et al. (2018), Dias de Faria et al. (2012)
Healthcare	Kipnis et al. (2022), Harmeling et al. (2021), Aiyar and Venugopal (2020), Meyer et al. (2020)
Financial services	Mende et al. (2020), Dadzie et al. (2013)
Retail and commercial settings	Jacob et al. (2022), Homburg and Ukrainets (2021)
Video games	Benischke et al. (2023), Parshakov et al. (2023)

Source: Authors' own work.

locations are crucial for understanding the cultural context of the research, it is worth noting that most of the research involves samples from the US or other Western countries, which is also in line with Figure A3 in Appendix E's descriptive findings.

### 4.2.3 | Characteristics

The "characteristics" dimension first describes the various types within diversity and inclusion that the reviewed articles had analyzed. Table 4 presents a summary of the most relevant aspects or forms of diversity and inclusion.

*Race and ethnicity* and *cultural diversity* are some of the most investigated topics. Another relevant group of articles focuses on *disabilities or health conditions*. Another stream of research centers on the topics of *sexual orientation or gender identity*. *Socioeconomic status* and social inclusion/exclusion are other recurrent topics.

*Intersectionality* refers to the understanding that individuals have various social identities, which include their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status. These identities intertwine and influence one another, thereby collectively forming each person's unique experiences and outcomes in life (Campbell et al., 2023). Intersectionality recognizes that various social differences could influence people's disadvantage experiences (Rydzik et al., 2021). A few articles appear to consider different forms or

aspects of diversity, directly dealing with intersectionality, as in the case of Rydzik et al. (2021), or considering various social identities, as Oc et al. (2023), Ruggs et al. (2018), and Thomas (2013) describe.

Finally, the column "Characteristics" in Table A4, Appendix D, presents the reviewed articles' main findings, primary constructs, variables, and the relationships derived from the studies. This content will be addressed in Section 5.

### 4.2.4 | Methodology

This section details the nature of the reviewed studies but excludes preliminary tests or pilot studies. As summarized in Table 5 (see Table A4 in Appendix D for details), various methodologies were applied.

Qualitative techniques, such as interviews, netnography and focus groups are not frequently employed as the main research methodology. *Experiments*, in many settings and under various conditions—online, in a laboratory, or in the field—are the methodologies that researchers use most commonly (19).

To a lesser extent, some articles rely on a secondary data analysis, such as content analysis or regressions, as their main approach. Large surveys are seldom used, except in combination with other techniques. Finally, a large number of articles (18) employed mixed methods, either qualitative or quantitative.



**TABLE 4** Diversity and inclusion types in the reviewed articles.

Type	Relevant references
Race, ethnicity, and cultural diversity	Benischke et al. (2023), Boman et al. (2023), Henderson et al. (2023), Khan and Kalra (2022), Touré-Tillery et al. (2022), Kuppaswamy and Younkin (2020), Licsandru and Cui (2019), Strebinger et al. (2018), Bartikowski and Walsh (2015), Bennett et al. (2013), Russell et al. (2013)
(Dis)abilities, health conditions, and inclusion	Naidu et al. (2023), Nelson and Cook (2023), Song and Park (2023), Chang and Kim (2022), Kipnis et al. (2022), Matson-Barkat et al. (2022), Fletcher-Brown et al. (2021), Harmeling et al. (2021), Meyer et al. (2020), Dias de Faria and Moreira Casotti (2019), Cloquet et al. (2018), Dias de Faria et al. (2012), Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers (2009)
Sexual orientation, gender, and individual diversity	Cabano and Minton (2023), Cheng et al. (2023), Chowdhury et al. (2023), Parshakov et al. (2023), Septianto et al. (2023), Eichert and Luedicke (2022), Ginder et al. (2021), Puntoni et al. (2011), Tsai (2011)
Socioeconomic conditions and inclusion	Jacob et al. (2022), Homburg and Ukrainets (2021), Aiyar and Venugopal (2020), Mende et al. (2020), Chipp et al. (2019), Dadzie et al. (2013)
Diversity and inclusion (general)	Oc et al. (2023), Wilkie et al. (2023), Yang (2023), Mirzaei et al. (2022), Campbell et al. (2023), Milfeld et al. (2021), Rydzik et al. (2021), Wu and Dodoo (2020), Lou et al. (2019), Wang and Lalwani (2019), Ruggs et al. (2018), Loughran Dommer et al. (2013), Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), Thomas (2013)

Source: Authors' own work.

**TABLE 5** Most used methodologies in the review articles.

Methods	Number of articles	References
Interview	4	Chipp et al. (2019), Dias de Faria and Moreira Casotti (2019), Tsai (2011), Kaufman-Scarborough and Childers (2009)
Netnography	2	Yang (2023), Fletcher-Brown et al. (2021)
Focus groups	1	Kipnis et al. (2022)
Experiment	19	Boman et al. (2023), Chowdhury et al. (2023), Naidu et al. (2023), Nelson and Cook (2023), Song and Park (2023), Chang and Kim (2022), Jacob et al. (2022), Khan and Kalra (2022), Touré-Tillery et al. (2022), Ginder et al. (2021), Harmeling et al. (2021), Milfeld et al. (2021), Aiyar and Venugopal (2020), Wu and Dodoo (2020), Lou et al. (2019), Wang and Lalwani (2019), Ruggs et al. (2018), Loughran Dommer et al. (2013), Puntoni et al. (2011)
Secondary data analysis	5	Benischke et al. (2023), Oc et al. (2023), Mirzaei et al. (2022), Rydzik et al. (2021), Cloquet et al. (2018)
Survey	3	Bartikowski and Walsh (2015), Bennett et al. (2013), Dadzie et al. (2013)
Mixed methods	18	Cabano and Minton (2023), Cheng et al. (2023), Henderson et al. (2023), Parshakov et al. (2023), Septianto et al. (2023), Wilkie et al. (2023), Eichert and Luedicke (2022), Matson-Barkat et al. (2022), Homburg and Ukrainets (2021), Kuppaswamy and Younkin (2020), Mende et al. (2020), Meyer et al. (2020), Licsandru and Cui (2019), Strebinger et al. (2018), Russell et al. (2013), Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), Thomas (2013), Dias de Faria et al. (2012)

Source: Authors' own work.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

The analyzed literature covers a broad spectrum of research streams and relevant topics related to diversity and inclusion, within the marketing literature, thereby underscoring the multifaceted nature of consumer research. To answer our RQ2, we therefore first identified the key marketing themes and for each pointed out the main contributions to diversity and inclusion that emerged from the reviewed articles.

