JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
Jönköping International Business School

Affecting the consumer by reflecting the consumer?

A qualitative study about how diversity and inclusion in sports commercials affect the consumer´s self-concept.

MASTER THESIS WITHIN: *Business Administration*

NUMBER OF CREDITS: *15 credits*

PROGRAMME OF STUDY: *International Marketing*

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JÖNKÖPING *May 2021*

Master Thesis in Business Administration

Title: Affecting the consumer by reflecting the consumer?
A qualitative study about how diversity and inclusion in sports commercials affect the consumer´s self-concept.

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Date: 2021- 05 - 24

Key terms: Stereotypes, visual communication, diversity inclusion, gender inclusion, self-concept, tokenism

Abstract

Background: Inclusion and diversity have been a frequently discussed subject within marketing for many years. In particular, marketing communication has to a large extent been criticized to not reflect the reality of society. Commercials present images that reflect and shape cultural norms as well as the individual's attitudes regarding their own identity and their treatment of other people in society. Despite the great interest in diversity and inclusion in marketing communication, there is a lack of studies that connect deficiency of diversity in visual communication, consumers' self-concept, and socially conscious marketing in a Swedish context.

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to get a deeper understanding of how sports brands include diversity in their visual communication through socially conscious marketing. Furthermore, the study aimed to contribute with deeper insights regarding marketing communication of visual character from the consumer perspective and how it influences the individual and its self-concept in the matter of diversity and inclusion.

Method: This qualitative research applied an interpretive and inductive approach to achieve the purpose. The empirical data was collected through semiotic analysis as well as semi-structured consumer interviews within generation Z. Moreover, two sports commercials were analyzed to gather information to answer the research questions.

Conclusion: It was stated that sports brands work with the inclusion of diversity in various ways, by including one diverse element such as different people or by including it with a holistic approach including several diverse elements such as different people, objects, environments, and feelings. This means that one commercial does not have a unilateral effect

on the consumer´s self-concept but that one image can induce multiple feelings. Therefore, the same commercial can make the consumer feel, insufficient, insecure, included, energized, and inspired all at the same time. The result of this study also shows that the consumers feel more included when their values and thoughts are reflected in a commercial than when their physical attributes are reflected.

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List of concepts

Visual communication

Visual communication can be described as a concept within graphic design. It consists of movement, color, text, image, light, and contrasts which all influence peoples´ receiving capacity (Bergström, 2007).

Diversity

Diversity is not limited to but could include ethnicity, gender, skin color, sexual orientation, physical abilities, body type, and religious beliefs. (Wiley, 2020). However, in this study, diversity refers to ethnicity and gender.

Inclusion

Inclusion in marketing can be linked to diversity since it is about having diversity in advertising and campaigns. It means having different types of people when it comes to the diverse elements mentioned above (DePalma, 2021).

Stereotypes

Stereotypes can be defined as a generalized image of people in a specific social group, e.g., gender or ethnicity and its personal characteristics. When an image of a specific social group is repeated, a general belief is created about the specific group, which in turn creates a stereotype. This belief is often a negative and simplistic image of the members of the social group. (Taylor & Stern, 1997).

Tokenism

Tokenism can be defined as the practice of including a small minority group of people just to create an inclusive appearance in the commercial, even though they are not welcomed otherwise (Osanami Törngren & Ulver, 2020).

List of abbreviations

- **BLM -** Black Lives Matter
- **SCM** – Socially Conscious Marketing
- **Gen-Z** – Generation Z
- **GDPR** – General Data Protection Regulation

1. Introduction

In this chapter the fundamental information about the research area in presented. First background information is given which leads the reader into the problematization for this study. Thereafter, the purpose and the research questions are presented. Lastly delimitations are explained to generate valuable information about the chosen angle of the research area.

1.1 Background

Advertising and mass media has become a powerful social and cultural source in society, a mirror of societal values, norms, and beliefs. Some would even say that it has more power to affect society than other institutions such as education or religion (Borman, 2020). This means that marketing has a huge possibility to encourage non-normative actions which in turn can create a society that includes all different types of individuals (Mozota, 2003). Compelling images has preceded many of the most important social changes historically. The visual nature in advertising is crucial when it comes to people´s perception which is important since it conveys meaning and shapes social attitudes towards cultures and people (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002).

Inclusion has been a frequently discussed subject within marketing for many years, and commercials have to a large extent been criticized to not reflect the reality of society. Slim bodies, white skin tone, and people without disabilities have been dominated in brand communication. Some claim that it is going in the right direction and that diversity is more frequently included today, but it is far from all brands that consider what effects their marketing communication might have on the individual consumer (Nilsson, 2019).

Commercials that include diversity invite consumers and allows consumers to communicate with the brand in a way that is relevant to them. (Zalis, 2020). Consumers today care about connecting with brands through non-traditional authentic representation, especially among the younger demographics (Wiley, 2020). Today, young people value advertising that includes differences in cultures, ethnicities, genders, body types, and sexuality. Therefore, it has become crucial for brands to consider diversity to be able to reach gen-Z (Woo, 2020). The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey showed that gen-Z requests more inclusion and diversity from brands than other generations. Furthermore, the same research also claims that young people are more

likely to dismiss a brand whose values differ from theirs (Olsson, 2019). Therefore, marketing communication is effective when it reflects the consumers of the brand (Zalis,2020).

