



MASTER'S DISSERTATION

**REPRESENTATION MATTERS:  
LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION IN BRANDS'  
ADVERTISING**

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, diversity is a major component of competitive advantage for brands, and so they incorporate social messages such as LGBTQIA+ equality into their advertising, as a means of differentiation. Moreover, the LGBTQIA+ market is currently estimated to be worth \$18 trillion globally. Hence, the main goal of this dissertation is to explore how LGBTQIA+ consumers respond to brands' LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising. In order to do so, as this is a qualitative study, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted, making use of a diverse sample of LGBTQIA+ consumers. Data was analyzed using Bardin's Content Analysis technique. Results show that there is still a lack of diverse and inclusive LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising and that actually appeals to this group of consumers. Additionally, brands must make a whole-hearted long-term effort to the LGBTQIA+ community, not only in their advertising but also as one of their core values. Finally, various recommendations are given to companies for them to become truly LGBTQIA+ friendly.

**Keywords:** Advertising; LGBTQIA+ Representation; Consumer Behavior; Consumer Perceptions; Brand Activism



## RESUMO

Atualmente, a diversidade é uma componente importante da vantagem competitiva das marcas, pelo que incorporam mensagens sociais como a igualdade LGBTQIA+ na sua publicidade, como meio de diferenciação. Além disso, estima-se que o mercado LGBTQIA+ valha 18 triliões de dólares globalmente. Assim, o objetivo principal desta dissertação é explorar a forma como os consumidores LGBTQIA+ respondem à representatividade LGBTQIA+ das marcas na publicidade. Desta maneira, como se trata de um estudo qualitativo, foram realizadas 25 entrevistas semiestruturadas, utilizando uma amostra diversificada de consumidores LGBTQIA+. Os dados foram analisados utilizando a técnica de Análise de Conteúdo de Bardin. Os resultados mostram que ainda existe uma falta de representatividade LGBTQIA+ diversa e inclusiva na publicidade e que, na realidade, apele a este grupo de consumidores. Além disso, as marcas devem fazer um esforço a longo prazo para com a comunidade LGBTQIA+, não só na sua publicidade, mas também como um dos seus valores. Finalmente, são dadas várias recomendações às empresas para que se tornem verdadeiramente “LGBTQIA+ friendly”.

**Palavras-chave:** Publicidade; Representatividade LGBTQIA+; Comportamento do Consumidor; Perceções do Consumidor; Ativismo de Marca



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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, diversity is hailed as a key competitive advantage for brands (Nölke, 2017). Advertisers, and therefore brands, use messages and images which influence our perception of society and social norms. These perceptions can be related to the product itself, as well as the race, sexuality, and gender role represented (McDonald et al., 2020; Pollay, 1986). In the 1990s, the LGBTQIA+ community was identified as a potential consumer segment, and from the 2000s onwards organizations started advertising to this segment (Ciszek, 2020).

Formerly known as the “gay community” or LGBT community, the group of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity minorities is now called the LGBTQIA+ community. This acronym has evolved in order to be more inclusive (Visão, 2021), and it is crucial that the meaning of each letter (Gold, 2021) is explained:

L – Lesbian (women who are attracted to the same gender)

G – Gay (men who are attracted to the same gender)

B – Bisexual (someone who is attracted to the same gender and other gender identities)

T – Transgender (people whose gender identity differs from the biological sex they were assigned at birth)

Q – Queer (people who transition between male and female genders or other genders where binarism does not apply; an umbrella term for a wide variety of people across a spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities)

I – Intersex (people whose biological sex characteristics do not fit the binary norm)

A – Asexual (people who feel little to no sexual attraction to other people)

+ – Involves all other possible sexual orientations and gender identities

A few decades ago, LGBTQIA+ representation was mainly non-existent, and later was unavailable outside of media specifically targeted to this community. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, many Western countries decriminalized homosexuality, which led to the development of a commercial LGBTQIA+ culture (Dahl, 2021). Currently, the LGBTQIA+ market is estimated to be worth \$18 trillion globally, although there are significant differences among this group (Shepherd et al., 2021). Nonetheless, Hollibaugh and Weiss (2015) demonstrate that LGBTQIA+ consumers are significantly more vulnerable to poverty and other forms of economic injustice.

Current research on LGBTQIA+ representation in brand positioning, especially through the use of advertising, includes various gaps. The main one is based on the fact that research is not fully representative of the LGBTQIA+ community, namely of bisexual and transgender consumers, and this also leads to the erasure of multiply marginalized groups in advertising research

(Shepherd et al., 2021). Following is the need to investigate LGBTQIA+ consumers' attitudes towards the portrayals in advertising (Nölke, 2017); while understanding if some LGBTQIA+ consumers might react more favorably to positive portrayals of identities apart from their own, but that represent more marginalized members of the community (Blackburn, 2019). Additionally, there is a call for analyzing if LGBTQIA+ consumers, particularly younger ones, take brands' LGBTQIA+ supportiveness into consideration when making purchasing decisions (Blackburn, 2019). Another gap is based on examining the role of race, gender identity, socioeconomic status, age, and sexual orientation on different LGBTQIA+ consumers' responses to advertising (Blackburn, 2019). Finally, there is a need for research on the effect of consumer's personal involvement on LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions of this representation (Li, 2021).

Therefore, in an attempt to fill some of these gaps, the present study's main research objective is to "Explore how LGBTQIA+ consumers respond to brands' LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising". This primary objective can be further subdivided into specific research objectives: 1) "Analyze LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions and feelings towards LGBTQIA+ representation advertising", 2) " Study LGBTQIA+ consumers' behavior towards brands that represent the LGBTQIA+ community in their advertising" and 3) "Understand LGBTQIA+ consumers' opinions on brands' LGBTQIA+ activism and friendliness".

Finally, the overall structure of this dissertation takes the form of five chapters: Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion and Conclusions. The first one, Literature Review, presents a comprehensive overview of the current literature on LGBTQIA+ representation in brands' positioning in advertising. The second one, Methodology, describes the overall methodological approach of this study. The third one, Findings, exposes the results of this study, while the fourth one, Discussion, critically examines and connects them to the existent literature. The last one, Conclusions, provides answers to the proposed research objectives, presents this study's contributions and limitations, and shines a light on possible future research.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Next, a Literature Review is assembled, in order to further contextualize this study. It starts with the "LGBTQIA+ Context and History" section, where the reader has a look into the LGBTQIA+ community's history and context. The second section, "LGBTQIA+ Representation in Brands' Advertising", is subdivided into three parts. Firstly, there is the "Socio-historical context of LGBTQIA+ brands' advertising" part, understanding what has led up to LGBTQIA+ representation in brands' advertising. Secondly, the "LGBTQIA+ brand positioning in advertising" part analyzes how brands currently represent the LGBTQIA+ community. And thirdly, in the "Brand activism and authenticity in LGBTQIA+ brand positioning in advertising" part, brands' motivations for this LGBTQIA+ positioning are contemplated. Finally, the third section is called "Influence of LGBTQIA+ brand advertising in LGBTQIA+ consumers".

### **1.1. LGBTQIA+ CONTEXT AND HISTORY**

The LGBTQIA+ movement, as we know it today, emerged in New York City, during the summer of 1969, with the Stonewall Riots, where the community resisted a police raid (McDonald et al., 2020). It is undeniable that the LGBTQIA+ community is now more visible than ever, as a result of changes in legislation, the role of various organizations, and LGBTQIA+ representation in media

(Burgess & Baunach, 2014). However, according to McDonald et al. (2020), the LGBTQIA+ population has long faced “morality laws”, social stigmas, hatred, and discrimination, along with distorted religious messages – which remains true to this day.

Starting with the European context, homosexuality was decriminalized around the 1980s in countries such as Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Cyprus, and Romania. Europe also introduced the first piece of legislation protecting gay and lesbian individuals from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment. Denmark was the first European country to legally recognize same-sex couples with registered partnerships in 1989. This breakthrough spread across all of the Nordic and Benelux states, along with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom by 2004. In 2017, fifteen states granted full marriage rights, and twenty-seven offered some form of partnership recognition. ILGA, the first enduring transnational LGBTQIA+ organization, was developed in 1978, and it has later played a crucial role in the globalization of LGBTQIA+ activism (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2019). In the 1990s, Transgender rights groups started to appear in most European countries, blossoming at the turn of the century (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2014). Currently, Europe presents itself as a threat to LGBTQIA+ rights in the following manners. Firstly, Putin’s Russia is a big example of opposition, as it is the leader of a cultural, civilizational, and political alternative to liberal Europe. Secondly, right-wing populists and religiously inspired activists oppose a wide range of issues, such as policy

targeting gender violence, sex education, and same-sex marriage (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2019).

In Portugal, in the midst of the Portuguese revolution, in 1974, a gay movement originated in the Portuguese environment - Movimento de Acção dos Homossexuais Revolucionários (MAHR). Homosexuality is later decriminalized in 1982. ILGA Portugal, the first Portuguese association which promoted the equality of LGBTQIA+ people and their families in Portugal, was founded in 1995. Lisbon held the country's first Pride March in the year 2000 – currently, marches are held in cities all over the country, such as Porto, Coimbra, and Bragança. By 2004, sexual orientation was included in the Portuguese Republic's Constitution as a non-discrimination factor (Cascais, 2020). Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2010, but the adoption by Portuguese gay and lesbian couples was only allowed in 2016. The year 2016 was also characterized by the expansion of access to medically assisted procreation techniques to women, regardless of their marital status and sexual orientation. Concerning Transgender rights and inclusion, the brutal death of Gisberta, a transgender woman, in 2006, became a symbol of the violence and neglect trans people face, even within the LGBTQIA+ movement. In 2018, Portugal passed a law concerning the right to self-determination of gender identity and gender expression, and the protection of each person's sexual characteristics (Santos, 2018).

Moreover, analyzing sexuality or gender identity as LGBTQIA+ individuals' sole source of identity provides a simplistic view of this community,

as it overlooks how these social characteristics intersect with others (Nölke, 2017). Being LGBTQIA+ combined with categories such as socio-demographic origin, ethnicity, functional diversity, age, and schooling may lead to the overlapping of various types of discrimination and exclusion (Bayrakdar & King, 2021; Dahl, 2021). It is then important not to consider LGBTQIA+ individuals and consumers as a single group, as it is beneficial to examine the diverse perspectives of groups within the LGBTQIA+ umbrella (Oakenfull, 2013). At this moment, it is crucial to analyze how brands are, in fact, representing the LGBTQIA+ community in their brand positioning, which is the focus of the next chapter.

## 1.2. LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION IN BRANDS' ADVERTISING

### 1.2.1. Socio-historical context of LGBTQIA+ brands' advertising

Advertisers, and therefore brands, use messages and images which influence our perception of society and social norms. These perceptions can be related to the product itself, as well as the race, sexuality, and gender role represented (McDonald et al., 2020; Pollay, 1986).

A few decades ago, LGBTQIA+ representation was mainly non-existent, and later was unavailable outside of media specifically targeted to this community (Dahl, 2021). McDonald et al. (2020) established that there was a lack of advertising - and consequently, brand positioning - depicting LGBTQIA+ individuals, due to the lack of acceptance of this community in society. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, many Western countries decriminalized homosexuality, which led to the development of a commercial LGBTQIA+ culture (Dahl, 2021). In the 1990s, due to the increased visibility of "gay" individuals in the AIDS epidemic, the LGBTQIA+ community was identified as a potential consumer segment. Nonetheless, it was from the 2000s onwards that organizations started advertising to this segment (Ciszek, 2020).

The concept of a gay "Dream Market" was firstly introduced in the Wall Street Journal in 1988, due to these individuals' significant income and career

success, greater spending on alcohol and travel, and above-average credit card purchases. In fact, the growing visibility of this “Dream Market” was part of a strategic effort to achieve social acceptance through the marketplace by leaders of the LGBTQIA+ rights movement (Oakenfull, 2020). The idea of achieving equality through an emphasis on consumption (Dahl, 2021) derived from the path of other social movements that established the marketplace as an important domain of social contestation, where vulnerable groups would fight for social and political inclusion (Peñaloza, 1996). Accordingly, over the past two decades, companies and brands have progressively advocated for LGBTQIA+ rights and invested in this market segment (Oakenfull, 2020).

In addition, brands and their marketing teams must perceive consumers as people who seek companies that address their deepest needs for social, economic, and environmental justice in their mission, vision, and values (Kotler et al., 2010; Tressoldi & Cardoso, 2021). Seeing that, nowadays, there are many brands selling similar products, advertisers also incorporate social messages regarding feminism, racism, and LGBTQIA+ equality into their advertisements, as a means of differentiation (Chauhan & Shukla, 2016).

As marketing and society interact, some brands have struggled to keep up with social changes and to target both minority and mainstream consumers (McDonald et al., 2020). Conversely, some brands seem to be comfortable with alienating some consumers as they acknowledge polarizing socio-political issues

(Vredenburg et al., 2020). Consequently, it is important to understand how brands are marketing to and representing LGBTQIA+ consumers in this everchanging marketplace and society.

### 1.2.2. LGBTQIA+ brand positioning in advertising

The concept of Positioning originated in the 1970s, as it was argued that in an “over-communicated society”, in which consumers cannot process all the existent commercial messages, marketers (and therefore, brands) should focus on getting into consumers’ minds (Urde & Koch, 2014). To differentiate from competitors, significant brand associations should be established in the mind of consumers (Keller & Lehmann, 2006) – marketers do this by employing brand positioning (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010).

Brand positioning is the process of creating its own image, distinctive properties, positive associations, and values in the consumers’ minds, and aiming to create a sustainable brand image and ensure that consumers are attached to this brand (Fayvishenko, 2018). Aaker and Shansby (1982, p.56) view positioning as a strategic decision related to “the customer’s perception and choice decisions”. Keller and Lehmann (2006, p.740) see it as setting “the direction of marketing activities and programs – what the brand should and should not do with its marketing”. Other authors see positioning as the essence

of a brand's offer, which indicates the brand's ability to meet its consumers' needs and preferences (Fayvishenko, 2018).

Positioning is considered to be one of the key elements in marketing, branding, and strategy (Urde & Koch, 2014). Additionally, a thought-out brand positioning provides direction for the development of new products, markets, communications, pricing, and distribution channels (Fayvishenko, 2018). Brand positioning is expected to shape consumers' preferences and lead to high consumer loyalty, brand equity, and willingness to search for the brand (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Kalra & Goodstein, 1998; Keller, 2003; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). If done in a satisfactory manner, it has the potential to build powerful brands. Oppositely, if done incorrectly, it can destroy the brand (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Haig, 2005; Ries & Trout, 1985). Moreover, the perceived positioning depends on each consumer, as they may interpret the same positioning differently (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010).

A brand's positioning may be considered more market-oriented or more brand-oriented. On one hand, market-oriented positioning is an outside-in approach that has brand image, as perceived by consumers and other stakeholders, as the focus of positioning. For example, Kotler and Keller (2009) state that positioning results in "the successful creation of a customer-focused value proposition, a cogent reason why the target market should buy the product", which directly links to this positioning approach (Urde & Koch, 2014;

p.482). On the other hand, brand-oriented positioning is an inside-out approach that has brand identity, which is influenced by the organization's mission, vision, and values, as the focus of positioning. For example, Kapferer (2012) emphasizes brand identity as a basis and guide for brand positioning, which consists of brand-oriented positioning. Ultimately, these two approaches are different yet synergistic (Urde & Koch, 2014).

A brands' marketing communications must focus on consistently developing that positioning, in a way that it occupies a specific place in consumers' minds (Hooley et al., 2008; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Ries & Trout, 1985; Rossiter et al., 1997). Advertising is considered the main marketing communication tool for building a brands' positioning (Krishnan, 1996; Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2003) because, through the creative part of the advertisement, the consumers' attention is drawn and directed to the brands' positioning (Easingwood & Mahajan, 1989). Strategic communication initiatives are crucial for the survival and continuous success of brands (Zerfass et al., 2018), as they can position themselves as "socially responsible" in order to engage and attract consumers (Champlin & Li, 2020).