The main themes were identified through manual reading and coding of each reviewed article, supported by a semi-automatic text

network analysis conducted employing the cloud-based version of InfraNodus (n.d.). This analysis is a computational method that highlights the relationships between words as a network graph; after visualizing the text as a network, topic modeling can be employed to identify latent topics and associated word groups within the text corpus (Berger et al., 2022; D'Arco et al., 2024; Paranyushkin, 2019). More details on the themes' identification are available in Appendix F. Finally, to fully answer our RQ2, we rationalize these findings in a conceptual framework (described in Section 5.8) that systematizes the relationships between diversity, inclusion, and marketing policies

and their impacts for individuals, companies and the society as a whole.

## 5.1 | Diversity in the marketplace

The literature review points out that diversity can be a form of self-expression, as well as a factor influencing marketplace relationships. Minority group consumers, such as gay men, often leverage their economic power and consumption choices as a means of political activism, thereby leveraging their consumer status to support their rights (Tsai, 2011). Diversity also influences product choice (Touré-Tillery et al., 2022), for example, consumers are more likely to choose healthy food in the presence of outgroup members because they anticipate more negative judgment. However, certain consumers face challenges and frustration when seeking variety and inclusivity in the mainstream market. An example of this is plus-size consumers, as analyzed by Scaraboto and Fischer (2013). These “fashionistas” require a greater choice and inclusivity. Social exclusion affects not only consumers' impression management but also their cultural self-construal, particularly in the context of social interactions and decision-making processes (Wang & Lalwani, 2019). Strongly religious service providers or very conservative service employees should therefore probably avoid affiliating with certain social groups and associating with undesirable social identities, such as that of LGBTQIA+ consumers, which would adversely affect their service quality because other consumers would perceive their social identity as a threat (Cabano & Minton, 2023).

Exposure to cultural diversity shapes consumers' tastes and preferences, leading to more openness to diverse cultural products and services. Documenting the complex relationship between cultural diversity and firm performance, Benischke et al. (2023) found that cultural diversity enhances the sales of foreign firms' products more strongly than those of domestic firms. Consumers who live in culturally diverse regions are also more variety-seeking than those in culturally homogenous regions. However, Bartikowski and Walsh (2015) demonstrated that consumers with a stronger national identity exhibit greater reluctance to purchase foreign products, while a global identity does not influence their decision. Thomas (2013) links consumption values to cultural diversity, shedding light on how diverse cultural backgrounds influence consumer preferences and choices. Both black and white millennial men use the consumer culture for self-expression and to form their identity, while there are also differences in the way various groups perceive and utilize marketplace symbols. Indeed, the dominant discourse about white and black male identity influences how consumers perceive themselves and their possibilities and how these perceptions affect marketplace interaction. In this regard, Bennett et al. (2013) found evidence that racial groups' brand perceptions differ. Several levels of marketplace access have relevant consequences for minority consumers. Compared with majorities, minorities perceive some brands as warmer, although fewer differences emerged with respect to brand competence. Minority groups also exhibit more exaggerated affective responses. Similarly,

Henderson et al. (2023) posit that prominent brands' purchase intention advantage is relatively weak among racial minorities, due to the erosion of their ingroup identification.

According to Loughran Dommer et al. (2013), brands manage both social inclusion and exclusion. Their study finds that self-esteem plays a moderating role in consumers' attachment to differentiated brands, particularly in social exclusion contexts. Greater diversity within firms' corporate teams leads to perceptions that such firms and their representatives exhibit a higher morality, which in turn results in more favorable consumer attitudes and behaviors. Khan and Kalra (2022) showed that diversity has a positive impact on consumer attitudes and behavior toward the firm. Ginder et al. (2021) found that internal and external congruence in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives leads to positive consumer perceptions. Consequently, when a company's CSR efforts align with its internal practices and external communications, these efforts also enhance the company's credibility and foster consumer trust. Mirzaei et al. (2022) delved into the authenticity of woke brand activism, by stressing its importance. Nevertheless, being authentic is both complex and challenging for a brand. According to the authors, inclusion can be defined as the extent to which the target audience finds a “woke” message neutral (related to gender, race, and politics).

## 5.2 | Break the stigma to foster inclusion

Consumers' individual characteristics, such as the condition of their health or their socioeconomic status, might therefore become a stigma. Consequently, these attributes are judged negatively when they deviate from what others consider normal, thereby leading to the person being devalued in a specific social context. This situation could impact consumption behaviors, and it presents marketers across various industries with a significant challenge (Harmeling et al., 2021). The literature has shown that stigmatization of social groups, such as racial or sexual minorities, also affects consumer behavior and well-being (Homburg & Ukrainets, 2021).

Stigmatized consumers could interpret certain elements in marketing messages as indicators of an audience's reaction, thereby judging how observers might perceive their consumption, given the stigma (Harmeling et al., 2021). Audience cues also influence social devaluation implications, thus affecting beneficial consumption, such as engagement in healthcare programs, and interest in detrimental consumption, specifically in products that might alleviate the stigma but are associated with risks and financial costs. Anticipated empowerment could, however, play a role in increasing stigmatized consumers' beneficial consumption (Harmeling et al., 2021).

As discussed by Homburg and Ukrainets (2021) in the context of discount stores, the social stigmatization of low-status customers could also affect high-status, non-stigmatized customers' behavior. Stigma leads to a social identity threat that reduces higher-income customers' loyalty. However, if their social identity is secure, this

stigmatization could paradoxically enhance their loyalty to these stores, a phenomenon attributed to destigmatization when a once stigmatized practice becomes socially acceptable.