In marketing, there are two forces, advertisers' impact on society and societal changes impact on advertisers, and both these two encourages change. It might have a little immediate effect on the marketplace but if many marketers make small decisions daily in the right direction, it will reflect the market system, and those same values and consequences will impact society (Mick et al., 2009). One example of societal actions that influenced marketing activities is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement that was once again enlightened and raised debates regarding systematic violence and racism against black individuals all over the world (Black Lives Matter n.d.). Many companies posted a black picture on Instagram with the hashtag #blackouttuesday to show their support towards fostering equality (Törner & Winberg, 2020). However, people mean that this statement is not trustworthy if it does not reflect the reality of the company (Knight, 2020).

Social science researchers claim that commercials should mirror the socio-cultural composition of a nation in an ideal situation, and such composition should intersect with categories of ethnicity and race (Tukachinsky et al. 2015; Peruta & Powers 2017). Despite the increased interest in diverse marketing and liberal norms, the western media continues to produce images that reflect and confirms dominant cultural norms (Edström 2018; (Osanami Törngren & Ulver, 2020). According to Hobb´s (2017) study, nearly half of the marketing professionals included experienced that their brands are failing to reflect a racially diverse society in their marketing communication. The usage of stereotypical roles in commercials is influenced by the lack of diversity among the people creating the commercials (Borman, 2020). This lack of representation in the contexts where commercials are produced is problematic since it can lead to a continuous lack of inclusion where white marketers might not think about the ramifications of token roles and stereotypes in a larger sense (Borman, 2020).

Advertisers need to be aware that advertising is not only a tool of commerce but also a social influencer that both conveys and reinforces consumers' norms and values since they are disseminated across various widely accessible media platforms and mediates conspicuous cultural, political, psychological images (O'Barr, 2006). Because of the global media landscape today there is always a risk of social media sharing, and marketers need to execute their messages with far more sensitivity hence to the lack of control of which consumers it might reach (Davis, 2020).

1.2 Problem discussion

There There has been a general improvement in the embracement of diversity in the advertising industry, but it still struggles with issues of inclusion (Davis, 2020), and some social groups are more included than others (Åkestam, 2017). Previous research has shown an overrepresentation of some personal traits in advertising, heterosexual, white, attractive, skinny, and successful were some of the overrepresented features (Martin and Kennedy, 1993; Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Elliott and Elliott, 2005; Eisend, 2010). A Swedish study from 2020, researching how people are portrayed in advertising, showed that white appearance and slim bodies are dominant in advertising even though it does not reflect the Swedish society (Kantar Sifo, 2020). However, there are advertisements where minorities are included, although, they are often stereotypical or aimed at a small audience or minority. (Oakenfull et al., 2008; Mastro, 2009; Bissell and Rask, 2010; Kantar Sifo, 2020).

Historically, advertising was primarily developed to address privileged white people and their interests since they dominated society's economic, political and cultural landscape, which laid the ground for the continuous skewed portrayal in advertising (Thomas, 2017). As most advertising images historically were and continues to be created, approved, and controlled by white people, advertising is often executed in a way of selling "whiteness" as attractive, high social status, and other positive attributes superior to other ethnic or racial minorities. This kind of racist behavior could be unintentional, or sometimes even unrecognized since research shows that it is embedded in cultural norms communicated over many years and the inferiority of ethnic minorities is carried out in advertising into the present day (Davis, 2020). Women and racial minorities are the most vulnerable groups when it comes to the negative portrayal in advertising which has contributed to criticism of marketing and its way of portraying groups differently in society (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2015).

Gender stereotypes and inequalities in how men and women are depicted are prominent, even within the sports industry (Heaphy, 2007; Héas et al., 2011; Reich, 2020). Sports advertising directed to females is mainly connected to their looks and appearance in terms of becoming skinny, sexy, and beautiful. The advertising images are also much more focused on the female bodies and displaying certain body parts compared to men. Sports advertising directed towards men on the other hand is more connected to performance and building strength (Heaphy, 2007; Héas et al., 2011). Men are also more frequently depicted as superior to women in sports advertising (Héas et al., 2011). These ways of portraying men and women differently indicate that there are differences in how and why men and women should exercise sports, which affects

the consumers (Reich, 2020). There have been increased efforts in the sports marketing industry to conduct more diverse marketing when it comes to ethnicity as well, but there are still changes that need to be made (Dees et al., 2021). As well as gender stereotypes are used in sports advertising, so are racial stereotypes. One stereotype that is commonly seen within this segment is the black athlete which is then depicted based on the idea that black people are naturally more athletic (Davis, 2018; Davis, 2020; Readman, 2020) when there in fact is no established differences between raced in this matter (Readman, 2020).

It is not only the lack of diversity and inclusion that is problematic in advertising today. It also presents a misleading reflection of the society that some describe as "a stilted view of the society" (Dan, 2020). Including diversity in commercials is not only about appealing to more consumers but also a social issue that has an impact on the audience. It is important to emphasize that diversity does not mean including one person of color. Diversity refers to including all elements that make one person unique from another (Wiley, 2020).