Likewise, brand activism (Moorman, 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2021) is a growing technique for brands to stand out in a chaotic marketplace, i.e. a way for brands to position themselves, in which they take public stances on socio-political issues, such as LGBTQIA+ rights (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This technique comprises not only intangible but also tangible commitments to the

sociopolitical issue. Hence, brand activism goes beyond mere advocacy and messaging, as it includes alignment with the brands' purpose, values, and practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Furthermore, brand activism is strongly connected with other concepts, namely Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Social Marketing. Brand activism is, in fact, an evolution of CSR (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021), and LGBTQIA+ issues are commonly featured among CSR initiatives (Dahl, 2021). Brands can also target and position themselves towards LGBTQIA+ consumers through the use of Social Marketing (Dahl, 2021), for instance in social marketing campaigns promoting HIV testing for gay men (Olawepo et al., 2018).

To reach LGBTQIA+ consumers, brands often use the gay-window approach, namely in advertising, as a means of avoiding backlash and, at the same time, not alienating from "straight" consumers, i.e. non-LGBTQIA+ consumers (Sender, 2003). This technique involves using either obvious signals of "gay culture", such as rainbows, LGBTQIA+ symbols, and icons, or ambiguous images and text that may only be understood as "gay" by LGBTQIA+ consumers (Puntoni et al., 2010; Tsai, 2011b).

Over twenty years ago, academics were already criticizing the use of a one-size-fits-all identity, mostly based on LGBTQIA+ stereotypes (Simpson, 1996). Additionally, current research in advertising mostly focuses on gay men

and the corresponding depictions and effects (Champlin & Li, 2020). Gay men are also portrayed as noticeable consumers, who are rich, luxurious, and used to upscale products (Badgett, 2003).

This leads to the exclusion of lesbian advertising representations and their effects on academic research (Champlin & Li, 2020). In fact, lesbian representation in advertising is still very narrow and sexualized, and they are portrayed as hot “lipstick lesbians” that do not challenge heterosexual gender norms (Gill, 2009). Ginder and Byun (2015) conclude that “the lack of female representation continues to propagate patriarchal dominance and a history of lesbian invisibility within the marketplace’ (p. 838).

Moreover, transgender individuals are barely represented in advertising, being that trans men are all caucasian and middle-class, and trans women are completely invisible – only drag queens are portrayed (Dahl, 2021; Nölke, 2017). Apart from being apprehensive about the overly sexualized representation, LGBTQIA+ consumers are concerned with being used to promote an “edgy” brand image (Mikkonen, 2010; Nölke, 2017; Tsai, 2011a). They further identify, for example, a lack of working-class, rural LGBTQIA+ representations (Mikkonen, 2010; Nölke, 2017).

Another important aspect in LGBTQIA+ representation is the portrayal of loving, committed, and presumably monogamous couples (Dahl, 2021). Nölke (2017) finds that both gay and lesbian characters in advertising fall into this type of representation. While this may be considered positive, as it reflects the reality

of many LGBTQIA+ people, it may also neglect other constructions of LGBTQIA+ relationships (Bonello & Cross, 2009). This socially acceptable depiction of “gay” couples supports the idea that they are “just like us”, i.e. “just like heterosexual couples” (Dahl, 2021). Accordingly, slogans that emphasize the similarity between “gay” and “straight” couples are common - “Love is love” and “all families are wholesome” are reoccurring themes in LGBTQIA+ advertising (Nölke, 2017).

Some literature has also expressed concern over the body image shown in advertising targeted to LGBTQIA+ consumers (Dahl, 2021). This is probably related to the fact that LGBTQIA+ individuals are more prone to having eating disorders, lower body satisfaction, and lower self-esteem related to physical appearance (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2015). Nölke (2017) suggests that the “absolute invisibility of non-lean characters” (p. 244) leads to the double marginalization of individuals - firstly because they are LGBTQIA+, and secondly because they cannot achieve those beauty standards.

As a way of positioning themselves towards LGBTQIA+ issues, employing LGBTQIA+ related cause marketing, brands are increasingly using social media platforms like Instagram and partnering with influencers (Li, 2021). Influencer marketing/advertising accentuates the need for congruence between the brand and the influencer, as well as the contextual seamlessness of regular advertising (Breves et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). Thus, choosing an appropriate

influencer might be beneficial to the brand as it effectively targets the proper audience, through the influencer's WOM to their followers; as well as transfers the influencer's worth to the brand, optimizing brand equity (Li, 2021).

Finally, yet importantly, recent research has found an improvement in LGBTQIA+ representation, namely a weakening in hypersexual representation and a more sophisticated character development (Dahl, 2021). Nonetheless, there is still an erasure of multiple marginalized groups (Nölke, 2017), and a scarcity of ethnic diversity (Ginder & Byun, 2015). Additionally, the portrayal of largely socially acceptable characters is central to the discussion of representation, as it is not representative of the far more diverse and complex LGBTQIA+ community.

Addressing intersectionality is important since it leads to a richer analysis, by confronting the assumption that sexual orientation, race, gender, socioeconomic class, and disability - which act as multiple points of marginalization - are independent characteristics (Dahl, 2021). Although many authors have reported this lack of diverse LGBTQIA+ representation, few have actually researched the subject (Dahl, 2021).

It is now important to consider brands' motivations for this LGBTQIA+ positioning, which will be contemplated next.

### 1.2.3. Brand activism and authenticity in LGBTQIA+ brand positioning in advertising

Brands can position themselves towards social issues, such as the LGBTQIA+ movement, in brand activism activities. This can be done in thoughtful ways, connecting the social issue to the brand's core purpose, or it can be considered "woke washing", in case the brand promotes certain ideas just to make a profit. For instance, while some companies are truthfully dedicated to the LGBTQIA+ community, others are most likely captivated by this segment's purchasing power (McDonald et al., 2020).

Vredenburg et al. (2020) map out a typology of brand activism, using the degree of activist marketing messaging and the degree of prosocial corporate practice, resulting in four categories. Firstly, there is the Absence of Brand Activism, in which brands do not have a prosocial brand purpose and values or use activist marketing messages, and do not adopt prosocial corporate practices. Secondly, brands in the Silent Brand Activism category embrace sociopolitical issues as part of their mission or strategy. Despite that, they operate quietly, working on integrated practices that are aligned with their purpose and values. Next off is Authentic Brand Activism, in which brands are seen as authentic, in that there is alignment between their corporate practice, marketing messaging, and brand purpose and values. Lastly, brands in the Inauthentic Brand Activism category use activist marketing messages, even though their purpose, values,

and practices are not linked with their support of sociopolitical issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This last category of Inauthentic Brand Activism can be related to the fact that consumers have become more vigilant, holding brands accountable for their actions. This ability is heightened with the use of social media since consumers participate in conversations that expose brand actions that are not congruent with their values, i.e. pinkwashing/rainbow-washing (Lubitow & Davis, 2011).

Rainbow-washing or pinkwashing refers to brands using the LGBTQIA+ cause and its symbols as a way to boost sales, without engaging in further support of this community and their rights. This is viewed as a form of performative allyship profiting off the LGBTQIA+ community (Champlin & Li, 2020). A different problem can emerge when organizations donate to causes that conflict with the LGBTQIA+ community. Various brands which support Pride events in the United States also donated to politicians who are against LGBTQIA+ protection and equality (Dahl, 2021). For example, CVS, while receiving a perfect Human Rights Campaign (HRC) score, also supported sponsors of anti-trans legislation in Texas, North Carolina and Tennessee, through its corporate political action committee (Helmore, 2021).

Failed initiatives of diversity, such as pinkwashing, might display stereotyping and a poor understanding of marginalized groups, further contributing to the oppression and inequality of these groups (King et al., 2009). In addition, these types of initiatives may evoke not only negative word of mouth,

but also poor brand perception and attitude, and decreased purchase intentions (Chen & Chang, 2012; Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Torchia et al., 2011).

Brands are particularly criticized during June, i.e. LGBTQIA+ Pride Month, as Pride collections can be considered exploitative of this cause (Li, 2021). Pride Month has grown into a large-scale, widely known event, and consequently branded products and advertisements showing support have also become common. Pride collection items often use elements like rainbow imagery and equality-themed language (Champlin & Li, 2020). Most brands, namely Nike and Ralph Lauren, only introduce periodical Pride collections during Pride Month (Li, 2021).

Consumers have different reactions to this type of representation. From one point of view, it is seen as something positive (Dahl, 2021), as past research has stressed the symbolic meaning of representation for LGBTQIA+ individuals, which is, for instance, feeling included and considered (Kates, 1999; Mikkonen, 2010; Nölke, 2017; Tsai, 2011a; Um, 2012; Um et al., 2013). Alternatively, it can be perceived as the “selling out” of the LGBTQIA+ movement (Dahl, 2021), up to a point where the term Pink Money is used to describe LGBTQIA+ consumers’ money (Nunan, 2003).

Marketers must understand that approaching the LGBTQIA+ ‘Dream Market’, requires a commitment that goes beyond simply running ads. This

audience expects sponsorships, as well as a brand's long-term pledge to equality and advocacy for this community (Gudelunas, 2010; Tressoldi & Cardoso, 2021). An LGBTQIA+ friendly brand must also devote time and effort towards this cause, and engage in inclusive practices, both internally and externally, as these are customers who are mindful of the balance between speech and practice (Pinto et al., 2020).

Some brands support the LGBTQIA+ cause all year long and launch campaigns consisting of LGBTQIA+ influencers sharing their experiences in the format of video advertisements. For example, Abercrombie and Fitch expanded its partnership with the Trevor Project – an LGBTQ suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization – to be year-long (Li, 2021). Absolut, the vodka brand, does more than market to the LGBTQIA+ community, stating that “that outreach, engagement, and support is an ongoing commitment that lasts well beyond June Pride Month” (McDonald et al., 2020; p. 600).

In essence, authentic brand activism depends not just on the alignment of practice and marketing messages, but also on their match with the brands' purpose and values. Thus, when this is achieved, consumers are more likely to perceive the brands' socio-political positioning as relevant, truthful, and dependable (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

At this moment, it is essential to look at how this LGBTQIA+ brand positioning can possibly influence LGBTQIA+ consumer behavior.

### 1.3. INFLUENCE OF LGBTQIA+ BRAND ADVERTISING IN LGBTQIA+ CONSUMERS

According to the Distinctiveness theory, individuals tend to respond positively to advertisements that not only reflect their distinctive traits – such as sexual orientation or gender identity – but also place them in unique market segments (Li, 2021; Lindzey, 1985). Furthermore, Bond and Farrell's (2019) research confirms that when consumers are exposed to advertisements with imagery congruent with their own sexuality, they tend to have positive behavioral outcomes that can last for at least three weeks.

This can also be explained by social identity theory, which states that individuals employ social identity categories to understand themselves and others, in a way that they appraise their ingroup members with favoritism. Ingroup refers to the group with which consumers identify, because of shared interests and characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Additionally, consumers respond most favorably to advertising and marketing that reflects their self-identities (Jaffe, 1991), which is related to the idea that “gay” consumers are likely to prefer “gay” ad imagery (Bhat et al., 1996).

LGBTQIA+ consumers are commonly considered a “dream market” of early adopters and trendsetters (Nölke, 2017; Sender, 2001), and their representation in advertising has been found to elicit feelings of pride among

LGBTQIA+ individuals (Nölke, 2017). They tend to crave the feeling of social acceptance in marketing communications, rewarding companies with fervent brand loyalty (Kates, 1999; Tuten, 2005). This loyalty persists even if portrayals are perceived as highly stereotypical and the message is considered commercialized (Tsai, 2011a).

However, brands must identify LGBTQIA+ individuals as consumers with intersecting identities. Some authors argue that viewing the entire LGBTQIA+ population as a market segment, and so possessing a common set of preferences and behaviors, is incorrect. This is due to the fact that at the simplest demographic levels, the LGBTQIA+ population includes individuals who vary in sex and gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Additionally, it is questionable whether sexual orientation can be seen as a significant segmentation variable that results in consistent responses to a brands' marketing mix (Oakenfull, 2020). Another crucial characteristic is based on the fact that "lesbians appear to place more importance than do gay men on most LGBT-oriented corporate activities when evaluating a company's gayfriendliness" (Oakenfull, 2013; p. 86). Therefore, having a one-size-fits-all approach to LGBTQIA+ representation is not suitable, as it suppresses the individuality of consumers (Simpson, 1996).

Furthermore, current findings suggest that the identity of influencers is a crucial determinant of how consumers will respond to the influencer, as well as the advertisement and brand. Hiring influencers who identify as LGBTQIA+ for a

brand positioning is considered to be a win-win situation for the influencer, due to the increased perceived credibility, and most importantly, to the brand, as it benefits from decreased perceived hypocrisy. For LGBTQIA+ consumers, brands' support of LGBTQIA+ issues, through the use of advertising, might mitigate their concerns and motivate them to scrutinize the brand less (Li, 2021). Nonetheless, the individual consumer's level of personal involvement with the social cause might interfere with the effects of influencer credibility, brand hypocrisy, and brand motive (Patel et al., 2016).

Generally, there is also a discrepancy between brands' diversity initiatives and consumers' perceptions – for instance, though 90% of brands claim to be passionate about diversity, only 4% are perceived as diverse by consumers (Burgess et al., 2020). Thus, when brands utilize “woke” positioning strategies, particularly through the use of LGBTQIA+ issues, it is important to understand how these can affect the consumer's brand attitude (Greene & Stock, 1966).

Ultimately, Nölke's (2017) analysis indicated a lack of diversity of LGBTQIA+ individuals in advertising, and so that inadequacy “raises the question of whether LGBTQIA+ imagery used currently in ads really appeals to the LGBTQIA+ community” (2017, p. 243). This is precisely one of the goals of the current study – to understand the effects of brand advertising and activism on LGBTQIA+ consumers.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Following the definition of the research objectives and the conceptualization of a theoretical framework, in this chapter it is presented this research's methodology, which includes: the methodological approach, the data collection techniques, the participant characterization and the data analysis procedure.

### 2.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Considering that the main objective of this dissertation is to “Explore how LGBTQIA+ consumers respond to brands’ LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising”, a qualitative methodological approach is best suited.

Aspers and Corte (2019, p. 155) define qualitative research as “an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied”, i.e., the phenomenon of LGBTQIA+ representation in brands’ advertising. In essence, qualitative research explores attitudes, behavior and experiences, and it aims to get in-depth insights from participants (Dawson, 2002), as well as “reveal the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). Qualitative research uses a smaller number of participants (Dawson, 2002), a less structured approach that is connected to its

flexibility (Ragin, 1994), and it can provide diverse perspectives (Lanka et al., 2021).

In fact, qualitative research is especially compatible with issues that are under researched within the existing the literature (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011; Bryman, 1984; Ji et al., 2019; Pratt, 2009; Welch, 2000), as is the LGBTQIA+ representation in brands' advertising (Blackburn, 2019; Li, 2021; Nölke, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2021). Instead of producing generalizable results, qualitative researchers' goal is to generate in-depth and subjective findings in order to build theory (Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Pratt, 2009; Pratt et al., 2020; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Suddaby, 2006).

Furthermore, employing this qualitative approach, the researcher intends to answer three specific objectives which are to: "Analyze LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions and feelings towards LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising", "Study LGBTQIA+ consumers' behavior towards brands that represent the LGBTQIA+ community in their advertising" and "Understand LGBTQIA+ consumers' opinions on brands' LGBTQIA+ activism and friendliness".

It should also be mentioned that previous studies on brands' LGBTQIA+ advertising, such as Breves et al. (2019), Champlin and Li (2020), Chauhan and Shukla (2016) and Li (2021), employed quantitative methodology, thus the importance of studying this theme while resorting to qualitative methodology.

## 2.2 DATA COLLECTION

### 2.2.1 Exploratory Questionnaire

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, in the first stage of the data collection, an exploratory questionnaire was developed in order to get some initial insights on LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions and opinions on brands' LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising. This questionnaire also had the purpose of assembling a group of possible participants for the second and most important component of the data collection process.