Indeed, destigmatization could progress through several paths. As Tsai (2011) describes, consumers could develop self-empowering, interpretive strategies to cope with stigma and negotiate their marginalized social status. Matson-Barkat et al. (2022) discuss destigmatization by means of the social sharing of emotions and empowerment. These authors use the case of disabled athletes and the consumers of disability sports to illustrate that participation in sports could change public perceptions and empower individuals with disabilities. According to Eichert and Luedicke (2022), when a stigmatized social group, such as gay men in Germany, achieves greater recognition, the group no longer has a single stigmatizing representation because a fragmented stigma has been generated in which oppressive, enabling, and normalized societal representations coexist and compete. The social group gradually disintegrates into diverse subgroups that allow individuals to pursue their interests and use consumption as a strategic tool to navigate their stigmatization. Each of the subgroups has specific effects on the destigmatizing of the group as a whole.

Meyer et al. (2020) investigated public stigma regarding health conditions and their impact on the effectiveness of anti-stigma campaigns. Such campaigns could be enhanced by tailoring health message frames (biomedical or biopsychosocial) that align with the target audience's implicit worldviews (categorical or dimensional), particularly for health conditions perceived as less severe. The same mechanism applies to physical health conditions such as obesity. Vulnerable consumers stigmatized by cancer could also engage with a brand's corporate social media campaign in the context of limited public health provision and sociocultural norms that marginalize such consumers (Fletcher-Brown et al., 2021). They could leverage the brand's platform to replenish their depleted cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social resources. Companies could therefore play a transformative role through their corporate social media engagement. Explicitly mentioning highly stigmatized groups in advertising could, however, lead to less positive consumer responses. Nevertheless, as Milfeld et al. (2021) found, leveraging a deeply embedded and widely shared cultural concept or mindset to frame a message—for example, by employing a cultural identity mindset framing—could mitigate this effect and generate more positive responses. The authors used the “fresh start” concept rooted in American culture to improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups (e.g., ex-offenders and drug addicts) and the sponsoring brand.

### 5.3 | Addressing socioeconomic conditions to achieve equity

Research has analyzed socioeconomic conditions' consequences for consumer inclusion and highlighted the role institutions play. Aiyar and Venugopal (2020) addressed the challenges of including economically disadvantaged consumers by means of a

macromarketing lens, thereby emphasizing the importance of understanding the unique needs of base-of-the-pyramid markets. By removing consumers' affordability constraints and allowing them to engage in markets, public policy could also play a crucial role. Jacob et al. (2022) notably found that anticipated socioeconomic status-based discrimination leads to the poor experiencing reduced price sensitivity. This “psychological ghetto tax” implies that people's fear of being discriminated against due to their socioeconomic status could alter their purchasing behavior and potentially lead to their reduced price sensitivity and willingness to accept lower-value rewards. Consequently, as an alternative, and to avoid discrimination, consumers could opt to buy higher-priced products.

Mende et al. (2020) focused on how to enhance financial inclusion in “banking deserts,” that is, areas with limited access to banking services. According to their research, communal financial orientation could also play a crucial role in engaging marginalized consumers. Rural communities' characteristics in emerging markets influence economic development programs' effectiveness. Marketing could also shape rural banking programs' public policy options, thereby contributing to inclusive economic development by taking consumers' preferences and habits into consideration. Dadzie et al. (2013) reported that modern banks could achieve large-scale credit aggregation, although rural consumers might resist using these banks due to their nonlocal origin. Finally, Chipp et al. (2019) investigated institutions' role in shaping acquisition value. These findings highlight institutional factors' significant impact on consumer perception and decision-making processes in terms of their value acquisition.

### 5.4 | Diversity and inclusion through representation and advertising

Representation is important, and advertising could also influence consumer perceptions positively (Russell et al., 2013). Indeed, how the marketplace communicates with and about stigmatized groups is an emerging topic in the literature (Milfeld et al., 2021). Ruggs et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of diversity and representation in advertising by showing that the use of nontraditional models could influence consumers' attitudes and behavior positively. However, consumer responses to ads featuring marginalized groups are varied and depend on the consumers' identities and the ads' compatibility with their schemas. Wilkie et al. (2023) provide a framework for understanding consumer reactions to inclusivity in advertising, finding that contemporary consumers generally require brands to embrace inclusivity. However, promoting diversity and inclusion through advertising could be intricate, requiring marketers to support minority groups without alienating others. According to Wu and Dodoo (2020), it is important to consider the social context when crafting advertising strategies. Social experience (i.e., inclusion or exclusion) significantly influences how consumers perceive and react to advertisements, particularly those with different regulatory focuses.

In other words, advertising could achieve greater inclusion by playing a relevant role in diversity's different forms or aspects.

Advertising presenting minorities and featuring diversification by showing multi-racial groups lessens a sense of segregation and strengthens societal identification and prominent brands' value (Henderson et al., 2023). Consumers expect communication to celebrate diversity, respect, and cultural competence. As Licsandru and Cui (2019) revealed, because millennials are ethnically diverse, mono-ethnic targeted messages do not resonate with them; multi-ethnic embedded marketing communications are more effective. Political ideology and racial attitudes could also shape consumer responses. Incorporating diverse racial cues into messages could help conservative brands overcome the stereotypes associated with conservatism. These brands could also enhance consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and brand choice by using racial cues that are incongruent with the ingroup's conservative preferences (Boman et al., 2023). However, in ethnically homogeneous markets, luxury brands' multi-ethnic advertising could be perceived differently than in ethnically diverse markets (Strebinger et al., 2018). In the former, advertising is regarded as a sign of brand globalness, while it is associated with brand inclusiveness in the latter. In ethnically homogeneous contexts, such as Japan and China, advertising featuring Caucasian models leads to a perception of higher status and global appeal, since they align with the brand's luxury image. When consumers are minorities in an ethnically diverse environment, such as Japanese and Chinese immigrants in Canada, they exhibit a stronger appreciation of multi-ethnic advertising, because they value its inclusive message (Strebinger et al., 2018).