Furthermore, Goffman (1979) argued that advertising has a strong influence on our self-concepts and how we view what is right or wrong (Belk, 2006). Some visual communication strategies that are designed to target a specific ethnic group or a specific gender, could have tendencies to create and enhance stereotypes, for example by using specific colors in combination with stereotypes images (Fung & Ho, 2019). Furthermore, Chang (2019) explains the power of visual communication when it comes to changing the attitudes of the receiver and creating emotional responses. Therefore, visual communication can change people's attitudes when it comes to diversity and racial minorities (Chang, 2019). A visual representation can create meaning within the circuit of sociopolitical artifacts and invoking issues formerly reserved for the political sphere (Belk, 2006). Consumer's background knowledge and cultural codes affect their ethical concerns and responses to the advertising which they use to construct and perform identities and self-concepts (Belk, 2006).

According to Davis (2020) the images that are illustrated both reflect and shape cultural norms as well as the individual's attitudes regarding their own identity and their treatment of other people in society. Visual elements also influence consumers, even though they are aware that it is not real, which also affects their perception of the real world (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). This means that marketers have the power to influence the audience and make them believe they know something they never actually experienced. This power is what evokes concerns and there is, according to Borgerson, and Schroeder (2002), not enough reflections regarding its possible impact.

Diversity in visual communication is an extensively discussed subject in a marketing context today but the research is still deficient regarding what effects it might have on the individual consumer. According to Davis (2018), most research regarding racial inclusion comes from the US and to a lesser extent from Europe (Davis 2018; Davis, 2020), which is why this study aims to research the phenomenon in a Swedish context. It has also been stated that exclusion and stereotypes in visual communication do affect societal norms and the individual consumer (e.g. Davis, 2018; Mick et al., 2009 Laczniak & Murphy, 2006; O'Barr, 2006; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002). Consumers avoid brands that are not congruent with their self-concept (Islam et al., 2019) which is the relevant effect to discuss for this research since it has been stated that consumers who are negatively portrayed or not included at all in a brand´s marketing communication find it difficult to identify with the brand (McDonald et al., 2020).

However, there is a lack of studies that connects the parallels between deficiency of diversity in visual communication, consumers self-concept, and socially conscious marketing in a Swedish context. This study intends to contribute with new and relevant insights into how including diversity in visual communication affects the consumer´s self-concept. It has also been established that including diversity is important to affect younger consumers (Zanger, 2018; Olsson, 2019; Wiley, 2020; Woo, 2020), which leads the study to investigate consumers in gen-Z.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to get a deeper understanding of how sports brands include diversity in their visual communication by using socially conscious marketing. By explaining how inclusion and stereotypes are portrayed in visual communication this study aims to get insights regarding how this affects the individual consumer.

It has been established that visual communication in commercials does have a great impact on society. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute with deeper insights regarding marketing communication of visual character from the consumer perspective. This study intends to explain how it influences the individual consumer and its self-concept related to diversity and inclusion by answering the following research questions:

I: How do sports brands use visual communication to include diversity in their commercials?

II: How does diversity in visual communication affect the consumer´s self-concept?

1.4 Delimitations

This study is limited to research visual communication since it is the most relevant in today's global marketplace (Jakus, 2018; Davis, 2020), and therefore other marketing communication tools will not be observed.

It is also limited to the diversity perspectives; gender and ethnicity. The reason for this is because these groups are most vulnerable when it comes to the negative portrayal in advertising (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2015) which has contributed to criticism of marketing and its way of portraying groups differently in society (Middleton et al., 2020).

Because of the global media landscape of today and the potential for increased exposure, more commercials are adjusted to this globalized marketplace (Jakus, 2018; Davis, 2020). Therefore, the analyzed commercials are global, and thereby also exposed to Swedish consumers. Due to the limitations in timeframe and access in this research, the interviews will be conducted among Swedish consumers which will generate deeper insights amongst a consciously chosen sample.

2. Frame of Reference

In this chapter the theoretical background is presented through four categories, Self-congruity theory, Diversity in Advertising, Tokenism and Socially Conscious Marketing. These categories lay ground for the proposed framework which is illustrated at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Self-congruity theory

The self-congruity theory has been integrated within marketing and consumer behavior research over the last 35 years (Sirgy et al., 2016). Today, self-congruence plays an essential role in consumer behavior and affects brand satisfaction (Çifciet al., 2016), brand evaluation (Japutra et al., 2018), and marketing effectiveness. (Islam et al., 2017; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2019). Self-congruity can be defined as a psychological process where the consumer compares its perception of a brand´s communication to the consumer´s self-concept (Sirgy et al., 2016; Sirgy 2018). The self-concept defines a person by containing the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings an individual has in reference to him or herself (Ulmerich, 2020). Consumer´s self-concept varies depending on their cultural origin as well as their personal attributes (Triandis, 1996). If a large portion of a brand´s consumers is negatively portrayed or not included at all in their marketing communication, it makes it difficult for the consumers to identify with the brand and use the brand to develop their self-concept (McDonald et al., 2020).

When researchers talk about the high and low self-congruity effect, they refer to how well the consumer's identity matches the brand's identity, the better match the higher the self-congruity effect (Ulmerich, 2020). For example, if a consumer considers herself as a "sporty" person and considers users of a specific brand as "sporty", this generates high self-congruity. On the other hand, if the consumer does not consider herself to be “sporty”, there is an imbalance between the brand and the consumer, which generates low self-congruity (Sirgy, 2018). The higher self-congruity effect increases the likeliness that the consumers will perceive the brand as positive increases (Ulmerich, 2020). Consumers' preferences of specific brands that are associated with certain personalities drive social patterns (Kressmann et al., 2006), so, consumers do not necessarily buy because of the product per se but based on what the brand represents (Hosany and Martin, 2012).