This questionnaire, which can be found in the Appendices section, was created using Google Forms and was open to answering over the month of January of 2022. Participants were initially asked context questions related to the study's criteria, and then were asked if they recalled any advertising that, in their opinion, rightfully and wrongfully represented the LGBTQIA+ community. Finally, they were asked to provide their contact information if they were interested in participating in an interview related to LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising. This exploratory questionnaire received 179 responses, being that only 120 participants met the research criteria, and 74 of them showed interest in participating in an interview.

## 2.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Within the scope of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Here, the researcher's goal is to compare pieces of information gathered in different interviews. In order to do so, the same questions need to be asked in each interview, to ensure continuity. However, flexibility is also necessary, as the researcher wants other important participant insights to emerge (Dawson, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews are particularly popular as they are suitable for disclosing important and often hidden aspects of human behavior, in addition to being one of the most effective and convenient ways of obtaining information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As it based on human conversation, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to adjust the style, pace and ordering of questions to get the richest responses from the interviewees (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Additionally, this enables participants to answer "in their own terms and in the way that they think and use language", displaying how they "perceive the social world under study" (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246).

This study's interview guide was composed in a process explained on the table present on Appendix 2. Specifically, the researcher gathered several pieces of information (referenced to the respective authors) from the literature review

chapter, which were transformed into interview questions and later linked to analysis' dimensions.

As stated by Goldenberg (2004), during the interviews, the researcher should create a comfortable environment and assume a neutral position regarding the participants' answers. It is also crucial to properly plan the interviews, that is: participants must fit within the study; the time and place of the interviews should be scheduled in advance to ensure that they can be conducted; interviewees' identity and answers should be confidential and guaranteed as such, and a careful preparation of the interview script should take place (Marconi & Lakatos, 2002).

The interviewing period occurred between the 25th of March and the 27th of April of 2022, and interviews were conducted through Zoom, as visual cues are also important, and the best way to make use of them is by video recording. This also gives the interviewer an opportunity to further analyze the insights shared by the interviewee, clarifying any ambiguities or adding extra information (Arvey & Campion, 1982). These interviews had an average duration of 60 minutes, due to the considerable amount and exploratory nature of the questions. All 25 interviews were fully transcribed, in order to later conduct a content analysis.

## 2.3 PARTICIPANTS' CHARACTERIZATION

In the present study, interview participants, had to meet two main criteria: they had to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and currently reside in Portugal – as the researcher's main goal is to “Explore how LGBTQIA+ consumers respond to brands' LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising”, more specifically in the Portuguese context, in order to have a somewhat homogenous sample of participants. According to Black (2009), sampling can be beneficial as it saves time and money, and when accessing the population is impossible, it is the only option available to the researcher.

For the first stage of data collection, i.e., the exploratory questionnaire, participants were sampled using Convenience Sampling. This is a type of nonprobability sampling where members of the target population are chosen due to their readily availability or willingness to participate (Etikan, 2016). In this case, the sample was comprised of the researcher's social media followers, who are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and currently reside in Portugal. The exploratory questionnaire received 179 responses, being that only 120 participants met the research criteria.

For the second stage of data collection, i.e., the semi-structured interviews, Self-selection sampling was utilized, as individuals identified their desire to take part in the research (Saunders et al., 2012). This was accomplished

by sharing the initial exploratory questionnaire on social media, and later contacting the individuals who showed interest in being interviewed regarding the issue of LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising. Initially, 74 individuals said they would be interest in participating in an interview. Even so, the final sample for the semi-structured interview added up to only 25 participants. Even though individuals believed this is an urgent theme to be studied, many experience shyness, as this is a very personal issue and they do not want to expose themselves, which led to them not participating in the interview stage. Additionally, since interviews are much more time-consuming than questionnaires, that was another reason for the decline in number of participants

**Table 1: : Interview Participants' Characterization and Codification**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity</b>	<b>Level of Schooling</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Data Coding</b>
Masculine	21	Gay	Bachelor's Degree in Management	Marketing Master's Student	E1
Masculine	22	Gay	Bachelor's Degree in Psychology	Clinical and Health Psychology Master's Student	E2
Feminine	26	Bisexual	Master's Degree in Biotechnology	Product Research & Development	E3
Feminine	25	Bisexual	Master's Degree in Psychology of Deviant Behavior and Justice	External Collaborator for one of Portugal's LGBTQIA+ associations	E4
Non-binary	31	Transgender Queer	Postgraduate Degree	Psychiatry and Mental Health Occupational Therapist	E5
Non-binary	24	Bisexual Queer	Master's Degree in Translation	Telephone Interpreter	E6

Masculine	24	Asexual	Master's Degree in Cinema	Film Production	E7
Masculine	26	Gay	High School Graduate	Science of Communications Bachelor's Student	E8
Masculine	20	Bisexual Transgender	High School Graduate	Science of Communications Bachelor's Student	E9
Feminine	28	Lesbian	High School Graduate	Mobility and Parking Technician	E10
Masculine	23	Gay Queer	Bachelor's Degree in Marketing and Advertising	Social Media Manager Digital Marketing Postgraduate Student	E11
Feminine	27	Pansexual	High School Graduate	Lab Technician	E12
Non-binary	21	Bisexual Queer	High School Graduate	Electronic Engineering Bachelor's Student	E13
Feminine	26	Pansexual	Bachelor's Degree in Sport	Personal Development Coach	E14
Feminine	27	Bisexual	Master's Degree in Teaching	Doctoral Student in Didactics of Mathematics	E15
Masculine	25	Gay	Master's Degree in Computer Engineering	Data Product Manager	E16
Feminine	30	Transgender	High School Graduate	Unemployed	E17
Masculine	22	Gay	Bachelor's Degree	Journalism Master's Degree Student	E18
Feminine	29	Bisexual	High School Graduate	Communications Assistant Political Science and International Relations Bachelor's Student	E19
Feminine	22	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree in Basic Science of Medicine	Medicine Master's Degree Student	E20
Masculine	25	Transgender	Bachelor's Degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Medical Imaging and Radiotherapy	Construction Industry Worker	E21
Masculine	17	Gay	Middle School Graduate	High School Student	E22

Feminine	23	Lesbian	Master's Degree in Multimedia Communication	UI/UX Designer	E23
Non-binary	28	Bisexual Transgender Queer	High School Graduate	Social Media and Customer Service Collaborator	E24
Feminine	27	Lesbian	Master's Degree in Criminal Psychology	Ministry of Justice Worker	E25

Intending to get the most representative sample, the researcher try to select a diverse group of individuals that are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Therefore, and considering external constrictions, this sample comprised of 4 lesbian individuals, 7 gay individuals, 8 bisexual individuals, 5 transgender individuals, 5 queer individuals, 1 asexual individual and 2 pansexual individuals. It is important to mention that one participant may identify with more than one identity, e.g.: a bisexual transgender individual. Regarding gender identity, there was also a goal to be as representative as possible. Having said that, 40% of this study's participants are women, 44% are men, and 16% are non-binary individuals.

## 2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Câmara (2013), after conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher must thoroughly read the collected material. At this point, the aim is to recognize recurrent themes, and group the information into categories, that is, to carry out a Content Analysis.

Content analysis comprises “a set of techniques for communications analysis aimed at obtaining, by systematic and objective procedures of description of the messages’ content, indicators that allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production/reception of these messages” (Bardin, 2011, p. 47). Bardin (2011) establishes that a Content Analysis has three fundamental phases: Pre-analysis, Material exploration, and Results’ treatment, inference and interpretation.

In the first phase, also known as the organization phase, there is an initial contact with the documents that will later be analyzed, their choice, the formulation of the hypotheses and objectives, and the development of indicators that will guide the interpretation of the material (Câmara, 2013). The second phase, the Material Exploration, consists of data organization and construction of coding units, considering text snippets in registration units, the definition of counting rules and the classification and aggregation of information into thematic categories (Silva & Fossá, 2015). For this purpose, each of the three

specific research objectives was linked to the appropriate analysis' dimensions, which resulted from the construction of the interview guide and associated with the respective authors.

**Table 2: Research Objectives and respective Analysis' Dimensions**

<b>Specific Research Objectives</b>	<b>Analysis' Dimensions</b>	<b>Key Authors</b>
Analyze LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions and feelings towards LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising	Current LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising and socio-historical reasons behind that	Li, 2021; Lindzey, 1985; Gill, 2009; Dahl, 2021; Nölke, 2017
	"One-size-fits-all" approach to LGBTQIA+ advertising	Simpson, 1996
	Brands' LGBTQIA+ symbols	Sender, 2003; Puntoni et al., 2010; Tsai, 2011b
	Brands' LGBTQIA+ stereotypes	Simpson, 1996; Nölke, 2017
	LGBTQIA+ representation's association with a type of brand	Mikkonen, 2010; Nölke, 2017; Tsai, 2011a
	Brands' use of LGBTQIA+ couples and phrases	Dahl, 2021; Nölke, 2017
	Inclusiveness of brands' LGBTQIA+ representation	Nölke, 2017; Ginder & Byun, 2015
	Other forms of LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising	Li, 2021
	Use of influencers for LGBTQIA+ inclusive brand partnerships	Breves et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017; Li, 2021
Study LGBTQIA+ consumers' behavior towards brands that represent the LGBTQIA+ community in their advertising	Appeal of brands' LGBTQIA+ advertising	Nölke, 2017
	Brands' "specific time of year" LGBTQIA+ inclusiveness	Li, 2021; Champlin & Li, 2020; Dahl, 2021; Kates, 1999; Mikkonen, 2010; Nölke, 2017; Tsai, 2011a; Um, 2012; Um et al., 2013; Nunan, 2003
	Brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness impact on customer loyalty	Kates, 1999; Tuten, 2005; Tsai, 2011a
Understand LGBTQIA+ consumers' opinions on brands' LGBTQIA+ activism and "friendliness"	LGBTQIA+ advertising's influence on inclusion	Dahl, 2021; Peñaloza, 1996
	Perceived reasons for brands' incorporation of social messages in their advertising	Chauhan & Shukla, 2016; Krishnan, 1996; Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2003 Easingwood & Mahajan, 1989; Zerfass et al., 2018; Champlin & Li, 2020

	Pinkwashing and possible effects	McDonald et al., 2020; King et al., 2009; Chen & Chang, 2012; Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Torchia et al., 2011
	Personal involvement's influence on LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions	Patel et al., 2016
	"LGBTQIA+ friendly" brand actions	Gudelunas, 2010; Tressoldi & Cardoso, 2021; Pinto et al., 2020;
	Brands' authentic LGBTQIA+ activism	Vredenburg et al., 2020

In the last phase, Results' treatment, inference and interpretation, the researcher must turn the results into meaningful and valid information. To do so, they should not limit this step to the content stated in the documents, but also consider other possible meanings for the expressed messages (Câmara, 2013). In summary, in this chapter the research's Methodological Approach, Data Collection techniques, Participants' characterization, and Data Analysis procedures were thoroughly explained. In the upcoming chapter, it will be conducted an analysis and discussion of the data obtained during the research, namely the data resulting from the semi-structured interviews.

### 3. FINDINGS

This chapter serves the purpose of exposing the findings of this research, namely the data resulting from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted. It is divided into three parts, each one related to one specific research objective, which are then branched into the previously mentioned analysis' dimensions.

#### 3.1. CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND FEELING TOWARDS LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING

##### 3.1.1. Current LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising and socio-historical reasons behind that

Almost all interviewees feel that there is a lack of LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, some even say that it is inexistent, specifically in the Portuguese context. As E14 states:

*"I do not yet feel that my sexual orientation or gender identity are represented."*

Interviewees say that there are sociohistorical reasons behind this scarcity of LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, which are mostly related with

homophobia and other structural stigmas around the LGBTQIA+ community, Portugal's connection to religion and traditionalism, and the fact that we live in a cis heteronormative society. E2 states:

*"People with non-normative sexual orientations or gender identities sometimes have a stigma associated with them, and therefore people have a negative attitude towards them, so brands do not want to associate themselves and their products with something of negative*

Interviewee E7, who identifies as Asexual, recognizes another sociohistorical reason for the lack of representation of their sexuality:

*"There is a hypersexualisation in the advertising world and because my sexual orientation does not see any sense in that hypersexualisation, it doesn't fit within that marketing or advertising stream."*

E8, E11, E12 and E21 consider, however, that LGBTQIA+ representation has been gradually increasing, not only in advertising but also in other mass media channels, as stated by E12:

*"More and more the representation of the LGBT community in advertisements is increasing... in advertising, in soap operas, in films, there is much more freedom in this sense."*

Some interviewees detect sociohistorical reasons behind the growing LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, which are linked both to the growing acceptance of queer individuals in society and to the current pressure felt by most brands to represent and state their support towards minorities, as E8 states:

*"I think the reason is evolution, as people are becoming more accepting of the spectrum of sexuality, but there's also a lot of taking advantage and profit of the LGBT community these days."*

Within the current representation, interviewees feel that some groups within the LGBTQIA+ community are severely less represented than others. Brands mostly portray Gays and Lesbians, and people who do not identify as such are left underrepresented or ignored. As E13 and E22, respectively, put it:

*"I'm glad that there is representation, it's just not the representation that I want and that makes sense. Things are so colorful, if you will, and people end up taking one thing and putting it in that one box, when there are probably several boxes."*

*"I think that the biggest groups in the Community are well represented, but, for example, trans people, pansexuals or non-binary people are not so well represented, because they are smaller groups, or with a smaller amount of people who can identify how they feel."*

When representation does, in fact, happen, most interviewees experience happiness and a sense of belonging, as E8 and E6 express:

*"I think that's great, because advertising, like television and films, allows us to realize that our reality is also valid and should also exist."*

*"I think it's a good feeling for anyone to feel represented, to feel heard and seen."*

However, interviewees E1 and E7 do not feel necessarily happy with this LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, mainly due to the reasons behind it. As E7 states:

*"And the fact that I don't see my sexuality represented by these brands is something that gives me some peace. I already feel some anger that they do it in a purely self-interested way."*

### 3.1.2. "One-size-fits-all" approach to LGBTQIA+ advertising

Nearly all interviewees agree that using a "one-size-fits-all" approach to LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising does not work since, within the community, there are individuals with all sorts of lives, experiences, and perspectives, as E2 and E24, respectively, express:

*"Although we are all part of a community that yes, suffers as a whole, we can never take a stance that all our internal and personal struggles are equal. For example, a white trans person does not suffer the same as a black trans person."*

*"A "one-size-fits-all" is not linked to representation, i.e. it is inversely linked, because it does not take into account the diversity or heterogeneity that exists between sub-groups, for example, lesbians, gays, bisexuals... and who says between sub-groups, also says intra-sub-groups. Within lesbian people you have a lot of diversity, within gay people a lot of diversity..."*

Interviewee E7 shares their disagreement with the use of this approach for LGBTQIA+ representation in a humorous manner:

*"No, it's funny having a one-size-fits-all approach and then the 7 letters and a "+" at the end. I don't think it works, does it?"*

This approach is used by portraying the "one-size-fits-all" group of the community, which are cisgender homosexual white men, who although are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, do not and cannot represent everyone, as E11 says:

*"So if we boil it all down to one stereotype, which is, for example, a well-built middle-aged white man, we miss out on a whole range of other colors, personalities and business opportunities, again, that can be leveraged, both for brands and for people themselves to feel represented and have products and services that are suited to their needs."*

Nonetheless, there is not consensus regarding the use of this approach, namely E10 stresses the importance of looking at the LGBTQIA+ community as just another part of society:

*"It makes sense that it works, it is the same thing as saying that we are all equal, this goes for everyone, we all have the same rights."*

Furthermore, E19, thinks that this approach works in the sense that we are a community, and that having a "one-size-fits-all" representation is an upgrade to the lack of Queer representation in advertising:

*"I think so! I don't think that there has to be one communication for lesbians, one for bisexuals... I think we are all in the same boat. As a bi person, I wouldn't be offended by a "one size fits all" communication, because I would already be feeling represented, there is already an advertisement for me and it's better to have one than none."*