Advertising aimed at the gay and lesbian community could be perceived as political and empowering, contributing to the affirmation of this community's identity (Tsai, 2011). However, several individuals wanted such advertising to portray homosexual individuals in a normalized way by emphasizing their commonalities with the heterosexual majority. Although aware of targeted advertising's potentially exploitative nature, the mentioned individuals often viewed it as a necessary tradeoff to allow greater social inclusion (Tsai, 2011). Advertising strategies when targeting minority groups could indeed be effective and need not alienate the general audience. Puntoni et al. (2011) found that when advertising targeted a covert minority, this could affect the target group (gay men) positively while also minimizing negative reactions from the nontarget group (heterosexual men). More recently, Cheng et al. (2023) focused in the market response to entertainment products targeted at LGBTQIA+-inclusive representation. Interestingly, movies with LGBTQIA+-inclusive representation outperform those with no LGBTQIA+ representation or with LGBTQIA+-themed representation. LGBTQIA+-inclusive representation's superiority comes from its ability to appeal to consumer segments with favorable and unfavorable LGBTQIA+ attitudes. However, LGBTQIA+ representation does not always lead to positive consumer responses (Chowdhury et al., 2023). Consumers with high intrinsic religiosity, which implies a deep commitment to their religious beliefs and practices, generally have negative attitudes toward brands using LGBTQIA+ themes in their advertising. Conversely, quest religiosity, characterized

by an open and questioning approach to religion, ensures positive attitudes toward brands that use LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements. However, inspirational LGBTQIA+ advertisements portraying LGBTQIA+ people in inspirational roles and evoking feelings of awe that result in consumers with both intrinsic and quest religiosity orientations having positive attitudes toward the brand could mitigate intrinsic religiosity's negative impact on consumer responses to LGBTQIA+-themed advertising (Chowdhury et al., 2023).

Septianto et al. (2023) explored the interplay between social media advertising, female consumers' empowerment, and engagement. The research indicated that locomotion-oriented (rather than assessment-oriented) advertisements emphasizing the initiation and continuation of the pursuit of consumers' goals are more effective at fostering feelings of empowerment and engagement among female consumers. This suggests that advertising strategies resonating with consumers' regulatory modes could enhance campaigns aimed at female empowerment's effectiveness. Naidu et al. (2023) also suggest that the message's nature plays a crucial role in shaping consumer responses. According to them, portraying the body as a process (focusing on functionality) rather than an object (focusing on appearance) results in women feeling more human and exhibiting higher intentions to purchase the advertised product. Lou et al. (2019) found that an advertisement featuring an average-sized model (vs. a thin model) increased women's purchase intentions in an individualistic culture, while there were no differences among female consumers in a collectivistic culture. Practitioners could be more inclusive by considering age-related factors when crafting advertisements, thereby ensuring they are accessible and understandable across different age groups. In fact, legibility in advertising is crucial if the goal is for older adults and individuals with declining visual activity to also process the content effectively, thereby leading to communication effectiveness results (Nelson & Cook, 2023).

Finally, Oc et al. (2023) suggest that managers could use machine learning and AI methods to better tailor dynamic content creation by refining campaign messages to stimulate additional engagement and reach diverse target segments.

## 5.5 | Diversity and inclusion in service design

Certain studies highlight the importance of understanding consumer diversity to effectively design services that are inclusive of diverse needs. Indeed, the service environment could play a crucial role in the consumer experience. Dias de Faria et al. (2012) endeavored to define the ideal restaurant features for visually impaired consumers: attentive service, low-intensity light and sound, round tables, and a system for summoning servers. The authors stressed the importance of creating an inclusive environment catering to all consumers' needs, regardless of their disabilities. Dias de Faria and Moreira Casotti (2019) investigated the experiences of people with Down syndrome as vulnerable consumers, highlighting their specific challenges and needs in consumer environments. They revealed the barriers to consumption that prevent these consumers from becoming agentic

consumers and highlighted the stigmatization and social exclusion they experience in market interactions. Song and Park (2023) focused on disability inclusion in service provision, highlighting the importance of accommodating diverse needs to enhance service experiences. An inclusive service environment for persons with disabilities elicits positive perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions from consumers without disabilities.

Cloquet et al. (2018) emphasized making leisure activities accessible by addressing the need for disability and social inclusion in the tourism industry. As an intervention strategy when service providers avoid affiliating with certain social groups, Cabano and Minton (2023) encouraged such businesses to emphasize their and their consumers' commonalities, improve service quality, foster inclusion, reduce discrimination, and generate market well-being. Plus-size travelers face unique challenges due to body size constraints and societal stigma. According to Yang (2023), structural constraints, such as issues with airline seat sizes, in-flight service experiences, and the lack of tailored travel resources, limit their access to tourism products and experiences. Consequently, plus-size travel movement leaders use online platforms to empower their community, provide resources and tips, reduce travel-related anxieties, and foster a sense of community. Businesses could engage with plus-size travel influencers to establish more inclusive practices and policies.

Minorities might also be underrepresented in marketing materials, as in the case of people with disabilities (Cloquet et al., 2018). Similarly, Rydzik et al. (2021) found that the dominant representations in wedding tourism brochures had remained largely unchanged for 16 years, continuing to feature majority-centric imagery underrepresenting minority groups. While societal norms and legal changes regarding marriage have evolved (e.g., the legalization of same-sex marriage), promotional materials do not fully reflect these changes, particularly when it comes to diversity and inclusion. Consequently, this perpetuates the hegemonic message of heteronormativity, reinforces norms related to whiteness, age, and body type, and sustains gender stereotypes (Rydzik et al., 2021).

Finally, Kipnis et al. (2022) examined the role of service robots in long-term care, emphasizing their potential to improve service quality and consumer satisfaction in healthcare settings, particularly for those requiring long-term assistance.

## 5.6 | Diversity and inclusion in product design

Although in a fragmented approach, as in the case of services, some contributions focus on the relevance of product design aimed at inclusiveness.

Parshakov et al. (2023) noted a significant drop in demand for a popular video game character after he was publicly outed as gay. This decrease was significant but short-lived, with a return to previous levels of demand after about 3 months. The drop was not mirrored in similar changes to other characters, suggesting the specific reaction was due to the character's LGBTQIA+ label. However, consumer response is complex since, interestingly, the study also observed a significant increase in demand for another LGBTQIA+-labeled character in the game.