As globalization increases consumers face various cultures simultaneously (Conti, 2017). A result of existing in such a diverse environment entails a risk of incongruence when the brand is symbolically incongruent with an individual's self-concept (Islam et al., 2019). Another effect of self-congruity is that consumers tend to choose brands that are in line with their self-concept before other brands. Brands that do not match the consumer's identity can result in dissonance and uncertainty around their identity (Sirgy, 1986). Kang, Tang & Lee (2015) explained that high self-congruity also can create an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand.

Researchers claim that there are many benefits with a match between the consumer's self-concept and the brand´s user image (Sirgy, 1986; Kressmann et al., 2006; Kang, Tang & Lee, 2015; Sirgy, 2018). To express a brand image that is congruent with consumers self-concept is decisive for marketing practitioners to be able to reach the consumers and increase market shares (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012; Beerli et al., 2007; Branaghan & Hildebrand 2011; Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997). This means that marketers can actively use the self-congruence effect by making the brand image more suitable to target specific consumer groups (Ulmerich, 2020).

2.2 Diversity in advertising

2.2.1 Ethnicity and race inclusion

Multicultural representation has been a part of advertising since the 1970s (Giroux, 1993). At the very beginning of inclusion in advertising, racist portrayals of for instance black people were not uncommon, and this left a mark in the marketing industry (Brown, 2018). In modern advertising, it still occurs poor inclusion and stereotyping (Hobbs, 2017). Studies reveal consistent mis- and under-representation of ethnic and racial diversity in commercials across different media channels (Mastro and Stamps 2018). Advertising that visually executes illustrations of social hierarchies based on ethnic and racial classification reinforces privileged groups and reflects societal values (Davis, 2020). Even though there has been increased inclusion of minorities in advertising over the past decades (Johnson & Grier 2012; Taylor & Costello 2017; Davis, 2020), it has also been noted that stereotypes or even racist elements have occurred which puts the minority groups in inferiority (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). According to Jacobs Henderson and Baldasty (2003), it is common that people of color are included in commercials as secondary or background characters in the US context. According

to Osanami Törngren´s and Ulver´s (2020) research, the same tendencies are shown in Swedish commercials as well as non-white people are commonly portrayed in isolation.

Further studies show that black people are continuously depicted very stereotypically, for instance as being unintelligent, criminal, athletic, aggressive, and sexual (Dixon et al. 2019) and are often presented in a predominantly black context (Mastro and Stamps 2018). Other stereotypes often connected to black people are that they are often portrayed as athletes or entertainers (Branchik & Davis, 2018), a stereotype that frequently occurs is the black ballplayer for example (Borman, 2020; Davis, 2020). This can be problematic since it causes role models who young black children aspire to become, despite that it is an unrealistic and limited option in society (Borman, 2020). As well as black representation in commercials, other ethnicities are also underrepresented to the population (Tukachinsky et al. 2015). Historically Latinos and other Hispanic people were relatively invisible in advertising (Behnken, & Smithers, 2015), or if included often stereotyped in their representation (Davis, 2018). Asian people often appear in the background but are rarely presented as the main characters (Taylor and Stern 1997) and positively portrayed as long as they "stayed in their place" (Davis 2018, p. 152). Studies also imply that Middle Eastern people are in general displayed in a negative way (Ahmed and Matthes 2017; Khosravi 2009; Mukhtar-Landgren 2008).

Another aspect of marketing that raises questions regarding how people of color are portrayed is Lisa Wade´s (2014) study about modern representation in advertising where she implies that people of color are often used to communicate an idea of color, flavor, or personality. According to Stewart´s (2013) study, there is also a lack of interracial romantic relationships as well as interracial families displayed in advertising. More recent research found that people of color were mostly presented in a background role or a token role (Davis, 2020).

2.2.2 Gender inclusion

Representation of women and men in advertising has proven to be a relevant topic since gender roles have been continuously used in commercials (Eisend, 2019). According to Döring & Pöschl (2006), advertising forms the path of what society perceives as masculine and feminine by communicating stereotypical gender roles. Other researchers mean that stereotypes in media define what is socially acceptable in society by showing how men and women should act and behave (Zotos and Tsichla, 2014). Social stereotypes are reinforced in advertising which can affect gender roles, especially the female roles (Eisend, 2010). Gender stereotypes can be

explained as beliefs that some attributes separate men and women from each other (Ashmore & del Boca 1981).

In 1978, Goffman (1979) conducted one of the first studies regarding gender stereotypes in advertising and visual communication. This research showed that stereotypical portrays of women were common and that women were often pictured with a submissive role, both social and physical in relation to men in advertising (Goffman, 1978). Even though society has changed since Goffman's study, research shows that there are still differences in how men and women are portrayed and that stereotypes still exist (Eisend, 2010; Kay et al., 2015; Stanković et al., 2018). Some researchers even claim that advertising fosters sexism because of the inequality portrayals of men and women in advertising (Lazar, 2006; lakoyiannaki et al., 2008; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009).

More recently, Khandeparkar and Motiani (2015) conducted a study where they concluded that stereotypes of women do not reflect the modern woman, instead, the advertising still portrays women as derogatory and demeaning. Independent and dominant were two common words that described men's role in advertising while women were passive characters and portrayed as helpless and submissive. The study also showed that women were pictured as young, beautiful, skinny, and were often sexually objectified and seen in contexts in their homes with children. Men on the other hand were often illustrated in professional roles (Cankaya, 2013). Research has also shown that stereotypes can affect people's self-esteem and body satisfaction by showing women with slim bodies and men with muscular bodies (Grabe et al., 2008).