### 3.1.3. Brands' LGBTQIA+ symbols

The majority of interviewees quickly state that brands mostly use the Pride Flag or rainbows as symbols to reach LGBTQIA+ consumers, although some also use the Trans Flag or the Progress Pride Flag, as E3 and E25 respectively say:

*"The flag is automatic, or the rainbow... those are the classics!"*

*"You can tell which brands are up to speed because they use the new flag, with the brown and black stripes and the trans triangle and the flag that is also intersex."*

There is also another noteworthy symbol mentioned by interviewee E16, which sees a non-queer symbol as a way of approaching and appealing to LGBTQIA+ consumers:

*“The fight against racism always ends up going hand in hand with LGBT representation, so whenever I see two hands holding, one white and one black, etc., in a way, I feel protected too. I think it's a symbol that, at least as a Queer person, despite being white, I feel that shows that the brand is concerned with minorities.”*

When mentioned by the researcher that symbols do not necessarily need to images, almost all interviewees add other symbols that brands use or can use in order to reach the LGBTQIA+ community, such as using inclusive language, cliché phrases such as “Love Wins”, Queer Icons or celebrities, and music associated with the community:

*“One thing that immediately strikes me, that immediately gives me the idea that the brand is very LGBT-friendly, is that they use gender-neutral pronouns, or in Portuguese they use the “@” instead of using the masculine by default. And times when brands associate themselves with queer artists.” - E3*

*“They play Lady Gaga's music, especially “Born This Way”, which is the song that identifies a lot with the LGBT community. Also, 2 years ago, I saw an advertisement that showed Marsha P. Johnson, who was a very important trans woman in the fight for LGBT rights.” - E8*

*“I think that to reach the LGBTQIA+ audience, it would probably be good to use songs by António Variações or Fado Bicha. Give us Fado Bicha, that's what we want!” - E6*

### 3.1.4. Brands' LGBTQIA+ stereotypes

Interviewees see several different stereotypes that brands use to represent the LGBTQIA+ in advertising. On one hand, E1, E9 and E12 mention that one of the biggest stereotypes used by brands is the inversion of gender roles, when representing gay or lesbian couples, as stated by E9:

*"I think it's always a bit that gay men are a bit fragile and effeminate, and lesbian women, on the other hand, are more masculine."*

On the other hand, some interviewees say that brands stereotype by portraying a heteronormative image of queerness, maybe as a way of normalizing the idea of being LGBTQIA+, as said by E25:

*"Gay couples are represented as white people, as people with a family, with a boy and a girl. It's a stereotype seen in our society as positive, because it's what society thinks is normal in a family. They are trying to assimilate it as much as possible. And they don't show all the other spheres of the LGBT community as well."*

There are also stereotypes related to the physical traits, race, age and gender of LGBTQIA+ people. More specifically, Queer individuals are represented as being cisgender, men, white, attractive, and younger:

*"They use the stereotype of the cis white gay man. You don't see many trans lesbians, it's very rare." - E17*

*"I think that there is not much representation of non-binary and trans people, so we always have 2 women or 2 men. And effectively most of the examples I remember are made with white people." - E24*

*“I would say it happens a lot, for example in terms of beauty and physical attractiveness, but that's in general, not just in the LGBTQIA+ population.” - E2*

*“Thinking about a physical stereotype, maybe it's more often people with tattoos and piercings. Maybe they tend to use younger couples, as if other ages couldn't be represented as well.” - E15*

A serious stereotype also used by brands is that the LGBTQIA+ community is intrinsically hypersexualized, as further explained by E18:

*“I think the main stereotype is one of a certain disorder associated with this community. This idea that relationships are not monogamous, also very much associated with the historical HIV crisis, and that individuals have various sexual encounters.”*

Interviewee E19 states that the excessive use of the Pride Flag and rainbows to attract LGBTQIA+ people can also be seen as a stereotype:

*“It's the little flags and the colors. I always know that the month of gay visibility has arrived, when I start seeing everything with the gay flag. They are very banal, they have rainbow flags and think that everything is already done.”*

However, some interviewees have trouble recalling certain or any stereotypes due to the lack of LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, as E11 and E14 respectively explain:

*“I think the examples we have are so few that I don't think I have enough content to answer that question.”*

*“There is no representation of intersex people, nor asexual people, so there is no stereotyping.”*

Consequences of using these stereotypes are vast. They can lead to the perpetuation of Queer stereotypes in society and generalization of what it means to be LGBTQIA+, as mentioned by E25 and E23:

*“The consequences of proliferating these stereotypes are that stereotypes do not die, that is, they are propagating information, a character judgement that may or may not correspond to reality.”*

*“I think they transmit the idea through these advertisements that really a lesbian couple, for example, only works if one of them is more masculine. Or that a gay couple only works if one of them is more feminine. In a way, by using these stereotypes, it ends up passing on a wrong idea to the rest of society, because people will never always find the same style of couples within the Community.”*

Interviewee E16 says that one of biggest consequences of using these stereotypes is that individuals may have a harder time accepting themselves as Queer, as they do not “fit the mold”:

*“Men who have a lot of internalized homophobia and see a more feminine man on television being portrayed as homosexual, that makes it more difficult for them to accept themselves as homosexuals. For example, I used to be happy when people said I looked straight, which is stupid, because being gay is not inferior, and I don't necessarily have to be feminine to be a gay man... It's these stereotypes that then propagate these incorrect thoughts.”*

Additionally, E24 recognizes an important consequence of using the white queer person stereotype:

*“I think this can have consequences not only in society, because they feed these little stereotypes that people already have, but obviously the fact that there is a majority of white people brings even more invisibility to the black community.”*

Contrastingly, E23 sees a more positive consequence of using some of these stereotypes concerning the LGBTQIA+ community:

*“I have mixed feelings because, on the one hand, I don't think you should associate stereotypes with anyone, you can be a perfectly straight girl and be super masculine, and vice versa. But on the other hand, I also think it's important that you have this representation of what's not normative.”*

### 3.1.5. LGBTQIA+ representation's association with a type of brand

Nearly all participants associate LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising with fashion or beauty brands, as these kinds of brands and products are deeply linked with personal identity, and their advertisements tend to draw the attention of consumers, as suggested by E7 and E15, respectively:

*“I would say that clothes also carry that weight of personal image, don't they? That is, if you want to emphasize your identity, there is nothing more practical than putting something on that carries that identity in a visible way.”*

*“Most probably, society is already expecting the fashion industry to shock in some way, shock by its type of clothes or shock with its type of advertising, which is not always accepted, and is something out of the box, so to speak.”*

E3 and E11 also associate LGBTQIA+ representation with two completely different types of brands, maybe due to the few examples in the Portuguese scene. As said by E3, these two types are sexual product brands and familiar brands:

*“Condom brands in general will be quite open in that aspect. More recently, there are a few brands that I feel like that are more “homey”, more family type,*

Interviewee E9 suggests that LGBTQIA+ representation is linked to a more humane brand image, where brands try to connect with their customers with some other purpose than just selling their products:

*“Companies that generally have a more humane image, for example, Sonder or Google. I think the way they communicate with the consumer is always closer, and it seems that they're there to help people and that profits are secondary. And that ends up also creating some need for them also to direct x percent of advertising or media, to the LGBT Community.”*

### 3.1.6 Brands’ use of LGBTQIA+ couples and phrases

Interviewees have divergent opinions regarding the use of couples for LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising. Some shed a more positive light on it, as they see it as way to normalize queer relationships and reduce stigma and prejudice around LGBTQIA+ individuals, but also as a point of connection with cisgender heterosexual people, as E1 and E23 respectively state:

*“They do it very well, because it normalizes the aspect of raising a family, and creates another point of connection with the rest of the population that is not part of the community and helps to normalize the non-stereotypical images that people outside the community may have.”*

*“I also think it's important to have the representation of couples, because I think that for a long time the Community was associated with nightlife and instability, illness, alcohol... And if you use the couple, you give an image of stability, like “you're from this Community, but you can raise a family perfectly well”.”*

E3, E9 and E22 see portraying couples as a way of representing the LGBTQIA+ without using inaccurate stereotypes, as E9 perfectly describes:

*“I think that's also why we see more couples, because then you get into other stereotypes. For example, if a man is gay, how are you going to represent him without being with his husband or boyfriend? He's going to be at the parade, he's going to be wearing rainbows... I think that it's also a little difficult to see how you can represent that without putting one's foot in it.”*

E5 and E18 view this type of representation as some sort of inspiration for young LGBTQIA+ people, who often grow up with an idea of future loneliness and unhappiness. As E18 shares:

*“I think it's very important to represent couples, it's important for young queer people who grow up with this whole ingrained idea that maybe they'll never be happy, that they'll never find that love.”*

E2, E6 and E13 have opposing views on this, as they feel that it is quite restrictive, and it gives a non-intersectional narrow perspective on LGBTQIA+ representation. As E2 adds:

*“I think it still has a very reductive and limiting perspective. When I think of couples from the LGBTQIA+ community in advertising, I think of male homosexual couples or female homosexual couples. I don't think there's much of this mixing... for example, a trans person being with a bisexual person. And on the other hand, I also feel that there's really very little intersectionality between these identity categories, it's always more white people who appear, and not so much black people or people with other ethnic backgrounds.”*

Some interviewees have some trouble remembering any type of phrase linked to the representation of LGBTQIA+ couples. Those who can recall, mention cliché phrases such as “Love is Love” and “Love Wins”. As E3 and E13 state:

*"That classic "Love is Love" type of phrase."*

*"Love wins" is the one that is used the most."*

### 3.1.7 Inclusiveness of brands' LGBTQIA+ representation

Almost all interviewees consider that LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising is not inclusive, and there are many reasons to think so. E2 and E6, respectively, reveal that it is not inclusive due to the lack of diversity in this representation, even regarding the different types of Queer people portrayed:

*"It doesn't take much account of the heterogeneity that exists between subgroups and within those subgroups, for example, within bisexual people. I think it's not inclusive in this sense of not mixing identity categories, and in the sense of having this stereotypical and often, even if it's not the aim of the advertising, stigmatizing view of LGBTQIA+ people."*

*"There are so many ways of being queer, there is so much existence, so much color and so much variety in the community, and they always end up showing little and the little they show is always the same!"*

Interviewees E4, E7, E8 and E13 get into detail by stating that it is not inclusive as it portrays mainly white gay cisgender people, especially men, which, leads to the erasure of people who do not have that identity and their opinions. As E13 perfectly summarizes:

*“I don't think it is inclusive! I think it favors more couples whose gender identity is cisgender. I think it favors more white people. It lacks a lot of representation of people of color in the Community, especially trans and non-binary people of color. It lacks that whole part, what has now been added to the flag, because those are the minorities who suffer the most and who are heard the least, and simply perpetuating the idea that what matters and what exists are white, cisgender couples who like the same gender, is not inclusive.”*

Interviewees E11, E14, E15 say that this representation is not inclusive, as it portrays queer people with a very specific physical appearance, pointing out the lack of representation of LGBTQIA+ disabled and older people. As stated by E11 and E15, respectively:

*“I think it's not inclusive at all because it only represents what might be a little more accepted by the people who are watching. It's also missing a lot of LGBT people who have disabilities or who suffer from mental health problems.”*

*“Look, the patterns were that the ones I mentioned, for example, people with tattoos, people with piercings, usually younger people. I am 27 years old, and I hardly feel represented now, but maybe in a few years I will feel even less represented.”*

However, interviewees E3, E4 and E20 feel that this representation is inclusive to some degree, as brands try to, at least, represent some part of the LGBTQIA+ community, as stated by E3:

*“For example, always having gay relations between men, I feel it works to some extent. It's better than nothing!”*

### 3.1.8. Other forms of LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising

Most interviewees say that another form of LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising, besides TV ads, can be in the form of outdoor advertisements, such advertising panels/boards, but also can be in the form of products with LGBTQIA+ symbols, as E23 mentions:

*“I would say street banners at bus stops and billboards. And the IKEA rainbow bag, I think it also works as advertising.”*

E14 adds to what was said by E23 by stating that another form of LGBTQIA+ advertising can be the types of photos brands use in their websites, i.e., portraying queer people:

*“In addition to these television commercials that they use as advertising, it ends up being launching some product with a rainbow or a phrase. Maybe also the photos that can be used on posters and on those street things and even the website photos, I think that can be inclusive.”*

E7 and E17 mention that other forms of inclusive advertising can be sponsoring LGBTQIA+ events or organizations. E1, E9, E17 and E21 also emphasize the importance of social media platforms in LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising. As stated by E1:

*“Ambassadors in social media platforms, because it is much easier to reach the target. Sponsorship in marches and other events, and specific collaborations between NGOs and other associations focused on the LGBT community.”*

Interviewees E2, E12, E15, E19 struggle with remembering other forms of LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising, maybe due to the lack of representation in general, as mentioned by E2:

*“Well, as I told you, there really is this invisibility... I can't think of anything. It's really hard for me to have even one example of advertising that is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ populations. “*

Only when asked by the researcher, nearly all interviewees say that social media influencers or brand ambassadors can count as another form of inclusive advertising. As E3 states:

*“I think it's a very good and efficient way of making me connect a brand with the LGBT world, because I always imagine them being okay with it, and a lot of times the content is a bit more explicit and more open.”*

### 3.1.9. Use of influencers for LGBTQIA+ inclusive brand partnerships

Some interviewees say brands should only hire LGBTQIA+ influencers for LGBTQIA+ related partnerships. Interviewees E6, E8, E11 and E20 justify their opinion by expressing that only queer individuals fully understand the struggles and bring an authentic perspective on what is it really like to live in this society as a queer person, something that an ally could never fully understand. As E20 shares:

*“I think it's important to hire LGBT influencers for this kind of thing, otherwise it's a bit of a paradox. Because obviously an LGBT influencer has their own personal experience, knows what it's like to be inside the Community and has a more realistic perspective of what's going on inside the Community than a person who is outside. They can even be more convincing in an advertisement. I think it's also in the brand's interest to use a person like that, they can have a much more realistic and much more genuine advertisement by having an LGBT influencer.”*

Interviewees also share that hiring an LGBTQIA+ influencer for these kinds of brand partnerships is important because it is a way for them to share their stories and experiences, bringing a sense of comfort to other queer consumers, who feel seen and heard. As E13 and E18 respectively share:

*“Seeing representation done by people who belong to the Community always gives that feeling of trying to pass on a message, but this person is really feeling and has gone through what they are transmitting. It gives a feeling of security and understanding. It always gives that comfort, it's as if people are seeing it themselves.”*

*“I think if we're promoting inclusion, and we're promoting products that, beyond the business, have a social impact, I think the influencers have to be from the LGBTQIA+ community. Because there's nothing better than them to also show their experience and what this kind of representation means to them. I think if we're talking about representation, there's nothing better than people who go through it and who feel and who are passionate about that representation to embody it and to get up front and speak out.”*

Interviewees E3, E7 and E25 strongly believe brands should only partner with LGBTQIA+ influencers for queer related advertising, as it gives those influencers a vital platform for them to speak and address queer issues, in a way that no one else could replicate. As E7 and E25 respectively state:

*"But I think being queer influencers doing queer marketing projects is the "bare minimum" for me. If you don't start there, it starts very badly, doesn't it?"*

*"Do you remember the film Soul, which is about a black musician? There was that polemic in Portugal about "why does the voice actor have to be black, if we're not even going to see him?". When theatre was created in ancient Greece, only men played all the roles, even men played women. Now, who can play women better than a woman? Certainly not a man! I think the same thought applies here. We need to create more space for there to be even more LGBTQIA+ influencers."*

However, E1, E2, E9, E12, E21 and E23 say that brands should partner both with LGBTQIA+ influencers and with non-LGBTQIA+ influencers, as long as they are vocal allies of the Community. They view hiring non LGBTQIA+ influencers in an educational perspective. These influencers can bring awareness to these topics from a place of privilege, paving the way for queer influencers, and contributing to LGBTQIA+ inclusion. As E1 and E23 respectively express:

*"It should be people who are a part of the community or people who are not part of the community, but who have a very important association in terms of the work they do or the image they reflect, or at least the work they do for that community."*