Website design and accessibility could shape the online shopping experiences of consumers with visual impairments, impacting their inclusivity and equal access to resources. Online shopping could give visually impaired individuals significant independence and control, contributing to their sense of consumer normalcy (Kaufman-Scarborough & Childers, 2009). Kuppuswamy and Younkin (2020) challenged the notion that consumer discrimination is a valid explanation for the movie industry's lack of minority hiring. However, the authors found that films with a greater number of black actors in major roles do not face a penalty in terms of box office revenues. On the contrary, these movies perform better. Audiences seem indifferent to token minority casting and actually prefer clearly diverse casts. Diversity also has a positive influence on consumers' perception of quality, regardless of the films' or actors' appeal. Chang and Kim (2022) explored the impact of background film music's valence on consumer attitudes toward social enterprises, thereby demonstrating how auditory elements influence para-social interactions. Inspiring music reinforces the feeling of empathy, elevation, or closeness; consequently, it creates a positive attitude toward the diversity of the protagonists.

## 5.7 | Diversity and inclusion's impact on society

Promoting diversity and inclusion might have beneficial effects on society and communities. Some of the reviewed articles pay special attention to these aspects, thereby illustrating the societal impact that marketing might have.

Representation and identity in marketing are crucial themes. The literature focuses on marketing's impact on cultural identity and societal perceptions (e.g., Bennett et al., 2013; Licsandru & Cui, 2019; Russell et al., 2013; Thomas, 2013). Marketing could help shape public attitudes toward diverse cultural groups and celebrate diversity and cultural competence.

Organizations and policymakers should cautiously design effective communications to avoid nudging consumers managing stigmas away from beneficial and toward harmful consumption (Harmeling et al., 2021).

Advertising could also contribute to societal change. From empowering female consumers to promoting LGBTQIA+ representation in the media, several studies show that inclusive advertising strategies could foster societal acceptance and understanding (e.g., Cheng et al., 2023; Khan & Kalra, 2022; Septianto et al., 2023; Wilkie et al., 2023). Similarly, levers such as technological advancements or strategic branding could impact consumer behavior and societal trends (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Oc et al., 2023; Wang & Lalwani, 2019; Wu & Dadoo, 2020).

Several scholars advocate societal changes to better accommodate the needs of vulnerable groups. These changes can be achieved by rethinking the way services (e.g., Cloquet et al., 2018; Dias de Faria & Moreira Casotti, 2019; Kipnis et al., 2022; Matson-Barkat et al., 2022) and products are designed (e.g., Loughran Dommer et al., 2013; Ruggs et al., 2018; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) to embrace and represent marginalized groups, thereby promoting a more inclusive society.

Finally, governments, institutions, and firms could play a significant role in enhancing market inclusion, as in the case of bottom-of-the-pyramid markets and economically disadvantaged consumers (e.g., Aiyar & Venugopal, 2020; Jacob et al., 2022; Mende et al., 2020), thereby contributing to societal welfare and reducing discrimination's impact.

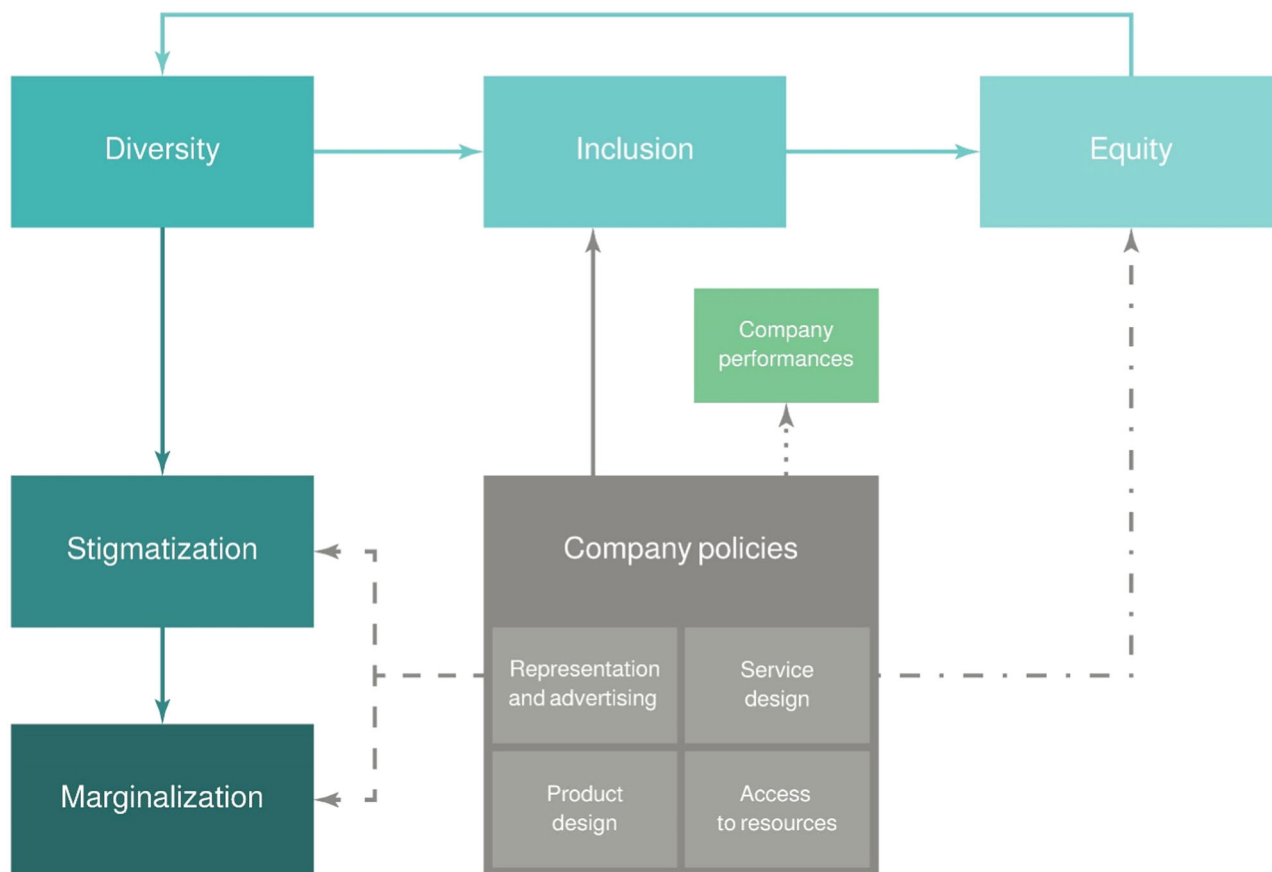
## 5.8 | Marketing for diversity and inclusion: A conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2 represents a systematization of the relationships between diversity, inclusion, and marketing policies, to fully answer our RQ2. In particular, the framework shows how consumers' diversity calls for inclusion, also to address negative effects such as stigmatization and marginalization. A central element leading to inclusion is companies' marketing policies, which can actively intervene, as a part of a wider process, to generate the desired change at the level of the individual and society as a whole, such as more equity among the diverse consumers, as well as produce positive outcomes for the companies themselves. This approach echoes the literature suggesting that marketing and the companies' efforts can positively impact the environment in which

they operate (e.g., Henderson et al., 2023; Madera et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2022), and accounts for relations between consumers, firms, policies, and society (van Bommel et al., 2024; de Ruyter et al., 2022).