Other researchers do not agree and argue that the equal portrayal of men and women is going in the right direction over the years (Hatzithomas et al., 2016; Kotzaivazoglou, 2018; Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020). Others argue that women are still underrepresented in advertising, but men are more often portrayed in a stereotypical way (Hatzithomas et al., 2016). Although there are differences of opinion as to whether there are still differences between how men and women are portrayed equally in advertising or not, there is one common component; the central roles in advertising are more often men than women (Goffman, 1978; Khandeparkar and Motiani, 2015; Cankaya, 2013; Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Effects of lack of diversity

Consumers' attitudes, values, perceptions, and behavior are factors that are widely influenced by media today. There have been attempts to enlighten the media's role in the diversity debate since they have the potential to question or promote stereotypical views of how social groups

define things like race and ethnicity (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2015; Åkestam 2017). Historically advertisers have exploited stereotypes concerning, gender, class, race, and other attributes by using certain stereotypical attributes as selling tools (Davis, 2020). Many commercials illustrate the company´s target audience using or interacting with their products. These commercials and the diversity, or lack of diversity, indirectly communicate their feelings towards society and people (Brown, 2018). It is important to keep in mind that inclusion of diversity in marketing construct reality and these images are crucial to global race relations. The viewers interpret the ads subjectively and create meaning from that interpretation. Therefore, marketers must avoid the typicality of race, ethnicity, and gender, especially the typicality that is constructed from colonialist, racist, and sexist positions (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002).

Researchers claim that media´s frequent use of gender roles does not only affect the brand itself, but also results in social effects, such as behavior and attitudes (Eisend, 2019). Furthermore, Kay et al. (2019) explain the damage gender stereotypes can cause for the individual in society. They argue that how women are portrayed when it comes to occupation has an actual effect on women's opportunities and choices in society, which in turn influences woman's role in working life (Davies et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 2008; Kay et al., 2019). Gender stereotypes can contribute to poorer equality in terms of opportunities for both sexes and reduce the positive self-perception of women (Davies et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 2008).

2.3 Tokenism

Minority groups are being represented in advertising more than ever, but there are questions raised regarding how they are being portrayed (Warner, 2017). An important concept to understand the discussion regarding diversity and inclusion of minority groups in media is tokenism. It refers to the policy or practice of including a small minority group of people to be inclusive. It can be minority groups of racial, ethnic, gender, or educational nature, or other exposed social groups. It means a small number of members in these groups are included and displayed in commercials, just to create an inclusive appearance, even though they are not welcome otherwise (Osanami Törngren & Ulver, 2020). Some believe tokenism is a course of action to open doors for minority groups, although research shows that it undermines people´s identity and is demeaning to minority groups (Jackson et al. 1995; Niemann 1999). Rather than foster the minority groups, tokenism reminds them that they are different from the dominant norms and that they need to present themselves in a certain way to be worthy of inclusion (Gent 2017).

Tokenism, occasionally also referred to as plastic representation, can also appear through a combination of synthetic elements that are put together to create what looks like a meaningful imaginary, but what is actually hallow if one views it more thoroughly. Plastic representation is used to "check a box" of diversity by including people of color but failing to create an authentic role for the person which creates an idea that the person is included for the wrong reasons (Warner, 2017). One aspect that also reflects the problem of tokenism is that the inclusion represented in commercials does not reflect how the company organization looks, which indicates it is not authentic (Peñaloza 2018). The idea of tokenism refers to the concept of recruiting people from underrepresented groups to give an appearance of racial or sexual equality. It is often experienced as a weekly attempt to encourage diversity and does not foster any meaningful impact to people or inclusion of minority groups. The typical token role is a character that is not important to the story rather than being the only colored character in the cast (Borman, 2020).

2.4 Socially conscious marketing

Socially conscious marketing refers to advertising based on politics or societal crises. This is commonly used connected to political crises and mass mobilization against systematic racism, one recent example is the many advertisements campaigns that were produced connected to the BLM movement in 2020 (De Oca, 2020). This conscientious response to social injustice in the past of advertising and the response of more inclusive advertising can be described as the concept of being woke. It means that marketers are socially aware and recognizes for example racial injustices (McDonald et al., 2020). Brands capitalize on the solid meaning created by societal problems such as the inclusion of minoritized groups, however, it also works as a channel for politics. By using SCM advertisers can shift the paradigm that they profit from people´s insecurities (Cohen & Dromi, 2018) to use their communication as a meaningful political act (De Oca, 2020).