*"I don't think you should only hire LGBTQIA+ influencers, because I think this has an educational function and what you want is to inform and try to make society as open and inclusive as possible for the Community. I think that if you get into that little box, it has no effect. I think it's important to have influencers who are straight, because they had no business being there, but they're friendly and want to demystify prejudices."*

E17 and E21 emphasize the importance of hiring LGBTQIA+ influencers for brand partnerships but not only for LGBTQIA+ related themes, as E21 states:

*"They should hire LGBT influencers, but not just for campaigns in favor of the LGBT community, rather for all kinds of campaigns."*

Some interviewees share what they think would be good and bad examples of influencers for LGBTQIA+ related brand partnerships. E9 shares a good example of a cis heterosexual influencer and a bad example of a queer influencer, both in the Portuguese context:

*“Not belonging to the Community, there is Bumba na Fofinha. She seems to be a very empathetic person, she is also a comedian, so it is also easier to receive these kinds of messages. A bad representative of the Community, I think is Goucha. Because he had some kind of ease being out as a gay man, I think he does very little of what he should do in the community. That is, he's a very big voice that reaches a lot of people in the country, and because he's in a position of privilege, he doesn't help the rest of the Community.”*

Interviewee E18 shares a good and a bad example of influencer for this type of brand partnerships, both a part of the LGBTQIA+ Community and Portuguese:

*“A good example is Rui Maria Pêgo, because he has been coherent, he has remained active on the issue of social causes. Goucha, on the other hand, is a rich white man, who is against Pride, who has already expressed his opposition to community associations several times.”*

These choices have consequences on the brand, the influencer and the consumer. On one hand, interviewees say that when a good choice is made regarding an influencer for an LGBTQIA+ related partnership, there are many benefits. Firstly, interviewees E1, E2, E6, E19, E15 and E18 say the brand itself gains credibility, especially when choosing a queer influencer, and approval from consumers, which can later turn into increased sales. As E1 and E2 respectively state:

*“For the company, I think they benefit a lot more from receiving the approval and the credibility that is associated with using these influencers or these figures.”*

*“In the sense that people also identify much more with the advertising, they will probably want to buy the product, or follow the brand.”*

Another positive consequence, expressed by E1, E9, E15 and E18, is that LGBTQIA+ consumers feel a deeper connection with the brand, as they feel seen and heard, which turns into a more positive brand image. As E9 and E15 respectively state:

*"This brings a very good image for the company, and for the influencer too, as the consumer now has a different relationship with the company, a different experience."*

*"But it also has a social impact for me, because it is a form of representation that will reach several people, and I feel seen heard and included as a consumer."*

Interviewees E5, E13, E14 and E17 also say that this makes the LGBTQIA+ consumer feel represented and inspired, especially by a queer influencer, which can lead to further brand awareness. As expressed here by E5 and E14, respectively:

*"I think the consumer will feel represented. And therefore, if they feel represented, I would at least try to look for more things from this brand, I would try to go to this brand and perhaps support this brand."*

*"That's why I mentioned the brand should bring people from the LGBT community, because it can give this reference to someone, and that person can be an inspiration to them."*

Lastly, interviewees E2, E3, E4 and E9 also say that this brings a positive image to the influencer, as they have an important role in the inclusion of queer people, and especially when it's an LGBTQIA+ influencer, this partnership can provide vital information for the consumer. As E2 and E3 respectively state:

*“For the influencer it's also good, because they partner with brands and carry a great job which is to make known to the world, to publicize, to make LGBTQIA+ people and minority identities less stigmatizing.”*

*“And a lot of times, they talk about topics that are very useful for the consumer, especially on these LGBT topics. For example, I was thinking about a channel I follow that people are non-binary. They talk about "top surgery" and the whole process of taking testosterone and etc.”*

On the other hand, there are also consequences of a poorly chosen influencer partnership, regarding LGBTQIA+ related content. Interviewees E4, E8, E11, E20 and E24 say that this could have a negative impact on both the brand and the influencer's image, which can lead to backlash for both the brand and the influencer. As E4 and E24 respectively state:

*“I also think that there isn't this connection, this emotional connection with the brand and it becomes less credible, and credibility here also plays an important role.”*

*“For the influencer, especially if they were a person who had never touched on these issues, it could have negative effects on their career in the future, they could lose several opportunities with other brands outside of this scope. Some brands or entities could see this as less serious or as if the person was less professional.”*

Nonetheless, E9 and E24 believe that negative consequences would always affect the influencer more than the brand, as E9 states:

*“I think in that case the influencer is much more scrutinized, so to speak, than the brand. The brand has more ability to point the finger at someone and say "but this is not what the brand wanted to say and communicate".”*

## 3.2. CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS BRANDS THAT REPRESENT THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY IN ADVERTISING

### 3.2.1. Appeal of brands' LGBTQIA+ advertising

Opinions on the appeal of brands' current LGBTQIA+ advertising are divergent. Interviewees E3, E4, E5 and E20 say that they feel attracted to the current LGBTQIA+ representation, as it is better than having no representation at all, and as it is something unusual, so they feel some sort of connection. As E4 and E20 respectively express:

*"I think in a way it attracts, because if it's something that represents me...I think it does! I think yes it attracts because it's so unusual that it awakens, it's like "Ok, this is happening!", isn't it? It draws attention because it's unusual"*

*"The little that exists, I think it is appealing."*

Interviewees E10, E12 and E16 say this representation is somewhat appealing, as LGBTQIA+ consumers see themselves represented, especially younger consumers who want to be accepted as queer individuals. As E10 thoroughly explains:

*"It attracts! I think it draws attention, and they will definitely buy things. I think there is this characteristic in people who are from the Community, this may sound stupid, but those people who have to fight for their own identity and freedom and acceptance in society, they lose that fear, because they have to fight with it every day, and every time a piece of clothing comes out, whether it's flashy or not, but as long as it has the rainbow on it, it's always that thing I'm going to buy it, because it's me!"*

E21 and E23 say that this is LGBTQIA+ representation is fairly appealing, but not appealing enough for it to affect their purchasing decisions. As they respectively state, they have different reasons to why this representation does not influence their purchasing decisions:

*“Yes, I think so. The Levi’s campaign, for example, was brutal. It’s a shame I can’t afford Levi’s stuff. I wish brands that were more accessible to my wallet would also represent and be LGBT friendly.”*

*“Just because I see a NOS or a Vodafone ad that has representation doesn’t mean I’ll switch to one of those. You consume whatever suits you best. It’s all very good, but at the end of the month you want your television to work well and you want a good internet connection. I really don’t think it has an impact in terms of final consumption. I think it has a more educational role perhaps.”*

To some interviewees the appeal of the current LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising depends on several factors. For E1, this representation appeals to consumer when it’s done in a natural way, which then creates a point of connection with consumers:

*“In creative industries, I think it’s done in a much more natural, seamless way, and it invites consumers to feel more comfortable with the brand. It creates a certain connection with the brand and they’re much more comfortable going, for example, to a brand shop and knowing or having an a priori perception that they’re not going to be mistreated in that shop. When ads are done in that way, they can attract consumers and be a point to create a connection.”*

E8, E15 and E19 say it can be appealing to consumers if they feel that LGBTQIA+ representation and equality are part of the brands’ values and history. As E15 and E19 respectively state:

*“For example, in relation to Benetton, I would say yes, because: they already have genderless pieces or there isn't exactly pink for girls, the brand has this kind of concern, as I also see that the employees are of different colors, heights, body types... not only in LGBT representation, but I think Benetton is already concerned about representing different types of people, which really attracts me! So, it depends a bit on the history of the brand.”*

*“If brands had representing LGBT people as a value already, I think yes, not only would it really attract consumers, but then there would be customer loyalty.”*

For E14, this representation can be appealing depending on how it's done:

*“I think that when representation comes from a place of empowerment, yes, it attracts me. When it reinforces more standards, no, quite the opposite, it causes me repulsion.”*

Interviewee E22 emphasizes the importance of which media channels brands use in the appeal of this LGBTQIA+ representation:

*“People of my generation are not so much at the points where they try to attract... they're more on television, which is something my generation doesn't watch as much. But I think when they try, they manage to do it very well. I think they can really attract people on social media because it's a channel that the Community uses a lot.”*

Contrastingly, some interviewees feel that the current LGBTQIA+ representation does not appeal to consumers. E2 and E9 share that they do not feel a connection towards this representation, and so it does not appeal to them. As E9 shares:

*“I don't think so! For example, what I was talking about in June, all the brands decide to make a shift on Insta and Facebook... Me with my friends, we always make fun of that, and we never pay attention to it.”*

E11 and E13 say that the current LGBTQIA+ representation does not appeal to them, as it not inclusive nor it is designed for Queer consumers. As E11 states:

*“No, because the representation that exists is not for us! The representation that exists is for brands to guarantee that we are there to be represented and to show other people that these different profiles exist, but I don't remember any example in which this representation is specific or thought out for the LGBT community.”*

E17 and E24 do not think the current LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising is not appealing, as it is often stereotypical, and leads to further exclusion of the Queer Community, and not the other way around. As E17 shares:

*“Advertising with LGBT people doesn't appeal to me. Because I don't like to be represented as a court jester. Because it's not inclusion, it's exclusion! I want them to treat me like they treat everyone else. Of course, I'm glad brands want to try and represent, but they're still sort of dividing the straight cis world from the LGBT world.”*

Finally, E18 feels that this representation is very one-dimensional, and it does not fully appeal to consumers as brands do not use storytelling:

*“Basically, I don't think it really attracts. It doesn't make people loyal, so it's something very superficial. I think this issue of loyalty is very important and it happens through stories, it happens through storytelling, it happens through the ethics of the brand...”*

### 3.2.2. Brands’ “specific time of year” LGBTQIA+ inclusiveness

Nearly all interviewees say there is a specific time of year when brands are especially inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community, and that is during June, also known as Pride Month. As stated by E6:

*“For example, we get to June and all the brands suddenly have a rainbow in their logo. And, okay, it's really nice to walk down the street and see only rainbows everywhere, but at the end of the day, that's not worth much if the rest of the year we don't exist for them.”*

This support can come in many shapes and sizes, as interviewees express. E19 and E25 say that some brands donate money to LGBTQIA+ organizations and charities, as E25 states:

*“Some brands do donations through purchases for the company itself, such as “linked to every purchase x percent goes to” some organization.”*

E3, E11 and E20 say that other brands only temporarily change their logo and do a special post on social media platforms, as E3 shares:

*“What I notice the most is really a putting up flags on their logos and making more posts about it on Instagram.”*

E5 and E9 say that some brands explore LGBTQIA+ symbols in exclusive collections for Pride Month, as E9 states:

*“I think for the most part, companies just make something that has a rainbow on it, and they think that it sells by itself, just by having a rainbow.”*

E6 and E8 say that other brands are present in Pride marches or other queer events, as expressed by E6:

*“In pride parades you have several brands that go there to sponsor themselves. Another thing that came to my mind, for example, music festivals or queer music events that might happen are usually sponsored by brands.”*

E16 and E21 say that others have special segments on their social where they talk to LGBTQIA+ influencers or about LGBTQIA+ individuals who work for the brand. As E16 explains:

*“I think they always tend to, for example, have conversations with queer people, and how they are involved in the company.”*

There is not a consensual reaction to this type of support among LGBTQIA+ consumers. On one hand, E7 and E10 say this generates a positive reaction that usually ends up in consumption, but E1 and E3 add that this positive reaction is not as simple as it seems. As E1 clarifies:

*“I think the majority react in a positive way, since they are represented, but I think that over time, the fact that this representation is so segmented in such a specific period dedicated only to that month, leaves a sour taste with the community.”*

On the other hand, interviewees say that this may not generate a positive reaction, but rather a negative reaction from LGBTQIA+ consumers, as E19 states:

*“LGBT people are always on top of events. Not everyone is, but there are a lot of people who are and let others know on Twitter and then there's always a boycott.”*

E21 and E22 express their negative reactions by emphasizing the seasonality of this brand inclusiveness towards the Queer Community, as E21 cleverly states:

*“They can't expect a person to be clapping their hands all year round for one advertisement they did, can they?!”*

E11 says that the reaction may also be neutral, as LGBTQIA+ consumers are so used to this “specific time of year” inclusiveness from brands:

*“I think that we are already so used to being a topic in specific moments that we're a little bit disconnected, it's not even effective at the communication level. But there is also not that much expression again, both from the community itself and from brands, so that there is a big impact, be it positive or negative. I think it comes up in these campaigns and in these actions that are done, but it's all “low profile”.”*

And to many interviewees, namely E8, E9, E13, E14, E24 and E25, consumers' reactions depend on various factors, such as if they have been out for a specific amount of time or their personal involvement and critical skills. As E13 and E25 respectively share:

*"It depends, especially people who have just discovered themselves, and have just come out of the closet, they have more need to assert themselves and take these things and say "this is part of my identity" and end up buying more."*

*"Not everyone reacts in the same way, because within the Community itself there is a great diversity of ways of thinking and of dealing with certain situations and with the various issues that are challenged by the brand throughout the rest of the year."*

### 3.2.3. Brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness impact on customer loyalty

Some interviewees say that the brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness makes them more loyal towards that brand, as E4 shares:

*"I think that yes, I feel more loyal to a brand because it is LGBT friendly. Definitely."*

E1, E3 and E25 say that the brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness only impacts their customer loyalty if they can tell that it is genuine. As stated by E3:

*"Yes, I feel I'm more loyal in general, however I think it's very much related to the quality of that "LGBT friendly" thing. If it's a more genuine thing, I feel quite loyal."*

E5, and E14 feel that the brands' queer friendliness impacts their customer loyalty, but also because they stand up for other important values such as feminism, anti-racism and others. As E5 expresses:

*"I tend to be loyal to the brands that I like, either because they represent the ideals that I stand for, either because they are LGBT friendly, because they support people with disabilities or people with mental illness, very much on this issue of values..."*

E7 and E20 say that a brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness does have an impact on their customer loyalty, but exclusively when it comes from a small business or brand. As E20 shares:

*"I don't think it influences me that much when it's international brands. But when they are small businesses or when they are smaller brands, I think it makes a difference and I like to consume a brand that I know is LGBT friendly."*

Other interviewees say that brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness does not impact their loyalty as costumers. Some are loyal to a brand due to their price range or product characteristics, as E2 and E21 respectively state:

*"I think I'm more interested in the product itself or the features of the product or the brand."*

*"My friend does it cheaper. Of course, economic power speaks very loudly."*

E16 and E17 say that a brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness does not impact their loyalty whatsoever, as they are not loyal to any brand. As E16 explains:

*"No, I am only loyal to myself. Companies change, so I'm not loyal to a brand because behind the brand there are several people and people go around."*

E15 has a peculiar opinion, as they disclose that the brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness impacts their loyalty depending on the type of brand:

*"If I'm thinking about clothing brands, I would say that I don't feel more loyal because they're for being LGBT friendly. If I'm thinking, for example, about socializing spaces, a restaurant or a bar, at a public event, then yes, I will stay loyal to the brand or the space if I consider it LGBT friendly."*

When asked whether loyalty remains if the brand uses stereotypes for representing the LGBTQIA+ community, most interviewees say it does not. As E13 expresses:

*"If it uses stereotypes, the loyalty is not going to stay. From the moment they make that stereotypical representation, it doesn't make sense to me, and I have no problem abandoning the brand or any connection I have with it."*

Others say this customer loyalty relationship termination relies on the type of stereotype used, the intention behind this stereotypical representation, or even the context of the situation. As E4 and E14 respectively explain:

*"I think that it has a lot to do with the fact that if I feel that it is something that is very disrespectful, that is, if the stereotype is so big that it no longer represents the community, it is already out."*

*"If I really like the brand and they make an advertisement that reinforces stereotypes, I will first try not to judge and to understand how that advertisement came about. But it would make me question, depending on the stereotype... depending on the conclusions I could draw, I would remain loyal to the brand or not."*

However, some interviewees say this customer loyalty remains, even when the brands use stereotypes, as they feel that there is this lack of LGBTQIA+ representation, so they take what they can get. As E5 states:

*“Yes, no matter how much I don't want it to, it ends up happening, whether it's a question of habit or not. So, yes, even if I don't want those brands to perpetuate stereotypes, perhaps I end up contributing to that brand, because it gives representation to collectives that are not normally represented.”*

### 3.3. LGBTQIA+ CONSUMERS' OPINIONS ON BRANDS' LGBTQIA+ ACTIVISM AND "FRIENDLINESS"

#### 3.3.1. LGBTQIA+ advertising's influence on inclusion

Most interviewees say that LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising does, in fact, positively influence this community's inclusion, in various ways. Some interviewees say that this representation normalizes and gives visibility to the queer community, therefore positively impacting inclusion. As E4 and E10 respectively explain:

*"Representing the LGBT community, and that can be in advertising, as well in other issues, I think that's a form of inclusion. It's giving visibility, in a way that it's saying "these people exist and so let's take them into consideration in this world"."*

*"I think that when straight people see advertising that includes people of the same sex, that somehow gets into their head like "OK, this is normal". Even if the person doesn't have an opinion about it yet, that sooner or later... Advertising has a lot of influence, visual advertising, mainly, and I think it does influence the inclusion of the Community."*

Other interviewees state that representation influences the community's inclusion, as it breaks down stereotypes and reduces prejudice and stigma, as E6 expresses:

*“Definitely, because it ends up normalizing and making something that people see as “the other” and “the strange” as a more common thing. So, if a person is watching television, sees a commercial and that commercial shows people with different experiences, different sexualities or gender identities... I think that most discrimination comes from a basis of ignorance, so if people see this representation and queer people in a positive light, they end up maybe getting more information and realizing that they are “people just like us.”*

E5 shares their personal story to explain how LGBTQIA+ representation influences the community’s inclusion and acceptance in society:

*“I think so! And now I speak in my case... In my family, to explain to other members of the wider family, and even people who hadn't seen me for a few years, with that MEO Christmas advertisement, they said “Ah, you see how in the advertisement there was a woman who had been born a boy and was now a woman? Right, here at home, it's the opposite! A girl was born and now we have a man”.”*

Other interviewees emphasize the importance of Queer representation in this community’s inclusion, by referring that it validates individuals' experiences, as

E8 explains:

*“I think so, because advertising ends up validating that our experience exists and is real. In other words, from the moment that the LGBT community is included in advertising, we are saying that their experiences are valid and will be used as a means of advertising.”*

E22, E23 and E25 say that queer representation in advertising influences the community’s inclusion, especially when we are talking about older generations.

As E23 expresses:

*“I think so. I think it's really important for older age groups, which I assume consume the most television, because TV is one of the main channels for accessing information.”*

However, interviewees E1, E7 and E16 say that for this representation to positively influence the community's inclusion, it must not be done in an unnatural obligatory manner. As E1 states:

*"It shouldn't need to tick and say "ok, we have a gay couple that appears in the ad for 2 seconds", and it's more like, why can't the focus of the ad be the gay couple?"*

E3 adds that the representation queer individuals in advertising could further influence the community's inclusion with the use of storytelling, as this happens with other types of media:

*"I mean, it's easier for a person who has a negative opinion of the LGBT community to change their mind with a movie, or something like that, which is maybe more engaging than advertising. On the other hand, advertising is very much one of those things that gets repeated and normalized, it's very much in our everyday lives and it's cool for that aspect. I think it's just because there's more time to explore the characters. Imagine, in an ad you can still have a story and it's cool, and you can have a positive story, but the engagement with the characters is never as strong."*

### 3.3.2. Perceived reasons for brands' incorporation of social messages in their advertising

Most interviewees see two types of reasons for brands to include these social messages in their advertising. On one hand, they can partake in that role because they want to promote equality and inclusion, as E23 states:

*"I think that it may be to give visibility to the Community and to try to make society more inclusive and to not always look at things from a normative perspective. I think that is the main function."*

On the other hand, a big portion of interviewees are suspicious of brands and say that they incorporate social messages like these in their advertising solely for selfish reasons. Some say that brands feel a social pressure to be vocal, at least to a certain point, about social issues, in order to seem inclusive and to not stay being other brands, as E9, E11 and E25 respectively state:

*"I think it's a lot of social pressure, pressure from people towards brands, the expectation people have from brands, and I think it's also a bit for profit."*

*"On the one hand, it's taking advantage of the theme, which is super usual, brands do that with any theme. It is a question of generating content, of generating proximity, but also of positioning their brand and its communication and values as something inclusive, current, respectful. And, of course, and to not stay behind others that are already progressive in this sense."*

*"It's a bit of gay washing. It's something that's cool at the time, it's something that gets views, it's fashionable to support social causes, even if you don't actually support it, and you do absolutely nothing about it. But a post and an advertisement take relatively some work and give them a lot in points on social causes."*

Other interviewees say that brands incorporate social messages in their advertising for purely financial reasons, as E3 states:

*"I think it's all money-driven, it's all about profit in the end! It's like now that having LGBT representation in ads might give a little more positive connotation, it might generate profits, there's a little bit more. But if it wasn't for generating profits..."*

Nonetheless, the incorporation of this social messages is important as it brings visibility to the LGBTQIA+ community, and it makes queer consumers feel seen and heard. As E2, E5 and E6 respectively state:

*“LGBTQIA+ people have a very stigmatizing path in society, and by spreading messages about LGBTQIA+ equality they are also promoting in a certain way equal opportunities, peace, even if indirectly, inclusion.”*

*“They end up giving us visibility and bringing information to society in general and to people who maybe wouldn’t have access to it in another way.”*

*“I think it is extremely important, because when a consumer feels identified with the product, they end up feeling more comfortable and represented. And so, it's good for everyone, in fact, because the person feels seen and heard, and the brand ends up, perhaps not necessarily selling the product, but at least gaining a good impression on people.”*

### 3.3.3. Pinkwashing and possible effects

When asked if they think the practice of Pinkwashing exists, nearly all consumers say that it does, as brands try to be perceived as LGBTQIA+ inclusive and they are actually not. As E5 states:

*“I think that this practice exists. They look good in the photo, as they say, in June they put up a little flag and show they’re allies. And “we even donated flags or other material to an association so that they could participate in a march”. And then the rest of the year they don't care, or they donate money to anti-LGBT organizations.”*

Interviewees think companies partake in this sort of action in order to seem inclusive of the Queer community, and consequently profit from it, without actually putting in the hard work. As E1 and E14 respectively state:

*“And the reasons behind those tactics are the same reasons that are associated with all the other types of “washing”, which is they want to get the benefits of being associated with this community without having to make logistical and financial implications, and certain changes in the way they currently operate to really meet the goals of the community.”*

*“I think that brands want to show they are inclusive. Also, because they've realized that young people are much more aware, they're much more involved with causes, they feel represented by the LGBT community because they also belong a lot to the LGBT community. I think that this can be used as a form of strategy, without the brands really thinking and talking about the subject and understanding if that is in their values.”*

Interviewees mention that the practice of Pinkwashing may have various consequences, as that may compromise brand image and credibility, which can lead to a boycott. As E19 and E23 respectively share:

*“During those periods there are a lot of brands that lose a lot of followers. LGBT people are always on top of events. Not everyone is, but there are a lot of people who are and let others know on Twitter and then there's always a boycott.”*

*“If a scene like this is discovered, it's destroying the brand completely, it's calling into question the whole credibility of the brand.”*

However, E11 feels that, unfortunately, a brand might not be as negatively impacted as they should be in case of partaking in Pinkwashing:

*“I would like to say that the brand could have a very bad time with that, but it depends a lot on the brand, and it depends a lot on the power of the brand and its ability to turn the script around. The most real effect I can give you is that maybe the Community will never look at the brand in the same way again, and it will influence it in the long term.”*

### 3.3.4. Personal involvement's influence on LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions

Most of the interviewees feel like they are highly involved with the LGBTQIA+ cause, and that in fact influences how they perceive brand actions. E8 starts by saying that their personal involvement definitely influences their perception, as it is impossible to be unbiased when we are talking about such a personal issue:

*"Yes, of course it does. For one thing, I don't believe that there is impartiality, especially when we are talking about issues that you are passionate about, that are issues that touch your life. The fact that I never really felt represented, influenced the way I grew up, how I built an image of myself."*

E16 states that being personally involved within the community means getting to know people with different experiences than yours which absolutely influences their perception as an LGBTQIA+ consumer:

*"Yes, because we are not born taught, and the more we are involved in the queer world, the more we know about other people's experiences. I, for example, never had any doubts about my gender, but contacting and knowing the experiences of transgender people and people with gender identities different from mine, made me more aware of the difficulties that are important to them, and this will influence my reaction and my perception of brands' advertising."*

E13 says that not being represented enough influences their perceptions, as it makes them uninterested in the brand, and possibly resistant to buy:

*"Of course, it does. When the consumer ends up not feeling represented, ends up not having interest in the brand. If the person doesn't feel represented, they won't want to buy, they won't want to be interested in seeing and researching."*

E2, E3, E8, E9 and E25 say that their personal involvement with the LGBTQIA+ cause makes them more critical of brands' actions. As respectively stated by E2 and E25:

*"I would say, the more personal involvement with LGBTQIA+ causes, the greater the degree of thoroughness or attention to detail that person will get."*

*"Yes. I am a relatively involved person with the LGBTQIA+ cause, namely in the part of fighting for rights for the place in society of certain members who don't even feel represented yet. So, yes, it does influence my reaction/perception towards the actions of brands, I tend to judge everything I see from those brands, because I always try to see what is behind it and what is behind it all is almost always a financial interest."*

A few say that they are not really involved with the LGBTQIA+ cause. However, that lack of personal involvement also influences their perceptions as LGBTQIA+ consumers. E12 and E21 say that they are not involved with the LGBTQIA+ cause, and that influences their perception of brands' actions, as they see it as some sort of exclusion. As E21 states:

*"I think I'm not really involved with the cause. And maybe I also feel a little bit of guilt because I don't feel that I am doing what I should or could do to defend my rights, but I don't like to expose myself. I've had big arguments with people who I considered friends and who stopped being friends because of this. I guess that's kind of why I feel that advertising trying to include this is also excluding. They're really labelling us, and I don't like that feeling of labelling."*

E17 say they are not very involved with the Community because they suffered prejudice from other queer people, and that means they overlook brands' actions:

*"I'm not very involved with the LGBT community, because when I came out as trans, I suffered prejudice mostly from gays. It influences, because I won't connect to that."*

Additionally, E20 states they are not really involved with the Community and consequently often suspicious of brands' actions:

*"I don't think I'm a person who is very involved in the community, I don't show it much on social media and in public either. That really influences my reactions and what I think, the fact that I get skeptical about some things, some advertisements. I think I'm always a bit suspicious about these things, and as I'm not a person who shows it a lot, when brands make products aimed more at the community, I don't buy them, and I don't think it makes sense for me."*

### 3.3.5. "LGBTQIA+ friendly" brand actions

Interviewees say there are several things that brands can do in order to be more LGBTQIA+ friendly. Firstly, brands should be LGBTQIA+ friendly and represent this community all year long, as shared by E21:

*"Not doing it just that month or that specific date... they could start by integrating advertising."*

Brands should have a code of conduct, and sensibilization initiatives to make sure that the environment is safe for LGBTQIA+ employees and customers. As E8, E13 and E18 respectively state:

*"Internally, there should be awareness-raising campaigns about these issues, about learning how to deal with these things. If someone says to me "in this shop, all the people have had training regarding LGBT issues and how to approach the LGBT community", I will feel super safe going to that shop, and doing things with that brand. In other words, this is also really good for the LGBT consumer to feel safe."*

*"I think there should also be, for example, codes of conduct within the companies themselves. I think it doesn't matter if you say you are LGBT friendly, if you can't transpose this into your company. I think that there should be more information about LGBT causes."*

*"They should have a welcoming policy, because there are many stories, unfortunately, especially within the trans community, of harassment and this cannot happen in a company that has these social causes."*

Another important aspect is having LGBTQIA+ employees and decision-makers, as E6 and E7 respectively state:

*"Not excluding queer people just because they are queer, because, truth be told, it often ends up being a decisive factor. And I think that there should be this attention to have an inclusive team, also because an inclusive and diverse team will work better and more effectively, in my opinion, than a team where everything is "one and the same"."*

*"Having queer people in leadership positions within companies, especially within advertising companies, to have queer people working there and to have queer people making decisions and developing these projects"*

Additionally, brands should use inclusive language, have LGBTQIA+ inclusive products, and start to let go of heteronormative gender roles and binarism. As respectively mentioned by E14, E16 and E23:

*"If a brand that wants to be revolutionary, launching an all-unisex clothing and not having the gender division in the shops, because the clothes don't have gender. And on the menstrual part, I think not just use the word woman, because trans men also menstruate... why not say people with a uterus? Women will also identify with that."*

*"Yes, you just have to understand the brand's intention. If they have an inclusive language, I immediately realize that they are concerned with being inclusive for everybody."*

*"For example, at my job, you would enter a form and as I have a girl's name, then they would automatically choose a woman's t-shirt... Why can't I choose a man's t-shirt? I think internally it's really important to get that message across."*

Likewise, interviewees place major importance in brands supporting LGBTQIA+ NGOs and donating funds to those kinds of initiatives. As stated by E5 and E6, respectively:

*“Support associations and collectives that work with the LGBT community, promote some training actions, or even donate products in a way that is truly inclusive.”*

*“OPEN. YOUR. WALLET. You can perfectly well take a part of the profits you make. Make that effort to donate to charity and to create initiatives that support the Community.”*

Having said that, some E10 and E25 feel like brands should not have to mention they are LGBTQIA+ friendly, because they all should be like that already, as E10 expresses:

*“This is ridiculous to me, this expression, it shouldn't even exist. Because if I open a shop, I'm not going to say it is hetero friendly.”*

### 3.3.6. Brands' authentic LGBTQIA+ activism

Interviewees have a very nuanced definition of LGBTQIA+ authentic brand activism. First and foremost, interviewees say that it's important that brands are coherent, i.e., that the brands words match with it the brands actions. As E18 and E21, respectively, state:

*“Genuine is to be coherent, we are defending this, we are going to apply it and, therefore, this is mirrored in the internal organization of the company, in the sense of respecting sexuality, all expressions of gender, gender identity, etc.”*

*“They say they are LGBT friendly, and you know that if they effectively are.”*

E15 and E24 also point consistency as an essential part of that LGBTQIA+ authentic brand activism, as expressed by E15:

*“Genuine activism cannot be an isolated episode.”*

Interviewees also mention that being an authentic LGBTQIA+ activist brand is related to being overall inclusive and having this activism deeply rooted in the brands’ values, mission and vision. As E13, E14 and E19 respectively explain:

*“Activism for me is supporting everyone, even minorities within the Community. Not only supporting white people and supporting especially people whose gender identity does not correspond to the one they were assigned at birth.”*

*“I think it involves those values being defined, the brand mission being inclusive. And in that mission, they really have this activism component for the Community.”*

*“There you go, change starts from within. You can't speak without right.”*

E7 mentions that this activism should also focus on all employee's well-being and meeting their needs, especially because trans people are usually at the lowest corporate layers:

*“Is not to make their workers precarious, and allow the creation of unions, that is, it's once again to do the bare minimum for the workers. Trans people have been eaten by capitalism and live mostly in precarious conditions. And I think a brand that doesn't value and respect its workers, at its lowest layer of the pyramid, is not an activist, especially because there are queer people in that layer. I imagine that in some workplaces, within that lowest layer, queer people are the majority.”*

E20 emphasizes the importance of brands being LGBTQIA+ activists especially in countries where queer people’s lives are most vulnerable:

*“Even more so for countries where there is homophobia to the point where people are imprisoned and tortured. I think that especially in those countries, there needs to be even greater activism. I think that it also ends up influencing the population and the people who consume that brand. And change is made little by little, isn't it?”*

However, some interviewees feel like brands' LGBTQIA+ activism does not exist, because for them activism is more associated with individuals and not so much with corporations. As E25 and E16 respectively express:

*“What is genuine LGBTQIA+ activism by brands? Where does it hang out? I don't know! I haven't seen it yet.”*

*“Yeah, I think activism is associated with people. Companies for me can't be activist, they can represent and defend human rights. They can have the company's workers can be activists, they can be associated to the company, but the company is not activist, it's the people that make it up.”*

The interviewees that believe that LGBTQIA+ activism is something that does belong in a brand, say that this can influence consumers' perceptions. It can lead to better brand image, greater brand associations, which would positively reflect on the consumers' purchasing decisions. As E4 and E18 respectively state:

*“In addition to the visibility it will have, the fact that the brand says it is generous, and then it really, without expecting anything in return, I think consumers pay attention to that.!”*

*“I think that it can only have a positive influence, because if a brand has this kind of ethic, we buy it with pleasure.”*

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND FEELINGS TOWARDS LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING

The main finding of this research is that LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising is still very scarce, which had been previously stated by McDonald et al. (2020). This is especially true in the Portuguese context, where some interviewees even say it is inexistent. McDonald et al. (2020) had also mentioned that this is related to the lack of acceptance of Queer individuals in society, and that this population has long faced stigma, discrimination and distorted religious messages, which the current research supports. Additionally, it is found that the lack of LGBTQIA+ representation results from Portugal's connection with religion and traditionalism, and the fact that we live in a cis heteronormative society. Champlin and Li (2020) research showed that this representation had gay men as a focus, which remains true, but this research found that lesbians are also some of the most represented members of the community. Trans individuals, and all other identities apart from Gay and Lesbian, are still sub-represented, which is consistent with previous research (Dahl, 2021; Nölke, 2017). Most LGBTQIA+ consumers have positive feelings when seeing themselves represented in advertising, which subscribes findings from Li (2021) and Lindzey (1985), while some consumers have resentment about it, as they see disingenuous reasons behind it.