Each individual is unique, and each identity generates diversity. Diversity is related to individuals' physical and sociocultural differences. Identity is multidimensional, comprising age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disabilities, indigenous heritage, and national origin (Arsel et al., 2022; Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021). However, personal factors, along with societal elements, could lead to stigmatization, including adverse beliefs, perceptions, or the stereotyping of individuals or groups (Harmeling et al., 2021; Homburg & Ukrainets, 2021; Yang, 2023). A stigma could result in marginalization (Campbell et al., 2023; Milfeld et al., 2021), leading to limited access to consumption and resources (Aiyar & Venugopal, 2020; Dias de Faria & Moreira Casotti, 2019; Kaufman-Scarborough & Childers, 2009), as well as segregation (Henderson et al., 2023) and social exclusion (Campbell et al., 2023; Loughran Dommer et al., 2013; Milfeld et al., 2021; Wang & Lalwani, 2019).

Inclusion is about integrating and valuing diverse groups to promote a sense of acceptance and counteract marginalization and stigmatization. However, inclusion goes beyond mere representation as in advertising, since it involves creating an inclusive environment in which individuals are esteemed and recognized, and they feel a sense of belonging regardless



**FIGURE 2** Marketing for diversity and inclusion: A conceptual framework. The dashed line shows the effects on the individual; the dashed and dotted line represents the effects on society; the dotted line concerns the effects on company performances. *Source:* Authors' own work.

of their differences (Campbell et al., 2023). Thus, inclusion emerges as a social need but also as a strategic response to the consumer diversity spectrum, advocating company policies that cultivate an environment in which diverse identities are not only accepted but also valued. Marketing and businesses can play a key role in this process through their policies, which should not be limited to representation and advertising only, but go further, considering diversity and inclusion also in the product offering design (Cloquet et al., 2018; Dias de Faria & Moreira Casotti, 2019; Kipnis et al., 2022; Loughran Dommer et al., 2013; Matson-Barkat et al., 2022; Ruggs et al., 2018; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), and in providing access to resources to the most disadvantaged groups, as in the case of problematic socioeconomic conditions (Aiyar & Venugopal, 2020; Jacob et al., 2022; Mende et al., 2020).

When businesses embrace inclusion, the effects extend beyond commercial interests to individual and societal well-being. In line with de Ruyter et al. (2022), marketing scholars can promote collective solutions that can benefit consumers, firms, and society. Indeed, such combined effects can foster inclusion and lead to equity (Arsel et al., 2022) through three trajectories.

First, company policies could be effective at the individual and group level, leading to demarginalization (Mende et al., 2020), destigmatization (Matson-Barkat et al., 2022), and empowerment (Septianto et al., 2023; Tsai, 2011; Yang, 2023).

Second, such actions can also generate a positive effect at the wider societal level, generating greater societal cohesion (Henderson et al., 2023; Licsandru & Cui, 2019) and reducing inequities. In turn, these societal impacts reinforce the principles of equity that advocate fair treatment and equal opportunities for all consumer groups, thus advancing societal welfare. Although it can be perceived as impacting a minority, the multiple forms of diversity affect a wide range of people as it extends to those indirectly involved, such as family members, friends, and relevant ones.

Third, enhancing inclusivity through concrete marketing efforts—such as advertising, services and product designs, and access to resources—offers a plethora of benefits for the companies themselves. Among others, brand evaluations (Henderson et al., 2023; Ruggs et al., 2018; Strebinger et al., 2018) and sales (Benischke et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2023) might benefit. Consumers' attitudes (Boman et al., 2023; Chang & Kim, 2022; Milfeld et al., 2021; Nelson & Cook, 2023; Puntoni et al., 2011; Song & Park, 2023), loyalty (Bennett et al., 2013; Homburg & Ukrainets, 2021; Loughran Dommer et al., 2013), purchase intention (Bartikowski & Walsh, 2015; Boman et al., 2023; Ginder et al., 2021; Khan & Kalra, 2022; Henderson et al., 2023; Lou et al., 2019; Naidu et al., 2023; Septianto et al., 2023), and willingness to pay (Benischke et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2023; Milfeld et al., 2021; Septianto et al., 2023) might also be affected.

The pursuit of equity in marketing should be considered an ongoing effort that necessitates the continuous recognition of diversity. Indeed, since equity involves actively ensuring justice, fairness, and impartiality in a system's processes, procedures, and allocation of resources to all (Shultz et al., 2022), it requires continuous acknowledgment of the various consumer identities that populate the marketplace. This triggers an

iterative process in which the insights gained from understanding diversity are employed to better understand the broad and dynamic spectrum of diversity itself and refine the inclusion strategies. Marketing can therefore help generate awareness. This approach reinforces diversity, inclusion, and equity's cyclical nature in consumer research and business practices.

This conceptualization effort is not intended to cover all possible forms and aspects of diversity and inclusion, including intervening factors and impacts. Instead, it aims to provide a structured approach to understanding diversity and inclusion's complexities in consumer research and illustrate a process by which marketing can generate concrete effects at the individual, corporate, and societal levels.

## 6 | AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

By relying on the SLR's results, this section aims to present and discuss relevant suggestions for future research and answer our RQ3. Table 6 presents a summary of the main avenues for future research questions that we identified after our analysis and that we hope will help stimulate the marketing community for the theme of diversity and inclusion. We structured our suggestions according to the TCCM framework dimensions.

