Research Article

The Coming Out of Advertising: Bulakeño Millennials' and Generation Z Responses to Homosexual-Themed Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Homosexual imagery in advertising has increased in recent years, reflecting greater inclusivity and diversity in marketing. Even though such campaigns gained global attention, reactions differed across cultural contexts. This study explored Filipino consumers' tolerance of homosexuality and its impact on responses to homosexual-themed advertising and brand attitude. It also examined how developmental factors, traditional culture, and generational differences influenced homosexual tolerance. Through a quantitative approach, data from 403 participants were gathered via an online survey. The researchers analyzed variable correlations using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results revealed that a higher tolerance of homosexuality correlated with a more positive attitude toward such advertisements and brands. Furthermore, developmental factors and generational differences positively influenced homosexual tolerance, whereas traditional culture had a negative impact. Understanding these factors provided insights for advertisers and marketers on inclusive campaigns that resonated with diverse audiences and laid a foundation for future research.

Keywords: *Homosexual-Themed Advertising, Generational Differences, PLS-SEM*

Introduction

Reflecting a broader shift in media representation, advertisements featuring homosexual imagery had become increasingly common. Homosexual-themed advertisements is a form of marketing that showcases people from diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual communities (LGBTQIA+). As consumers emphasized more inclusivity, brands responded by creating campaigns that appealed to LGBTQIA+ audiences, which accounted for over 8% of the global population (Jackson, 2021). A report by Nielsen

(2021) found that during the 2021 Pride Month, more than 50 brands aired television commercials featuring LGBTQIA+ themes, resulting in a higher brand recall (62%) compared to generic ads (58%). The consumer purchase intent for LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements also reached 17%, with a willingness to recommend them at 16%—slightly higher than the 13% and 10% recorded for non-LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements. Additionally, a survey by GLAAD (2023) revealed that most heterosexual American consumers expressed comfort with advertisements featuring homosexual individuals, indicating a growing acceptance of LGBTQIA+ representation in mainstream media.

Even though LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising has gained momentum over the years, consumers' tolerance of homosexuality often depends on their cultural backgrounds and personal beliefs. People with greater tolerance of homosexuality tended to view LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements more favorably, leading to a stronger connection with the brands behind them. According to Fried and Opree (2023), representation needed to feel natural—authentic portrayals resonated more with audiences while forcing inclusivity for the sake of marketing often backfired. Several factors influenced how these advertisements were received, including cultural norms (Um & Kim, 2019), gender (Hoffmann et al., 2021), and psychological traits (Read et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies suggested that women were generally more accepting of LGBTQIA+ representation, particularly in ads featuring lesbian imagery (Herget & Bötzl, 2021; Um & Kim, 2019). Significantly, a positive attitude toward LGBTQIA+ advertisements enhanced brand perception (Cheah et al., 2020), while factors like personal identity, representation style, and skepticism also shaped consumer responses (Hazzouri et al., 2019; Champlin & Li, 2020). To be effective, brands needed to approach inclusivity thoughtfully, ensuring that representation fostered connection rather than division (Gong, 2019).

Consequently, tolerance of homosexuality was heavily influenced by a combination of developmental factors, traditional cultural values, and generational differences. Several studies noted that regions with higher education levels and economic development tended to hold more inclusive views toward LGBTQIA+ individuals due to reduced homophobia (Badgett et al., 2018; Lee, 2021; Navarro et al., 2019). Liberal societies, where postmaterialism was more common, also showed greater acceptance of homosexuality (Navarro et al., 2019). On the other hand, traditional cultural values, such as religious beliefs, often fostered resistance to such changes. People with firm religious commitments were more likely to hold opposing views on homosexuality (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019; Yeck & Anderson, 2018). Political views and gender also played a critical role, with more conservative groups typically showing more vigorous opposition (Georgiou et al., 2018). Generational differences mattered as well—young people were generally more accepting of LGBTQIA+ individuals than older generations. Multiple studies showed that younger nurses, students, and teachers tended to have more positive attitudes, while older, less educated groups were more resistant (Lin et al., 2021; Rollè et al., 2021; Hall & Rodgers, 2018). While there were some mixed findings, younger generations were leading the way in embracing sexual diversity.

However, attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising vary across countries. Although there had been increased visibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the media, discrimination, and violence against community members persisted. In the Philippines, where the majority of the population was Catholics, LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising had been met with mixed reactions, often sparking controversy and curiosity. A study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (2024) ranked the Philippines 36th out of 175 countries in LGBTQIA+ acceptance. Despite this, reports showed that Filipino members of the LGBTQIA+ community still faced discrimination and harassment in their daily lives (Hernaez, 2024). Some individuals even perceived LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements as inappropriate, misaligned, or offensive to traditional gender roles and conservative values, occasionally leading to consumer backlash or boycotts. In response, achieving gender equality (Goal 5) had become one of the aims of the

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues.

Building on the work of Polkinghorne et al. (2022), this study explored how tolerance of homosexuality shaped consumer attitudes toward the use of homosexual imagery in brands and advertisements within the Philippine context. This study examined whether these attitudes reflected broader societal acceptance by applying social identity theory (SIT) and cultivation theory. SIT, introduced by Tajfel and Turner (1986), explained that people naturally identified with social groups, directly shaping how they perceived and responded to others. In the context of advertising, this meant that LGBTQIA+ consumers were more likely to feel a connection with brands that represented them because it reinforced their sense of belonging. Meanwhile, cultivation theory suggested that the more people were exposed to media, the more it shaped their perceptions of reality (Gerbner, 1969). Likewise, as LGBTQIA+ representation became more prevalent in advertising, it influenced how people accepted and perceived the community over time. Gillig et al. (2018) found that LGBTQIA+ media representation also created awareness and shifted attitudes among those with limited exposure to LGBTQIA+ issues.

By looking at these perspectives, this study aligned with Goal 5 (Gender Equality) of the UN SDGs by exploring whether advertising promoted LGBTQIA+ acceptance in Philippine society. Ultimately, the findings of this study contributed to a broader discourse on social acceptance and inclusivity, highlighting the role of advertising in fostering understanding and representation.

Methods

To accurately gather and analyze data, the researchers employed a quantitative research method, precisely a descriptive approach. This design allowed the researchers to observe and describe individuals, events, or conditions as they naturally occurred without manipulating variables (Siedlecki, 2019). The study examined how homosexual-themed advertisements influenced consumer attitudes while also capturing the demographic profile of respondents.

The researchers employed purposive and snowball sampling to recruit Millennial and Generation Z consumers from Bulacan. Purposive sampling ensured alignment with the study's inclusion criteria, while snowball sampling facilitated wider reach through participant referrals. However, the potential for referral bias is acknowledged, as participants may have recruited individuals with similar backgrounds or views, which could affect the diversity of the sample. Data were collected via an online Google Forms survey. The 30-item questionnaire—adapted from previously validated instruments—covered topics such as tolerance of homosexuality, developmental factors, traditional culture, and generational differences. With this, care was taken to ensure the questionnaire's contextual relevance through careful review of item content and alignment with local sociocultural norms.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to ensure reliability, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This allowed respondents to express their opinions clearly. The survey items were primarily adapted from Polkinghorne et al. (2022) and other related studies. Reliability measures included Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, which exceeded the standard thresholds ($\alpha > 0.7$; CR = 0.807 to 0.940), confirming the instrument's internal consistency.