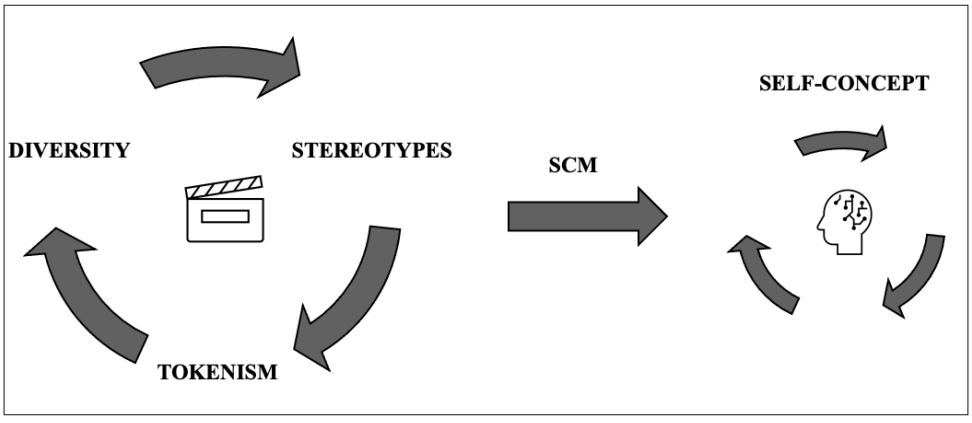
Marketers strive to connect with their consumers and that could be done by connecting the brand´s purpose to what is important to the consumers. The practice of engaging in social issues to create commercials can be very successful if done right, but it can also be criticized as woke-washing which means cashing in on social issues (Sobande 2019). Although, brands can make thoughtful advertising based on societal issues and connect them to their core purposes in a successful way (McDonald et al., 2020). One crucial factor to succeed with SCM is authenticity in the commercials, ethical consumers respond to communication that aligns with the brands' actual values (De Oca, 2020).

If SCM is executed correctly, it is a way to combine a company´s charitable activities with its advertising to attract consumers who want to make a difference with their behavior (De Oca, 2020). Advertisers also see SCM as an opportunity to attract desirable market segments; young, affluent, and educated (De Oca, 2020). SCM is efficient to attract young audiences since they more commonly expect brands to have a higher purpose (McDonald et al., 2020). This type of advertisement commodifies the energy of the emotions that occurs from racial activism or woke politics. Although some argue that this type of marketing only aims to symbolically satisfy the consumers, it does not result in any economic equity or real justice for the exposed group of people (De Oca, 2020).

2.5 Proposed Framework

The proposed framework (See Figure 1) for this research is inspired by the framework "Interplay of marketing and society" (See Appendix A) (McDonald et al., 2020). Adjustments have been made to propose a framework suitable for this research with a focus on commercials' influence on the consumer. Based on the frame of reference regarding self-concept, diversity in advertising, tokenism, and socially conscious marketing a proposed framework has been conducted to further clarify how these factors correlate. The large circle represents the visual communication in sports commercials and the influencing factors; diversity, stereotypes, and tokenism. SCM refers to one of the most impactful marketing strategies by which the consumers get influenced by these factors. The small circle represents the consumer and how the commercial´s visual communication affects the consumer´s self-concept.

Figure 1: Sports commercials effect on the consumer's self-concept.



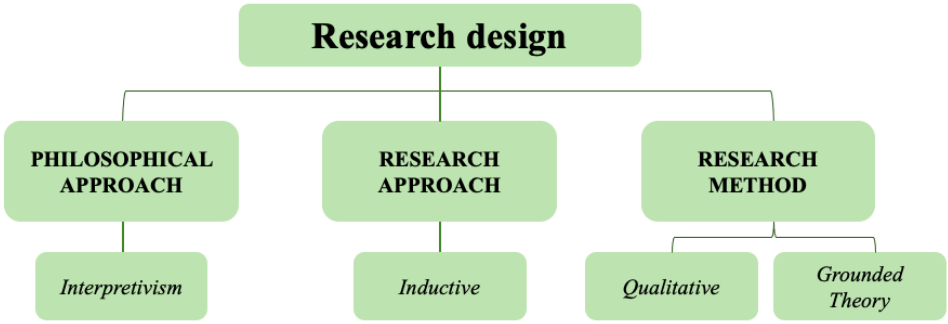
Note. Own elaboration, inspired by McDonald et al. (2020).

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the choices of methodology will be explained and argued for. First, the research design is going to be presented, consisting of philosophical approach, research approach, research method and research strategy. Thereafter, the sampling method and data collection is illustrated. The third part of the chapter consists of an explicit explanation of the data analysis and lastly, the method evaluation and ethical considerations is presented.

3.1 Research Design

Figure 2: Research Design



Note. Own elaboration

Philosophical Approach

This study is conducted through an interpretive philosophical approach which is frequently used in qualitative studies (Malhotra et al., 2017). Interpretative research is also commonly used to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the consumer perspective (Belk, 2006), and is therefore, a suitable approach for this study. When doing qualitative interviews such as in-depth interviews, the purpose is by interpretations receive a meaning to the research area (Malhotra et al., 2017). Interpretive research makes it possible for marketers to gain deeper insights into markets and consumers. Furthermore, it also generates insights into the changes in the marketplace (Moisander & Valtonen, 2011).

Research Approach

The chosen approach for this research is inductive since it is usually connected to qualitative research (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018). An inductive research approach is also common when using grounded theory. An inductive approach, which is an unstructured method, is more open

and not as limited as structured methods which are beneficial in this type of research (Thomas, 2006). An inductive research approach is suitable when the theoretical framework is limited or non-existent (Malhorta et al, 2017) which is the reality of the chosen research problem.