### 6.1 | Theory

Some of the reviewed articles employ either (social) identity theory (e.g., Cheng et al., 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Henderson et al., 2023; Licsandru & Cui, 2019; Loughran Dommer et al., 2013; Ruggs et al., 2018; Wilkie et al., 2023) or stigma theory (e.g., Jacob et al., 2022; Matson-Barkat et al., 2022). However, future studies could increase the use of psychological theories in consumer research linked to diversity and inclusion, thereby supporting more inclusive marketing practices.

Further consumer research in marketing could, for example, consider diversity and inclusion through a cognitive dissonance theory lens (Festinger, 1957), which suggests that individuals experience discomfort when they harbor conflicting beliefs or attitudes. This theory could, for example, be applied to understand how consumers react when their attitudes toward diversity and inclusion are not aligned with a company or a brand's messages or actions. This theory could be linked to the social identity theory to further investigate customers' reactions to diversity and inclusion in detail.

Contact theory is another interesting psychological background that could enrich consumer research studies (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, 1998). This theory suggests that, under certain conditions, intergroup contact could reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. In the context of consumer research, this theory could help develop contacts between different types of customers and even reduce the stigma of marginalized groups by promoting diversity and inclusion.

**TABLE 6** Proposed avenues for future research.

Proposed topics	Avenues for future research
<p><i>Theory</i></p> <p>The lack of psychological theories. The need for a structured theoretical psychological approach.</p>	<p>Besides social identity theory, which psychological theories could be effectively applied to enhance understanding of diversity and inclusion in consumer research and support marketing policies? How could existing theories (e.g., social identity or stigma) be expanded or combined with others to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions and responses to diversity and inclusion strategies? How could emerging theories in other disciplines (e.g., sociology) offer new perspectives on diversity and inclusion in marketing?</p>
<p><i>Context</i></p> <p>Industry-specific and geographical variations. Underrepresented diversity contexts.</p>	<p>What are the effects of diversity and inclusion strategies in underexplored industries? How do industry-specific factors (e.g., luxury vs. essential goods, service-oriented vs. product-oriented industries) impact diversity and inclusion initiatives' implementation and reception? How do consumer responses to diversity and inclusion policies vary across different cultural and geographical contexts?</p>
<p><i>Characteristics</i></p> <p>Underinvestigated type of diversity, e.g., age and mental health. Focus mainly on one type of diversity at a time. Inclusion policies' impact on marketing KPIs. Lack of differentiation between short- and long-term effects of diversity and inclusion policies</p>	<p>How might the results of previous studies differ if the focus shifts to underinvestigated types of diversity, such as age and mental health? How do different types of diversity interact and what is their combined impact on consumer behavior? Which specific marketing key performance indicators are most sensitive to changes in diversity and inclusion policies, and how are they affected? Which challenges do marginalized groups face when accessing products and services, and how can marketing strategies be tailored to overcome these barriers? What are diversity and inclusion activities' long-term effects, at the different levels (individual, firm, and society) and how can they be measured over time?</p>
<p><i>Methodology</i></p> <p>Predominance of quantitative methodologies. The need for longitudinal and field studies. The lack of case studies.</p>	<p>How could qualitative methodologies enhance understanding of customers' reactions to diversity and inclusion policies? What are diversity and inclusion activities' long-term effects, and how could they be measured over time? What insights could field studies provide to help understand diversity and inclusion strategies' efficacy? How could case studies provide new findings regarding diversity and inclusion strategies' effectiveness?</p>

Source: Authors' own work.

## 6.2 | Context

The contextual variety in the reviewed studies demonstrates the complexity of researching diversity and inclusion in marketing. It highlights the need to consider a range of factors, including industry focus, geographical and cultural settings, demographic characteristics, and specific diversity and inclusion themes, to fully understand consumer behavior and marketing strategies in different contexts.

First, while advertising and hospitality seem to be particularly well analyzed, other industries or context-specific situations are mostly not addressed, which provides scope for interesting future research developments. Furthermore, the literature could benefit from comparative studies of different industries, or related to actions conducted for product and service brands. Among others, Benischke et al. (2023) invite authors to replicate their studies in other

industries, while Naidu et al. (2023) suggest extending their findings to other product categories.

Second, the studies were mainly conducted in the US or other Western countries. The authors' affiliation also reflects this Western element, which does not seem very representative on a global level. The literature lacks studies involving multiple countries, except for minor cases (e.g., Bartikowski & Walsh, 2015; Henderson et al., 2023; Homburg & Ukrainets, 2021; Lou et al., 2019; Strebinger et al., 2018). The differences between countries' geographical areas could have a huge impact on consumers' responses to diversity and inclusion policies. As an example, Cheng et al. (2023) highlighted that many countries could be regarded as less progressive than the United States regarding LGBTQIA+ rights, while Henderson et al. (2023) noted that consumers' responses might vary between individuals and cultures, which change according to their location and over time.



Similarly, Naidu et al. (2023) highlighted that consumers' responses to inclusive messages could be culturally dependent, while Chowdhury et al. (2023) noted that cultural factors could affect research results. Chang and Kim (2022) reported the limitation of collecting data from just one country, while Jacob et al. (2022) called for studies in different regions, which could vary in their degree of individual and societal diversity. Differences could also emerge among ethnic minorities in more inclusive versus less inclusive societies (Strebinger et al., 2018). Furthermore, conducting cross-cultural studies should be an interesting exercise with regard to identifying patterns and differences across different contexts and cultures (Bartikowski & Walsh, 2015; Song & Park, 2023; Wilkie et al., 2023).

### 6.3 | Characteristics

Considering the various forms and aspects of diversity, some of the most investigated topics are: race and ethnicity, cultural diversity, disabilities, health conditions, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as socioeconomic status. However, certain types of diversity remain underinvestigated in consumer research. For example, more studies investigating age diversity are needed to consider age growth patterns in developed countries. For example, 17% of the population in North America and 19% in Europe (Statista, 2024) comprise people over the age of 65. Mental health was another type of diversity not represented enough in the studies we analyzed, although health conditions are typically investigated. The World Health Organization points out that one in every eight people in the world suffers from a mental disorder, but this topic may still be taboo in our society and, apparently, also in the literature. Understanding these two forms of diversity could help improve inclusive marketing policies in line with population patterns, therefore making these people relevant.