For data analysis, the researchers applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine correlations between observable variables—such as traditional culture, developmental factors, and generational differences—and latent variables like advertisement attitude, brand perception, and tolerance of homosexuality. Statistical computations were performed using R, a software for statistical analysis.
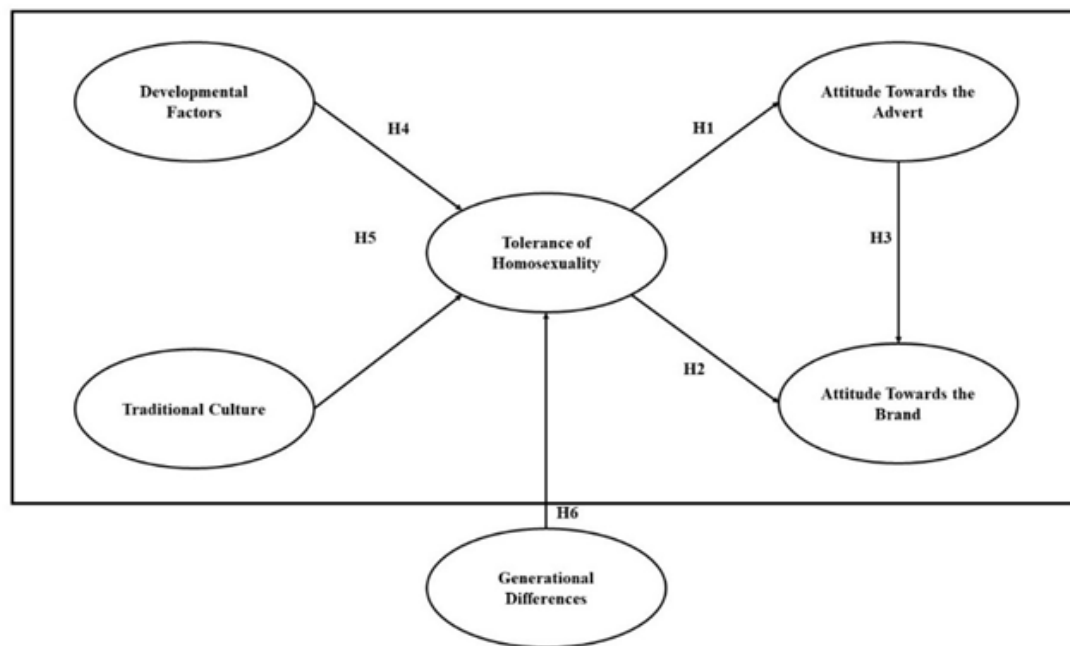
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework adopted from Polkinghorne et al. (2022).

Results

Table 1. Gender Profile of the Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	252	62.53
Male	102	25.31
LGBTQIA+	37	9.18
Prefer not to say	12	2.98
Total	**403**	**100**

Table 1 presents a detailed breakdown of the gender profile distribution of the respondents. Among the 403 participants, 62.53% (252) identified as female, constituting the largest group. Male respondents accounted for 25.31% (102), while 9.18% (37) identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, 2.98% (12) of participants preferred not to disclose their gender identity.

Table 2. Age Group Distribution of the Respondents.

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Millennials	59	14.64
Generation Z	344	85.36
Total	**403**	**100**

Table 2 presents the age group distribution of the respondents, where 85.36% (344) were from Generation Z, representing the majority of the sample. Meanwhile, millennials comprised 14.64% (59) of the participants.

Table 3. Measures of Fit for the Model of Bulakeño Millennials and Generation Z Responses to Homosexual-Themed Advertisements.

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Actual Model Value	Model Fit
χ^2/df (User vs. saturated model)	< 2.0	3.654	Bad fit
CFI	> 0.95	0.855	Acceptable fit
TLI	> 0.95	0.828	Acceptable fit
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.080	Acceptable fit
SRMR	< 0.05	0.095	Bad fit

Table 3 presents the model fit indices for the modified model of Bulakeño millennials and Generation Z responses to homosexual-themed advertisements. The computed fit indices ranged from poor to acceptable. To determine why the model had a borderline acceptable fit, the researcher examined the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 4. Convergent Validity of the Measurement Model of Bulakeño Millennials and Generation Z Responses to Homosexual-Themed Advertisements.

Variable	AVE	Remark
Developmental Factors	0.153	Questionable
Traditional Culture	0.261	Questionable
Tolerance on Homosexuality	0.523	Acceptable
Attitudes toward the Adverts	0.534	Acceptable
Attitudes toward the Brand	0.558	Acceptable

Based on Table 4, the average variance extracted (AVE) for developmental factors and traditional culture was below the threshold value of 0.5, indicating that the latent variable explained less than 50% of the total variation in this scale.

Some items had low factor loadings, contributing to the model's borderline acceptable fit. Specifically, TH2, TH3, TH4, and TH5 under the tolerance of homosexuality; AA1, AA2, AA3, and AA5 under attitudes toward the advertisements; and AB1, AB2, and AB4 under attitudes toward the brand were removed as their outer loadings were below the 0.5 threshold.