In the present research, it was confirmed that using a “one-size-fits-all” approach to LGBTQIA+ representation does not work, as established by Simpson (1996) as a way of suppressing the individuality of consumers. This is true for nearly all consumers, who feel like Queer individuals have different experiences and perspectives and therefore cannot be represented in one specific way, which is the stereotype of the cis gay white man. However, a few participants say that this approach works in a sense that it places of the Queer community as just another part of society, and simultaneously it is better than having no representation at all.

Moreover, it was confirmed that brands use specific symbols in order to reach LGBTQIA+ consumers, which may also be known as they gay-window approach, as mentioned by Sender (2003). The most common ones are the Pride flag and rainbows, yet brands can also use certain phrases and music, Queer well-known individuals, or even gender inclusive language, which confirms statements made by Puntoni et al. (2010) and Tsai (2011b). In addition to that, participants can also associate anti-racist messaging as a way of brands reaching to Queer consumers, as these issues are often linked to one another.

The present research confirmed the use of stereotypes when representing the LGBTQIA+ community, one of which is the “one-size-fits-all” identity of the cis gay white man, as stated by Simpson (1996). It also confirmed

Nölke's (2017) take on the "absolute invisibility of non-lean characters" (p. 244), and adding to that an invisibility of older and non-white Queer individuals. Gill (2009) also stated that lesbian representation was narrow and sexualized, and that this representation did not challenge heterosexual gender norms, which this research confirms. Adding to that is the hypersexualized representation of the LGBTQIA+ community, and also the heteronormative image of queerness in general. Research also identified the stereotype of the inversion of gender roles when representing gay and lesbian couples. Various consequences of using these stereotypes were also pinpointed.

Previous literature had stated that LGBTQIA+ consumers were associated with an "edgy" brand image (Mikkonen, 2010; Nölke, 2017; Tsai, 2011a), and results from the present research did not confirm nor deny this statement. For the most part, LGBTQIA+ representation is associated with beauty and fashion brands, yet some participants also mentioned sexual product brands, familiar brands and humane brands.

Research corroborates that LGBTQIA+ representation is done by portraying loving and committed gay or lesbian couples, as mentioned by Dahl (2021) and Nölke (2017). Most consumers see this as something positive, as it normalizes queer relationships, reduces stigma, inspires young queer individuals, and it is a way of LGBTQIA+ representation that does not resort to the use of stereotypes. However, as previously stated by Dahl (2021) and Bonello and Cross (2009), research confirms that this representation is used as

a point connection with cisgender heterosexual people, having a very narrow and non-intersectional view on what Queer couples are. Accordingly, research confirmed that this type of representation is linked to phrases like “Love is Love” and “Love Wins”, as said by Nölke (2017).

Current research confirmed that LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising is not inclusive, as it overlooks multiple marginalized groups and ethnic diversity, as previously stated by Nölke (2017) and Ginder and Byun (2015). Specifically, research found that current queer representation is not inclusive because it leaves out different types of queer individuals and couples, and only represents white cisgender gay people who are young and non-disabled.

Li (2021) had stated that brands increasingly use social media and partner with influencers to talk about LGBTQIA+ issues. The present study confirms this statement, but indicates that most consumers do not see influencer partnerships as a type of brand advertising. Consumers state more physical types of advertising, such as outdoors, as potentially LGBTQIA+ inclusive.

When discussing the use of influencers, Li (2021) stated that hiring influencers who identify as LGBTQIA+ would be ideal, but this study has found that brands should also partner with non-LGBTQIA+ vocal allies, which corroborates with Breves et al. (2019) and De Veirman et al. (2017) who emphasized the need for congruence and contextual seamlessness in influencer

advertising. Regarding the effects of this choice, the present research confirms that hiring queer influencers increases brand credibility, as Li (2021) had previously mentioned. Other positive consequences of choosing an appropriate influencer, whether they identify as LGBTQIA+ or not, are a deeper brand connection, a positive brand image, more brand awareness and also an optimized brand equity, which had been mentioned by Li (2021). Research also found that these types of partnerships are important as they can be a source of vital information to the consumer. Likewise, there are negative consequences for a poorly chosen influencer partnership, which research found can be more damaging to the influencer than to the brand itself.

## 4.2. CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS BRANDS THAT REPRESENT THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY IN THEIR ADVERTISING

Nölke (2017) questioned if current LGBTQIA+ imagery used in ads actually appeals to this group of consumers, and current research discovered that it does, at least to some degree, as they feel represented, which is rather unusual and creates a sense of attraction. This LGBTQIA+ representation appeal does not necessarily affect purchasing decisions. For some, it can be appealing when brands do it in a natural way, having LGBTQIA+ equality as a value, and using the proper media channels. However, a big portion of consumers are not attracted to LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, as they feel it is neither inclusive nor designed for queer consumers, and is often stereotypical.

Present research has validated Li's (2021) statement on brands being particularly inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community in June, also known as Pride Month. During this time, brands launch specific products and advertisements, using rainbows and equality themed-language, as mentioned by Champlin and Li (2020). Additionally, brands can also donate funds to LGBTQIA+ charities, be present in Pride Marches, or simply change their logo to a rainbow background. Reactions to these brands actions can be positive, yet many consumers see this as the "selling out" of the queer movement, as mentioned by Dahl (2021). This seasonality of inclusiveness may generate brand boycotts, for

example. Reactions may also depend on the consumer's involvement with the cause and their critical skills.

The present study diverges from Kates' (1999) and Tuten's (2005) perspective, as LGBTQIA+ friendliness does not necessarily positively impact queer consumers' brand loyalty. For most consumers, this affirmation is true only when they can tell that friendliness is genuine, or when it is paired with other important values such as anti-racism and feminism. Some consumers mention that this is true when it comes to smaller brands, as they believe it is truthful. Others say that the brands' LGBTQIA+ friendliness does not impact their brand loyalty whatsoever. Contrary to what was said by Tsai (2011a), most consumers do not remain loyal to a brand that uses stereotypes. However, research has found that some consumers may remain loyal to the brand, depending on the context and perceived intention of that stereotypical portrayal, or even because it is better than having no representation at all.

### 4.3. CONSUMERS' OPINIONS ON BRANDS' LGBTQIA+ ACTIVISM AND FRIENDLINESS

The present study supports Dahl's (2021) and Peñaloza's (1996) standpoint on the positive influence of LGBTQIA+ representation in this community's inclusion. Consumers see this representation as a way of giving visibility to the community, breaking down stereotypes and reducing stigma, especially around older generations. Nevertheless, this positive influence could be enhanced if done in an organic way, for instance making use of storytelling.

Chauhan and Shukla (2016) state that brands incorporate social messages into their advertising as a means of differentiation, which this study's results confirm, giving special importance to the financial gains of these kinds of initiatives. Furthermore, Zerfass et al. (2018) and Champlin & Li's (2020) statements are corroborated, as consumers feel that brands partake in these social initiatives because they are socially pressured to, in order to not fall behind others.

Research found that nearly all consumers think that the practice of Pinkwashing exists, as brands want to be perceived as LGBTQIA+ inclusive, and consequently profit from it, without being truthfully dedicated to this cause, as previously discussed by McDonald et al. (2020). Consequences of pinkwashing can be the compromising of brand image and credibility and an eventual brand

boycott, which aligns with statements made by Chen and Chang (2012), Lyon and Maxwell (2011) and Torchia et al. (2011).

This study also verified that each consumers' level of personal involvement with the LGBTQIA+ cause influences their perceptions on brand actions, as suggested by Patel et al. (2016). Some consumers say they are highly involved with the queer cause and that makes them more critical of brands' actions, and possibly resistant to buy. Others, who say they are less involved, are also influenced by being suspicious or disconnected with brands' LGBTQIA+ actions. A few consumers who are also not very much involved with the cause see LGBTQIA+ brand actions as a form of exclusion and labelling.

One of the main findings of this research was the extensive list of LGBTQIA+ friendly actions brands can partake in, the first being an all year long commitment to the community, as previously mentioned by Gudelunas (2010) and Tressoldi and Cardoso (2021). This study also validates Pinto et al.'s (2020) viewpoint that brands must engage in inclusive practices, both internally and externally. These practices range from employing LGBTQIA+ individuals and creating a safe space for queer employees and customers, to letting go of heteronormative gender roles and binarism in their products.

Finally, the present study also corroborated Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) perspective on authentic brand activism, where the brands marketing messages match their internal practices, as well as this being an essential part

of the brands' values, mission and vision. Additionally, consumers state that LGBTQIA+ brand activism should start from providing employees fair working conditions and pay, and emphasize that brands should especially be activists in countries where queer individuals are most discriminated against. In fact, authentic LGBTQIA+ brand activism may positively influence consumers' perceptions on brand image, even leading to higher purchase intentions. Having said that, many consumers view activism as something done by individuals, and not so much done by corporations, as the second always involves some sort of financial component.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins by delivering the final conclusions of the present study, in the form of objective answers to the proposed research objectives. Then, both the theoretical and practical contributions of the study are presented. Lastly, the study's limitations and possible paths for future research are introduced.

### 5.1. ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

#### 5.1.1. LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions and feelings towards LGBTQIA+ representation advertising

Throughout this research, it was clear that LGBTQIA+ consumers still do not see themselves represented in advertising, at least not in the ideal manner. Behind this lack of representation is the discrimination and stigma around the Queer community. Whenever they do see themselves represented in advertising, much like in other types of media, this provokes a sense of happiness and belonging. Additionally, consumers notice this representation mainly on fashion and beauty brands. The stereotypical "one-size-fits-all" portrayal of the white gay cisgender man does not work, and the use of other stereotypes is mostly harmful, as it invalidates individuals' experiences and perpetuates incorrect

ideas that may lead to further prejudice and stigma. Overall, representation is not inclusive, as the spotlight is mostly on gay and lesbian couples who are portrayed to be “just like us”, i.e., just like heteronormative couples. This neglects the existence of all other individuals that do not fit into this mold and it overlooks multiple marginalized groups inside the Queer Community. The commonly used method of influencer advertising is a great way for brands to approach the LGBTQIA+ community, yet most consumers don’t initially perceive it as a type of advertising. It was found that brands should partner both with LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ influencers, as these brand initiatives are seen as educational and inspirational. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the chosen influencers are vocal members or allies of the Community! Otherwise, this could lead to unfavorable consequences for the brand and the influencer.

### 5.1.2. LGBTQIA+ consumers’ behavior towards brands that represent the LGBTQIA+ community in their advertising

LGBTQIA+ consumers are somewhat attracted to brands’ LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising, however this does not necessarily affect their purchasing decisions. During Pride Month, brands are especially Queer inclusive, and they partake in all sorts of actions, ranging from launching exclusive collections to simply making a post on their social media platforms. Some Queer consumers have a positive reaction, while others notice this seasonality of

support and criticize the brand. Furthermore, LGBTQIA+ consumers are not inherently loyal to brands who are perceived as “LGBTQIA+ friendly”, as most of them value other brand attributes. When these so-called friendly brands represent the Community using stereotypes, LGBTQIA+ consumers tend to not remain loyal to them.

### 5.1.3. LGBTQIA+ consumers’ opinions on brands’ LGBTQIA+ activism and friendliness

LGBTQIA+ consumers see brands’ Queer representation as a means of making the Community visible and breaking down prejudice around it, especially when this is done in a natural way. Consumers think that brands make use of these social causes mostly for their own benefit, and in order to not stay behind other brands. This may lead to the unfortunately common practice of Pinkwashing, where companies want to be perceived as LGBTQIA+ inclusive just to make a profit from it. When noticed by consumers, this practice can seriously affect brand image and credibility. However, consumers’ opinions and perceptions on brands’ actions strongly depend on their personal involvement with the LGBTQIA+ cause. There are many actions a brand can engage in to be considered “LGBTQIA+ friendly”, such as having a long-term commitment to the cause, creating a safer space for their LGBTQIA+ employees and customers, and abandoning heteronormative gender roles and language in their products and practices. Finally, brands can be considered LGBTQIA+ activists, when their

words match their actions and they have LGBTQIA+ equality as a core value. This brand activism can be viewed as positive by consumers, but many see activism as something outside of a brands' role, due to the important financial component in any brand or company.

#### 5.1.4. How LGBTQIA+ consumers respond to brands' LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising

At this time, it is important to answer the main objective of this study, which is to "Explore how LGBTQIA+ consumers respond to brands' LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising". All things considered, LGBTQIA+ consumers still rarely see themselves represented in advertising, but when they do this provokes a sense of delight and belonging. Consumers feel that brands still portray the Queer community as the "one-size-fits-all" that is the gay cisgender white man, and that they neglect this group's diversity. Nonetheless, LGBTQIA+ consumers are somewhat attracted to brands that represent them, but this does not necessarily influence their purchasing decisions. Consumers also identify a seasonality of their representation in brands' advertising, happening mostly around Pride Month, which sometimes leads to a negative perception of the brand. Lastly, and more importantly than being represented in advertising, LGBTQIA+ consumers want brands to be inclusive and to match their communications to their practices, being truly LGBTQIA+ friendly.

## 5.2. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

As previously mentioned in the introduction, Shepherd et al. (2021) had stated that research was not fully representative of the LGBTQIA+ community, and to overcome that gap, the present study had a diverse sample of study participants. From 25 interviewees, there were one or more participants who identified with each letter of the acronym LGBTQIA+, except for the identity of Intersex. Regarding gender, 40% of participants were men, 44% were women and 16% were non-binary individuals.

Additionally, contributions were made in the LGBTQIA+ Consumer Behavior literature. Nölke (2017) had identified the need to investigate LGBTQIA+ consumers' attitudes towards the portrayals in advertising, and Li (2021) a need for research on the effect of consumer's personal involvement on LGBTQIA+ consumers' perceptions of this representation. Tsai (2011a) had stated that customer loyalty remains even when so-called LGBTQIA+ friendly brands use stereotypes. The present study found that not all LGBTQIA+ consumers react in a positive manner to being portrayed in brands' advertising, and that this portrayal might not influence their purchasing decisions. This is probably due to the way LGBTQIA+ consumers are represented in advertising, which is mostly non-inclusive and disregarding of the community's diversity in sexuality, gender, race and other characteristics. Furthermore, research found that LGBTQIA+ consumers' personal involvement with the cause definitely influences their perceptions regarding this representation, making them more

skeptical or critical of the brands' advertising and actions. Lastly, this study found that LGBTQIA+ consumers are not inherently loyal to LGBTQIA+ friendly brands, and that when these brands use stereotypes in their advertising, Queer consumers tend not to remain loyal to them.