Furthermore, the studies are mostly specialized in either one or a few diversity contexts, and by simultaneously considering different diversity contexts, they seem to lack a synergic approach. Future research should not only examine other types of diversity but also identify the interplay between them (Khan & Kalra, 2022). Groups' non-homogeneity is inherent in diversity, even within the same forms and aspects, which scholars should take into consideration when developing their research. For example, Song and Park (2023) mention it is not appropriate to define people with a disability as a homogenous group, since there are different types and degrees of disabilities. Moreover, there are less evident or hidden forms that are an everyday part of many consumers' lives, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, dyslexia, or dyscalculia, that are less recognizable at a superficial glance. A few articles consider different shapes and forms of diversity, thereby dealing with intersectionality (e.g., Oc et al., 2023; Ruggs et al., 2018; Rydzik et al., 2021; Thomas, 2013). The latter emphasizes social categorizations' interconnected nature, such as their race, gender, class, and sexuality, and how they intersect to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression for groups of people who cannot be defined by just one type of diversity. Furthermore, investigating intersectionality could

help brands create campaigns that authentically represent their audience's diverse experiences and identities, therefore resonating with a broader range of consumers.

Third, although inclusion activities' positive impact is identifiable, which is why the reviewed articles generally show that such policies have encouraging results, these outcomes are usually only reflected in a single or a few indicators related to the study's context and lack a global view. Consequently, we encourage future research to systemically analyze diversity and inclusion policies' impact on key performance indicators in marketing. While we recognize the positive impact of single indicators, these alone offer little actual value for marketing. By contrast, studies that examine the impact of these policies on a set of indicators (e.g., sales, brand loyalty, or net promoter score) provide more substantial value as such research allows the literature to explain diversity and inclusion policies' potential to managers and practitioners, as well as encourage their use in business practices. Moreover, future research could focus on whether and how diversity and inclusion might backfire (Khan & Kalra, 2022).

Fourth, there are still various barriers to market inclusion. Future research should consider which of these barriers prevent consumers from accessing markets and benefiting from a more inclusive marketplace, how they could be lowered, and what the challenges are that marginalized groups face concerning product and service accessibility and delivery (Aiyar & Venugopal, 2020).

Fifth, more diverse and inclusive marketing requires firms, consumers, and institutions' combined actions. As an example, scholars could endeavor to determine whether incentives effectively encourage the inclusion of stigmatized consumers and, if so, identify which incentives work best (Mende et al., 2024). They could also examine which types of action produce destigmatizing effects (Matson-Barkat et al., 2022) or influence consumers' choices and behaviors (Naidu et al., 2023). Patrick and Hollenbeck (2021) highlighted the growing emphasis on businesses' social value and, in line with the United Nations' SDGs, called for research on consumer responses to inclusive design for the incorporation of inclusivity into brand strategy, practice, and policy. Future research could therefore investigate which could be diversity and inclusion activities' long-term effects, at different levels (individual, firm, and society), analyzing their interaction and pointing out how they can be measured over time.

### 6.4 | Methodology

First, the analyzed studies mainly apply quantitative experimental methodologies, while there is a greater need for more in-depth qualitative studies. By providing rich, in-depth insights into individuals' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors within diverse contexts, such studies could play a crucial role in the understanding of diversity and inclusion.

Second, several authors call for longitudinal studies to investigate the dynamic effects of diversity and inclusion activities over time (e.g., Wilkie et al., 2023; Jacob et al., 2022; Matson-Barkat et al., 2022).

Third, certain articles pointed out that more field studies are required to replicate the findings and increase their generalizability (e.g., Cabano & Minton, 2023; Song & Park, 2023), although industry focus and case studies are also required (Ginder et al., 2021).

## 7 | CONCLUSIONS

This SLR analyzed the state-of-the-art diversity and inclusion literature within the consumer research domain. This article contributes to the knowledge development of this domain in at least three ways.

First, we tried to systematize the diversity and inclusion literature in consumer research by addressing the lack of knowledge about the impact on consumers' responses (Cheng et al., 2023; Khan & Kalra, 2022; Montecchi et al., 2024). This is in line with previous literature encouraging research on diversity and inclusion in the consumer behavior domain (Grier et al., 2022; Madera et al., 2023). Our findings emphasize that marketing must evolve to be more representative and, in particular, more inclusive of the diverse consumer base. This not only involves acknowledging the variety of consumer identities but also actively incorporating these considerations into inclusive marketing strategies and company policies (Licsandru & Cui, 2019). We echo Shultz et al. (2022) by stating that marketing scholars could have a role in advancing diversity and inclusion within the communities they serve.

Second, we discussed and structured the main findings on how consumers react to diversity and inclusion policies and the consequential benefits for the individuals, the companies' performances, and the society. The conceptual framework systematizes the relationship between diversity, inclusion, and marketing policies, to provide academics and practitioners with an actionable instrument to help them understand how marketing can effectively contribute to the greater good. In this attempt, we extend the previous literature, which called for the development of frameworks that can support organizations in enhancing consumer experiences (Thakur & Dhar, 2022) and societal actors in fostering a more inclusive environment (Arsel et al., 2022; Shultz et al., 2022).

Finally, we tried to provide a detailed and actionable agenda for future research, which we hope will inspire the academic community to develop these themes. Although progress has been made, we believe that the marketing academia can further contribute to creating a more inclusive society, based on diversity and equity, and support businesses to follow this path (Henderson et al., 2023; Madera et al., 2023; de Ruyter et al., 2022; Shultz et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this review underscores how important it is for marketing scholars and practitioners to embrace and support diversity and inclusion. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and diverse, the ability to understand and respond to this diversity will be a key determinant, since it can generate value for all the actors of the marketplace, namely individuals, companies, and society as a whole.

As with all studies, our research has certain limitations. First, we considered only empirical academic articles from Scopus and excluded books, book chapters, and conference papers that might have investigated inclusion and diversity policies. Moreover, we only included highly ranked journals, while there may be other likewise valuable research that has been omitted in this review. Moreover, our inclusion/exclusion criteria have guided the article selection process and affected the items' final selection. Thus, there may be additional relevant contributions not included in this research. Finally, further research could consider other quantitative techniques, such as bibliometric or meta-analysis, to integrate this article's results.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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