Moreover, upon further examination, the low AVE values for Developmental Factors (0.153) and Traditional Culture (0.261) indicated weak convergent validity, as they fell below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50. This suggests that less than half of the variance in the indicators was explained by their respective constructs. To improve the model, the researchers removed several items with weak factor loadings, which helped strengthen the structure and slightly improved the overall model fit. The model presented below reflects this refined version. Even so, the AVE scores for these two constructs remained below the ideal threshold. Despite this, they were kept in the final model because they played an important theoretical role and had statistically significant relationships with the Tolerance of Homosexuality. Specifically, Developmental Factors had a positive influence (β = 0.538, p < .001), while Traditional Culture had a negative effect (β = -0.309, p < .001). Keeping these constructs, even with their limitations, allowed the model to better reflect meaningful real-world patterns in the data.
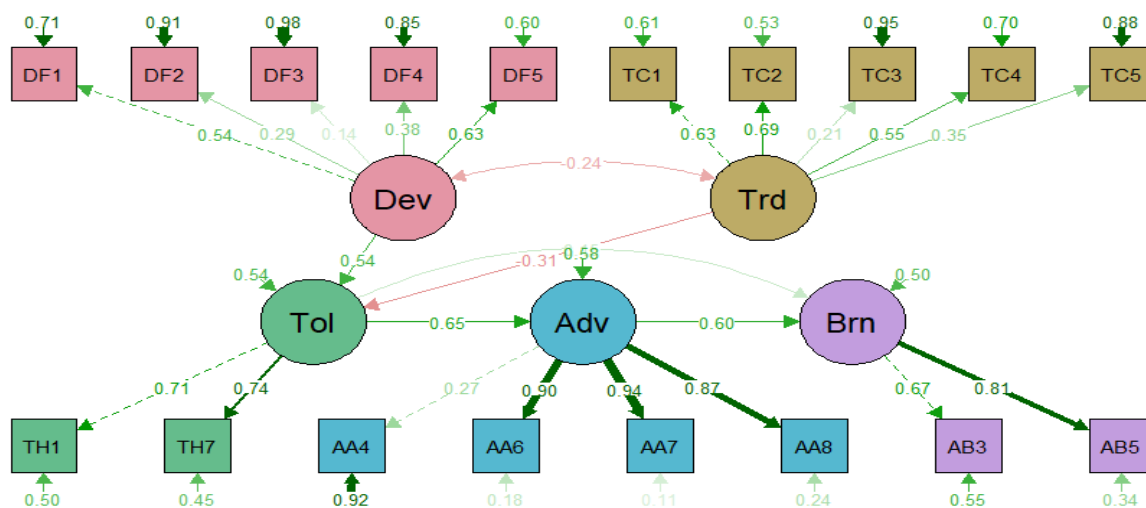
Figure 2. Path Diagram with Estimated Standardized Path Coefficients of the Adjusted Model for Bulakeño Millennials and Generation Z Responses to Homosexual-Themed Advertisements.

Another essential aspect examined was the significance of the path coefficients defined in the proposed model. If many exogenous factors (independent variables) had no significant effect on the outcome variables, the overall model fit may have been compromised. Figure 2 presents the path diagram, illustrating the relationships between the variables in the model. The estimated standardized path coefficients were also included. Thick, dark green arrows represented significant positive effects, while red arrows indicated negative effects. Dotted arrows denoted fixed parameters.

Additionally, Figure 2 showed that the estimated factor loadings were significantly different from zero (0), indicating that the latent variables were effectively represented by the indicator variables used in the questionnaire. This confirmed that the questionnaire measured the intended constructs. Furthermore, the findings suggested that the identified attributes had a considerable influence on tolerance toward homosexuality, which was discussed in detail later. Similarly, tolerance toward homosexuality significantly impacted attitudes toward advertisements, which, in turn, strongly correlated with brand perceptions.

Table 5. Estimated Path Coefficients of the Model for Bulakeño Millennials and Generation Z Responses to Homosexual-Themed Advertisements

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	Standardized Coefficient	z-value	p-value	Remarks
H1	TH → AA	0.293	0.647	4.868	<.001***	Supported
H2	TH → AB	0.150	0.153	1.873	0.061^	Not Supported
H3	AA → AB	1.290	0.597	4.410	<.001***	Supported
H4	DF → TH	0.631	0.538	5.514	<.001***	Supported
H5	TC → TH	-0.274	-0.309	-4.182	<.001***	Supported

*^ p<.1, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001*

Based on Table 5, tolerance of homosexuality had a significantly positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward homosexual-themed advertisements (β z = 0.647, p < .001). On the other hand, the results revealed that there was

no strong statistical significance between tolerance of homosexuality and consumers' attitudes toward the brand (β z = 0.153, p = 0.061).

Meanwhile, the findings indicated that attitudes toward homosexual-themed

advertisements had a significantly positive effect on attitudes toward the brand (β z = 0.597, p < .001). Moreover, developmental factors had a significant positive effect (β z = 0.538, p < .001), while traditional culture had a significant negative impact (β z = −0.309, p < .001) on tolerance of homosexuality.