Research Method

The research method chosen for this study is a qualitative method. When the objective of the study is to contribute with understanding, depth and insights to the research area, a qualitative research method is a suitable choice (Malhorta et al., 2017). Since the aim of this study is to contribute with a deeper understanding about diversity in visual communication and how it affects consumer´s self-concept, a qualitative method is a suitable choice for this research. A qualitative research approach is also appropriate to answer research-question that aims to answer "How" or "Why" (Hancock et al., 2001) which also advocates for the choice of method. When doing a qualitative research in the media context it refers to the relationship between the society and media. The qualitative research aims to investigate the relationship between these two parties and the values media creates (Brennen, 2013).

The research strategy Grounded Theory is often used simultaneously with a qualitative research method, and with aim to create new theory with imagination and creativity. The most significant factor of Grounded Theory is the purpose of discovery through direct contact with the social phenomenon during the study (Malhotra et al., 2017), which the researcher will be through contact with consumers and analysis of commercials which also makes it a suitable research strategy fortis study.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection for this research consists of both primary and secondary data to gain multiple insights about the chosen research area. The secondary data refers to the information collected from external sources suitable for the chosen research problem (Hox & Boeije, 2005), such as articles and previous research regarding inclusion in advertising. The primary data is the data collected by the authors for this specific research. In qualitative research, primary data is often collected on a small group of people to gain a large amount of data regarding the research area (Hox & Boeije, 2005). In this research, the primary data is collected through semiotic analysis and semi-structured interviews with Swedish consumers within generation Z.

3.2.1 Secondary Data

When collecting secondary data different databases were used. Firstly, relevant articles from multiple business magazines were collected to get an understanding of the background and the relevance of the chosen research subject. The articles were primary collected from Forbes.com and Resumé.se which are two business magazines and business sites that raise the relevance of inclusion and diversity in advertising. To find more qualitative scholarly articles for the study, the databases Google Scholar and Primo were used. To gain relevant information about the research problem terms as, diversity in advertising, stereotypes in advertising, Self-Concept, Self-Congruity Theory and advertisings effect on consumer were researched. Thereafter, the study was limited to research diversity with a focus on gender and ethnicity inclusion. During the research two more relevant theories were discovered, Tokenism and Socially Consonus Marketing. When searching for relevant articles for this study, peer-reviewed articles were primarily used to make sure the secondary data was trustworthy.

3.2.2 Primary Data

3.2.2.1 Multi-methods

Multi-methods which include different forms of data collection and triangulation are commonly used in interpretative research (Belk, 2006). In this study, the authors used two types of data collection, semiotics, and semi-structured interviews to get a deeper understanding of diversity in advertising. First, two commercials were analyzed to get insights regarding how these commercials include diversity in their visual communication. Thereafter the authors conducted semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C) with consumers to get an understanding of their thoughts about diversity in advertising.

As a part of the semi-structured interviews, the two commercials were presented to the participants with the purpose to gain insights into their opinions and thoughts about the commercials. According to Bryman & Bell (2013), showing visual materials while conducting a study can contribute to more effective and further elaborated discussions regarding the meaning of the content as well as the visual content can be used as a starting point for a discussion, if the material is relevant to the research questions. In this research, visual communication was fundamental for the research questions and therefore the authors believe that including visual material in the study was effective.

To create an even better understanding of the researched phenomena, the authors decided to collect both types of data previously discussed. According to Oswald, 2012, data such as

advertising from two competitive brands or a set of consumer interviews are commonly used in combination with semiotic analyses to establish a more extensive understanding regarding the research problem (Oswald, 2012). So, to create a more nuanced understanding of how the researched commercials include diversity in their visual communication and how that communication affects the consumer´s self-concept, the authors chose to use multi-methods conducting this study.

3.2.2.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

In depth-interviews is one of the most frequently used methods when it comes to qualitative research because of the flexibility the method implicate. Qualitative interviews are beneficial when the researcher wants to get deeper and more detailed answers from the participants (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018), which is an important part of this research. The chosen interview type for this research is semi-structured interviews since they are based on an interview guide that creates a general picture of the interview's starting points but also allows the participant to design the answers in their way without any limitations. It also gives the researcher the opportunity to ask questions not included in the interview guide, which makes it possible to ask follow-up questions based on the individual participants' unique answers (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018). The interview structure was chosen because a basic structure was necessary to include all parts in the frame of reference, but at the same time allow the participants to share their thoughts on the topics.

When conducting the semi-structured interviews for this study an interview guide (See Appendix C) was followed to gain relevant insights about the research problem. All interviews were conducted via Zoom because of the current restrictions due to Covid-19. Before starting the interview, the twelve participants (See appendix B) were asked if they were okay with the authors recording the interview. This to make it possible to transcribe the answers after the interview. Both authors were participating during the interviews and the average time for the interviews was 34 minutes. To make the participants comfortable and to gain as extensive answers as possible, the interviews were conducted in Swedish which where all the participant´s native language.

3.2.2.1.2 Semiotics

The power of the digital era and the revolutionary increase of visual communications within marketing makes semiotics a vital research method for marketers (Özbölük &

Kurtoğlu, 2019). One of the oldest and richest paradigms for understanding meaning is semiotics, and it is commonly used when studying consumer´s relationships to messages such as advertising. It is an assortment of concepts, perspectives, and tools to understand consumer behavior and to foster new insights on communication and meaning in marketing (Belk, 2006). Therefore a semiotic method will help the authors gain understanding and generate deeper insights regarding the research subject.