Moreover, contributions were made in Influencer Advertising literature, namely using influencer partnerships to approach LGBTQIA+ consumers, as studied by Li (2021). Research found that most consumers don't initially perceive it as a type of advertising, and that brands should partner both with LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ influencers, contrary to what was stated in previous research. It was also detected that LGBTQIA+ consumers see influencer advertising as an important source of information and also inspiration.

Finally, contributions were made in Brand Activism literature. The present study added to Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) research on authentic brand activism, and found that consumers perceive brands' activism as authentic when their words match their actions, but also when they have LGBTQIA+ equality as core value. Research also found that many LGBTQIA+ consumers do not agree with the idea of LGBTQIA+ brand activism, as there is always a financial component in brands and their actions, and that activism is mostly associated with individuals and non-profit organizations.

### 5.3. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The main practical contribution of this study is related to the various actions brands can take in order to actually be LGBTQIA+ friendly, or to rightfully advocate for this community. Additionally, several recommendations are given to brands that want to be authentically Queer Friendly, as mentioned in the Findings chapter. Some of those recommendations are: using inclusive language, representing the LGBTQIA+ community all year long, and educating their staff on these important issues, in order to enhance the experiences of LGBTQIA+ customers and employees. Likewise, brands can find some examples of good and bad choices of influencers for LGBTQIA+ related partnerships, namely in the Portuguese market.

### 5.4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

As any piece of research, this study had some limitations. Firstly, the researcher is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, making her a possible subject of study, which may lead to a somewhat biased analysis. Secondly, interview participants' ages ranged from 17 to 31, which can be considered narrow.

Future research can be carried out by LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ researchers, in order to reduce bias in data analysis. It can also have a participant sample with a broader range of ages, to get further insights on LGBTQIA+

consumers' perceptions and opinions. Finally, this can be converted into a quantitative study, which can use a larger sample of participant and generate generalizable results.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1: Exploratory Questionnaire*

The following appendix will be written in Portuguese, as it was conducted in Portuguese.

#### Representatividade LGBTQIA+ na Publicidade

Olá! O meu nome é Rita Lopes e sou estudante do Mestrado Global em Marketing no IPAM Porto. No âmbito da minha tese de mestrado, que estuda a Representatividade LGBTQIA+ na Publicidade, gostaria que me ajudasse neste passo tão importante. Para isso, agradecia que preenchesse este breve questionário sobre o mesmo tema. Comunico também que toda a informação partilhada será utilizada de forma confidencial, no âmbito deste estudo. Obrigada, desde já, pela sua participação!

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Pertence à comunidade LGBTQIA+?

Sim

Não

#### Dados Pessoais

Com que "letra(s)" da comunidade LGBTQIA+ mais se identifica?

Lésbica

Gay

Bissexual

Transgénero

Queer

Intersexo

Assexual

Outra opção: \_\_\_\_\_

Qual o seu género?

Feminino

Masculino

Outra opção: \_\_\_\_\_

Qual a sua idade?

\_\_\_\_\_

Atualmente reside em Portugal?

Sim

Não

### Perguntas

Recorda-se de alguma publicidade que, na sua opinião, represente positivamente a comunidade LGBTQIA+? Se sim, qual/quais?

\_\_\_\_\_

Recorda-se de alguma publicidade que, na sua opinião, represente negativamente a comunidade LGBTQIA+? Se sim, qual/quais?

\_\_\_\_\_

Estaria disponível para partilhar as suas opiniões sobre a forma como a comunidade LGBTQIA+ é representada na publicidade numa breve entrevista? A sua partilha seria extremamente valiosa para este estudo! Se sim, agradeço antecipadamente a sua disponibilidade, e peço que partilhe o seu email para contacto em breve.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Muito obrigada pela sua participação!**

## **Appendix 2: Semi-structured Interview Guide Elaboration**

<b>Literature Review Information</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Analysis' Dimensions</b>
<p>“Individuals tend to respond positively to advertisements that not only reflect their distinctive traits – such as sexual orientation or gender identity – but also place them in unique market segments.”</p>	<p>1. How are and how do feel seeing your sexual orientation and/or gender identity represented in advertising? In your opinion, is there any social or historic reason behind that representation?</p>	<p>Li, 2021</p> <p>Lindzey, 1985</p>	<p>Current LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising and socio-historical reasons behind that</p>
<p>“In fact, lesbian representation in advertising is still very narrow and sexualized, and they are portrayed as hot “lipstick lesbians” that do not challenge heterosexual gender norms.”</p>		<p>Gill, 2009</p>	
<p>“Transgender individuals are barely represented in advertising, being that trans men are all caucasian and middle-class, and trans women are completely invisible – only drag queens are portrayed.”</p>		<p>Dahl, 2021</p> <p>Nölke, 2017</p>	
<p>“The idea of achieving equality through an emphasis on consumption derived from the path of other social movements that established the marketplace as an important domain of social contestation, where vulnerable groups would fight for social and political inclusion”</p>	<p>2. Do you think that LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising influences this community’s inclusion in society? Why?</p>	<p>Dahl, 2021</p> <p>Peñaloza, 1996</p>	<p>LGBTQIA+ advertising’s influence on inclusion</p>
<p>“Seeing that, nowadays, there are many brands selling similar products, advertisers also incorporate social messages regarding feminism, racism, and LGBTQIA+ equality into their advertisements, as a means of differentiation.”</p>	<p>3. In your opinion, why do brands incorporate social messages, such as LGBTQIA+ equality, in their advertising and what is the importance of doing so?</p>	<p>Chauhan &amp; Shukla, 2016</p>	<p>Perceived reasons for brands’ incorporation of social messages in their advertising</p>
<p>Advertising is considered the main marketing communication tool for building a brands’ positioning because, through the creative part of the advertisement, the consumers’</p>		<p>Krishnan, 1996</p>	

<p>attention is drawn and directed to the brands' positioning."</p>		<p>Lilien &amp; Rangaswamy, 2003</p> <p>Easingwood &amp; Mahajan, 1989</p>	
<p>"Strategic communication initiatives are crucial for the survival and continuous success of brands, as they can position themselves as "socially responsible" in order to engage and attract consumers."</p>		<p>Zerfass et al., 2018</p> <p>Champlin &amp; Li, 2020</p>	
<p>"Having a one-size-fits-all approach to LGBTQIA+ representation is not suitable, as it suppresses the individuality of consumers."</p>	<p>4. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is a single approach used for a group. In this case, a single way of representing and captivating LGBTQIA+ consumers in advertising. Do you think that using a "one-size-fits-all" approach works for LGBTQIA+ representation? Why?</p>	<p>Simpson, 1996</p>	<p>"One-size-fits-all" approach to LGBTQIA+ advertising</p>
<p>"To reach LGBTQIA+ consumers, brands often use the gay-window approach, namely in advertising, as a means of avoiding backlash and, at the same time, not alienating from "straight" consumers, i.e., non-LGBTQIA+ consumers. This technique involves using either obvious signals of "gay culture", such as rainbows, LGBTQIA+ symbols, and icons, or ambiguous images and text that may only be understood as "gay" by LGBTQIA+ consumers."</p>	<p>5. In your opinion, is there any symbol(s) that brands use to reach LGBTQIA+ consumers? If so, which one(s)?</p>	<p>Sender, 2003</p> <p>Puntoni et al., 2010</p> <p>Tsai, 2011b</p>	<p>Brands' LGBTQIA+ symbols</p>
<p>"Academics were already criticizing the use of a one-size-fits-all identity, mostly based on LGBTQIA+ stereotypes."</p>	<p>6. Do you think that brands represent LGBTQIA+ consumers</p>	<p>Simpson, 1996</p>	

<p>“The “absolute invisibility of non-lean characters” leads to the double marginalization of individuals - firstly because they are LGBTQIA+, and secondly because they cannot achieve those beauty standards.”</p>	<p>using any stereotype? If so, which one(s) and what consequences might they have?</p>	<p>Nölke, 2017</p>	<p>Brands' LGBTQIA+ stereotypes</p>
<p>“...being apprehensive about the overly sexualized representation, LGBTQIA+ consumers are concerned with being used to promote an “edgy” brand image.”</p>	<p>7. Do you think that LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising is associated with any type of brand?</p>	<p>Mikkonen, 2010 Nölke, 2017 Tsai, 2011a</p>	<p>LGBTQIA+ representation's association with a type of brand</p>
<p>“LGBTQIA+ representation is the portrayal of loving, committed, and presumably monogamous couples; both gay and lesbian characters in advertising fall into this type of representation.”</p>	<p>8. What do you think about brands that portray couples to represent the LGBTQIA+ community in advertising? Are there any phrases used by brands linked to this representation?</p>	<p>Dahl, 2021 Nölke, 2017</p>	<p>Brands' use of LGBTQIA+ couples and phrases</p>
<p>“This socially acceptable depiction of “gay” couples supports the idea that they are “just like us”, i.e., “just like heterosexual couples”.”</p>			
<p>Accordingly, slogans that emphasize the similarity between “gay” and “straight” couples are common - “Love is love” and “all families are wholesome” are reoccurring themes in LGBTQIA+ advertising.”</p>			
<p>“There is still an erasure of multiple marginalized groups, and a scarcity of ethnic diversity.”</p>	<p>9. Do you consider LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising inclusive? Do you recognize any flaws or patterns in this representation?</p>	<p>Nölke, 2017 Ginder &amp; Byun, 2015</p>	<p>Inclusiveness of brands' LGBTQIA+ representation</p>
<p>“... analysis indicated a lack of diversity of LGBTQIA+ individuals in advertising, and so that inadequacy “raises the question of whether LGBTQIA+ imagery used currently in ads really appeals to the LGBTQIA+ community””</p>	<p>10. Do you think the current LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising really appeals to LGBTQIA+ consumers? Why do you think so?</p>	<p>Nölke, 2017</p>	<p>Appeal of brands' LGBTQIA+ advertising</p>

<p>“As a way of positioning themselves towards LGBTQIA+ issues, employing LGBTQIA+ related cause marketing, brands are increasingly using social media platforms like Instagram and partnering with influencers.”</p>	<p>11. Besides normal advertising (e.g., TV ads), are there any other forms of LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising used by brands? If so, which ones?</p>	<p>Li, 2021</p>	<p>Other forms of LGBTQIA+ inclusive advertising</p>
<p>“... need for congruence between the brand and the influencer, as well as the contextual seamlessness of regular advertising.”</p>	<p>12. Do you think that brands should only hire LGBTQIA+ influencers for this kind of partnership, or is it indifferent and for you there are other characteristics of the influencer that are more important? What are the effects of this choice for the brand, for the consumer, and for the influencer?</p>	<p>Breves et al., 2019</p> <p>De Veirman et al., 2017</p>	<p>Use of influencers for LGBTQIA+ inclusive brand partnerships</p>
<p>“Choosing an appropriate influencer might be beneficial to the brand as it effectively targets the proper audience, through the influencer’s WOM to their followers; as well as transfers the influencer’s worth to the brand, optimizing brand equity.</p>		<p>Li, 2021</p>	
<p>“Hiring influencers who identify as LGBTQIA+ for a brand positioning is considered to be a win-win situation for the influencer, due to the increased perceived credibility, and most importantly, to the brand, as it benefits from decreased perceived hypocrisy. For LGBTQIA+ consumers, brands’ support of LGBTQIA+ issues, through the use of advertising, might mitigate their concerns and motivate them to scrutinize the brand less.”</p>			
<p>“While some companies are truthfully dedicated to the LGBTQIA+ community, others are most likely captivated by this segment’s purchasing power.”</p>	<p>13. The term “pinkwashing” refers to brands using the LGBTQIA+ cause and symbols as a way to increase their sales, without actually supporting this community. Do you</p>	<p>McDonald et al., 2020</p>	
<p>“Failed initiatives of diversity, such as pinkwashing, might display stereotyping and a poor understanding of marginalized groups, further contributing to the</p>		<p>King et al., 2009</p>	

<p>oppression and inequality of these groups.”</p>	<p>feel that this practice of "pinkwashing" exists? If so, what are the reasons behind it?</p>		<p>Pinkwashing and possible effects</p>
<p>“In addition, these types of initiatives may evoke not only negative word of mouth, but also poor brand perception and attitude, and decreased purchase intentions.”</p>	<p>Do you recognize any effects or consequences of this type of action?</p>	<p>Chen &amp; Chang, 2012  Lyon &amp; Maxwell, 2011  Torchia et al., 2011</p>	
<p>“Brands are particularly criticized during June, i.e. LGBTQIA+ Pride Month, as Pride collections can be considered exploitative of this cause branded products and advertisements showing support have also become common. Pride collection items often use elements like rainbow imagery and equality-themed language.”</p>	<p>14. Is there a time of year when brands are especially inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community and how is this inclusiveness demonstrated (e.g., advertising, products, etc.)? What are the reactions of LGBTQIA+ consumers to such inclusiveness of brands? Do they all react in the same way?</p>	<p>Li, 2021  Champlin &amp; Li, 2020</p>	
<p>“Most brands, only introduce periodical Pride collections during Pride Month it is seen as something positive, as past research has stressed the symbolic meaning of representation for LGBTQIA+ individuals, which is, for instance, feeling included and considered.”</p>		<p>Li, 2021  Dahl, 2021  Kates, 1999  Mikkonen, 2010  Nölke, 2017  Tsai, 2011a  Um, 2012  Um et al., 2013</p>	<p>Brands’ “specific time of year” LGBTQIA+ inclusiveness</p>
<p>“Alternatively, it can be perceived as the “selling out” of the LGBTQIA+ movement, up to a point where the term Pink Money is used to describe LGBTQIA+ consumers’ money.”</p>		<p>Dahl, 2021  Nunan, 2003</p>	

<p>“Nonetheless, the individual consumer’s level of personal involvement with the social cause might interfere with the effects of influencer credibility, brand hypocrisy, and brand motive.”</p>	<p>15. Do you think that your level of personal involvement with the LGBTQIA+ cause influences your reaction/perception towards brands' actions (e.g., partnerships with influencers)?</p>	<p>Patel et al., 2016</p>	<p>Personal involvement’s influence on LGBTQIA+ consumers’ perceptions</p>
<p>“Approaching the LGBTQIA+ ‘Dream Market’, requires a commitment that goes beyond simply running ads. This audience expects sponsorships, as well as a brand’s long-term pledge to equality and advocacy for this community.”</p>	<p>16. Is there anything brands can do besides advertising that translates that they are "LGBTQIA+ friendly"? If so, what?</p>	<p>Gudelunas, 2010  Tressoldi &amp; Cardoso, 2021</p>	<p>“LGBTQIA+ friendly” brand actions</p>
<p>“LGBTQIA+ friendly brand must also devote time and effort towards this cause, and engage in inclusive practices, both internally and externally, as these are customers who are mindful of the balance between speech and practice.”</p>		<p>Pinto et al., 2020</p>	
<p>“In essence, authentic brand activism depends not just on the alignment of practice and marketing messages, but also on their match with the brands’ purpose and values. Thus, when this is achieved, consumers are more likely to perceive the brands’ sociopolitical positioning as relevant, truthful, and dependable.”</p>	<p>17. For you, what is genuine LGBTQIA+ activism by brands? How might such activism influence consumers' perceptions of the brand?</p>	<p>Vredenburg et al., 2020</p>	<p>Brands’ authentic LGBTQIA+ activism</p>
<p>“They tend to crave the feeling of social acceptance in marketing communications, rewarding</p>	<p>18. Do you feel more loyal to a brand because it is</p>	<p>Kates, 1999  Tuten, 2005</p>	

companies with fervent brand loyalty.”	"LGBTQIA+ friendly"? If so, does this loyalty		
“This loyalty persists even if portrayals are perceived as highly stereotypical and the message is considered commercialized.”	remain even when there is use of stereotypes in advertising, for example?	Tsai, 2011a	Brands’ LGBTQIA+ friendliness impact on customer loyalty