Table 6. *Differences in the Tolerance for Homosexuality Between Generation Z and Millennial Bulakeños.*

Hypothesis	Median Tolerance Level for Millennial	Median Tolerance Level for Generation Z	W	p-value	Remarks
H6	4.00	4.43	8690	0.076^	Not Supported

The table above displays the perceived tolerance of homosexuality between Generation Z and Millennial Bulakeños. Using the Mann-Whitney test, the data indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the tolerance of homosexuality between Millennials and Generation Z (W = 8690, p = 0.076).

Discussion

Tolerance of Homosexuality and Consumer Attitudes Toward Homosexual-Themed Advertisements and Brands

The study found that tolerance of homosexuality (TH) among Millennial and Generation Z Bulakeños significantly correlated with their attitudes toward homosexual-themed advertisements (AA), supporting H1. This finding corroborated previous studies indicating that individuals who are more accepting of homosexuality generally respond positively to advertisements with homosexual themes (Hoffmann et al., 2021; Frankel & Ha, 2020; Polkinghorne et al., 2022). These results suggest that inclusive advertising may become more effective in shaping consumer perceptions of brands as societal acceptance grows. Notably, several studies found that some consumers preferred advertisements featuring mixed sexual orientations rather than exclusively homosexual-themed content (Fried & Opree, 2023; Gong, 2019). Specifically, members of the LGBTQIA+ community preferred to be targeted by mixed advertisements rather than exclusively homosexual ones, as they wanted to be represented as an integral part of a society where diverse genders and sexual orientations coexist. This highlights the importance of authentic and inclusive advertising strategies over forced representation.

However, tolerance of homosexuality (TH) did not have a statistically significant effect on attitudes toward brands (AB) featuring homosexual-themed advertisements, rejecting H2. Although Greenland et al. (2016) noted that a non-significant result does not necessarily indicate the absence of a relationship, in this study, the analyzed data were not strong enough to confirm a correlation—potentially due to sample size limitations or measurement constraints. In contrast, the studies of Frankel and Ha (2020) and Polkinghorne et al. (2022) suggested that consumer perceptions of brands are influenced by their level of tolerance toward homosexuality. Additionally, Um and Kim (2019) found that advertisements featuring lesbian imagery were received more positively than those depicting gay individuals. While this study did not establish a significant link between tolerance and brand attitudes, brands may still benefit from the growing acceptance of homosexuality among Filipinos.

Moreover, the findings revealed that positive attitudes toward homosexual-themed advertisements (AA) significantly influenced brand attitudes (AB), thus supporting H3. This indicated that consumers who responded favorably to LGBTQ+-inclusive ads were more likely to view the associated brands positively. These findings aligned with related studies emphasizing that a favorable response to advertisements can result in a positive attitude toward the brand (Cheah et al., 2020; Champlin & Li, 2020; Gaber et al., 2019). Similarly, a study by Hazzouri et al. (2019) showed that advertisements featuring mixed-sex couples led to lower levels of reported disgust, thereby influencing attitudes toward both the advertisement and the brand. Overall, these findings

suggest that marketers and brands should recognize the importance of inclusive messaging in advertising and its potential to impact brand perception positively.

Factors Affecting Tolerance of Homosexuality

The study found a significant positive relationship between developmental factors (DF) and tolerance of homosexuality (TH), supporting H4. This finding suggests that societal progress fosters inclusivity by promoting open-mindedness and reducing prejudice. Prior studies have linked economic growth, education, and post-materialist values to greater tolerance, emphasizing how structural advancements play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes (Badgett et al., 2018; Navarro et al., 2019; Lee, 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Oyarce-Vildósola et al., 2022).

Conversely, adherence to traditional culture (TC) was found to have a significant negative impact on tolerance of homosexuality (TH), supporting H5. This indicates that cultural conservatism remains a key barrier, as deeply ingrained beliefs and social norms discourage the acceptance of individuals from diverse sexual orientations. This finding aligns with previous studies demonstrating how faith-based values shape personal beliefs that reject homosexuality (Rich & Eliassen, 2020; Georgiou et al., 2018; Janssen & Scheepers, 2018; Yeck & Anderson, 2018). Additionally, Georgiou et al. (2018) identified religiosity as a strong predictor of homophobia, underscoring the enduring influence of religious institutions on individual perspectives.

Finally, the study found no significant relationship between generational difference (GD) and tolerance of homosexuality (TH), rejecting H6. This suggests that Millennials and Generation Z exhibit similar attitudes, indicating that generational affiliation alone is not a decisive factor in shaping acceptance levels. This finding aligns with Lin et al. (2021), who argued that education, globalization, and social media exposure contribute to different generational perspectives. However, Greenland et al. (2016) noted that sample size disparities may have influenced these results. In contrast, studies by Lin et al. (2021) and Rollè et al. (2021) reported

that older generations tend to demonstrate lower tolerance levels.

In addition to these findings, it's important to mention that although the AVE values for Developmental Factors and Traditional Culture remained below the recommended 0.50 threshold, the researchers decided to keep both constructs in the model. This decision was based on their strong theoretical importance and statistically significant influence on the outcome variables. Keeping them aligns with accepted practices in SEM research, where constructs can still be retained if they show meaningful predictive value and have reliable indicator loadings. Including them helped ensure that the model remained conceptually sound, even with some measurement limitations.

Conclusion

As advertising continues to evolve alongside shifting social norms, including LGBTQIA+ representation, it has gained academic and commercial significance. This study examined the relationship between tolerance of homosexuality and consumer attitudes toward LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements and brands. The findings revealed a positive correlation between tolerance of homosexuality and acceptance of LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements, affirming that as society becomes more inclusive, the effectiveness of such marketing efforts also increases. However, while tolerance of homosexuality was expected to influence consumers' attitudes toward brands featuring LGBTQIA+ themes strongly, the correlation was not statistically significant. Despite this, previous research suggests that brands embracing inclusivity foster stronger brand loyalty and positive consumer perceptions. Notably, a strong link was found between attitudes toward LGBTQIA+-themed advertisements and attitudes toward the brand, indicating that consumers who engage positively with these ads are more likely to favor the associated brand.

Beyond consumer reactions, this study also explored the influence of developmental factors and traditional culture on tolerance of homosexuality. The results indicate that developmental factors—such as education, economic

growth, and media exposure—had a more substantial impact than traditional cultural norms. This suggests that modernization plays a crucial role in fostering acceptance. Meanwhile, generational differences had no significant effect on attitudes toward homosexuality, likely due to increasing LGBTQIA+ representation in Philippine media and evolving perspectives across age groups.

These findings highlight the importance of recognizing the LGBTQIA+ market as a profitable segment and a key factor in brand positioning. Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, tend to support brands that champion diversity and inclusivity. By embracing LGBTQIA+-friendly messaging, companies can build stronger connections with socially conscious consumers, enhance brand loyalty, and establish a competitive advantage.

While this study provides valuable insights, it has certain limitations. The sample was limited to Millennials and Generation Z in selected areas of Bulacan, underscoring the need for future research to include a more diverse range of participants in terms of age, geography, religion, socioeconomic status, and education level. The study's questionnaire also measured general brand perception rather than specific attitudes toward brands featuring LGBTQIA+-themed advertising. Future research should refine this aspect to achieve greater accuracy. Further exploration is needed to understand the factors influencing consumers' responses to LGBTQIA+-themed ads. Beyond tolerance and demographics, elements such as ad messaging, representation style, and brand authenticity may play significant roles. Moreover, research on consumer responses to other LGBTQIA+ subgroups, such as transgender and bisexual individuals, remains limited. Addressing these gaps will contribute to more inclusive and effective marketing strategies in the Philippine context.

Ultimately, gaining a deeper understanding of LGBTQIA+ representation in advertising will enable brands to create campaigns that resonate with their audience while promoting inclusivity and acceptance in society.

To enhance future research in this field—especially when dealing with culturally sensitive and abstract constructs such as traditional values or social development—scholars should consider refining construct measures during the research design stage. Improving construct validity and achieving a stronger model fit is essential for ensuring the credibility and reliability of findings. Methodological rigor becomes particularly critical in underexplored sociocultural contexts, such as gender-inclusive marketing practices in the Philippine setting, where cultural nuances may influence both interpretation and response.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for inclusive advertising and offers a strong foundation for future investigations into how cultural and developmental variables shape consumer perceptions and behaviors. Such work not only deepens academic understanding but also provides actionable insights for advertisers and marketers seeking to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through brand communication.

Acknowledgement

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