Semiotics is a useful method to map the relations between the brand and the consumer´s symbolic needs and mental operations. It is a research tool used to understand the intersection between consumer behavior and marketing strategy, and how deeper meanings in the marketplace are constructed. A semiotic method provides tools that let the researchers explain the emotional need of the target audience as well as the values and the associations the commercials represent and communicate (Belk, 2006). When conducting semiotic research, consumers are not viewed as independent and self-determining but rather as products of culture constructed by the popular culture within their lives. They are not seen as a result of freely made choices but as a reflection of the surrounding cultural discourses which makes it important for the researcher to account for the cultural context of the consumer as well as the marketing context (Malhotra et al., 2017).

According to a European perspective, semiotics emphasizes the interface between the social sciences and semiotics which enables the researcher to draw inferences between the advertising message and personal, social, and cultural factors that shape the consumer´s interpretation of the message (Belk, 2006). A semiotic approach to conduct a qualitative analysis of marketing communications goes more into depth than other methods used in the context and investigates the subtext of the communication (Malhotra et al., 2017). The semiotic analysis accounts for systematic structural codes and systematic organization of culture and society. Semiotic codes seek to structure and create an understanding of sign systems, and how visual communication like advertising influences consumers, and how they respond to messages in their environment (Oswald, 2012). These factors make a semiotic method suitable to combine with self-congruity theory since they aim to help explain the consumers' interpretation of an advertisement based on psychological and sociological factors.

Critical visual analysis is a part of semiotics which is crucial to understand and contextualize images. This is relevant when researching issues related to marketing

communication due to the cultural centrality of vision (Belk, 2006), which is vital when analyzing commercials with the capacity of global reach. According to Belk (2006), there are a few questions that are appropriate to analyze through critical visual analysis. These partly include questions regarding how consumers understand advertising images and what the ethical and social implications for the reliance on images in marketing communications are (Belk, 2006), which makes it relevant for answering the research questions.

3.2.3 Purposive Sampling

To collect the data for this research purposive sampling was used. This sampling method is based on a deliberate choice by the researchers. A purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling, is a suitable method when the research problem aims to study a specific group of people who can contribute relevant information to the research area. When using an interpretative approach, it is suitable with purposive sampling (Belk et al., 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994) since it aims to seek out participants that can help the researchers to understand the research problem and give relevant insights (Belk, 2006). So, to help the authors gain relevant information regarding the research problem, twelve Swedish participants were interviewed. A diverse sample of participants regarding gender and ethnicity was chosen in different ages within gen Z, to get multiple and insightful perspectives (See Appendix B).

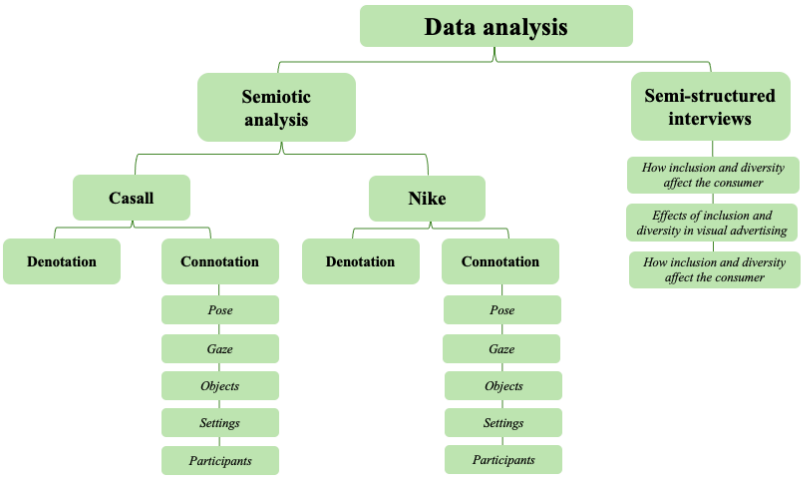
When choosing which brands and commercials to analyze various factors were considered. At first, it was important for the research that the brands were active in the same industry. This, to be able to make an upright comparison. Both commercials (Casall, 2020; Nike, 2020) are global campaigns which was another important factor. The sports industry was chosen because sports clothes are a product category that is relevant for everyone, no matter who you are and what you look like. The commercials “You Can´t Stop Us” (Nike, 2020) and “Wellness” (Casall, 2020) were chosen based on the similar messages in which both commercials meditate a feeling that life is about much more than just sports and training. However, the commercials mediate the message in different ways, which also was important to be able to make a nuanced analysis.

Another factor that was considered when choosing brands and commercials was their previous reputation when it comes to diversity. One brand that has received attention for successfully working with diversity in its visual communication is the sports brand, Nike. By including people from different cultures, with different genders, with different body types as well as with different forms of disabilities, makes them one of the leading consumer brands in the world

when it comes to taking a stand through inclusive advertising (Thorell, 2020). Casall on the other hand has been criticized for being sexist and has also been convicted by the Swedish Advertising Ombudsman (Reklamombudsamannen, 2020). By analyzing these two different brands and commercials the authors gained broad insights regarding the research problem.

3.3 Data analysis

Figure 3: Data analysis



Note. Own elaboration

3.3.1 Semiotic analysis

Semiotic analysis is among other things used to reveal the cultural context of the ad and to identify the meaning of the ad (Ivanov, 2018). To be able to analyze the commercials and to gain relevant insights, two analysis schemes were conducted. The first scheme analyzes the gender and diversity inclusion in the commercials, and the second scheme analyzes the direct and indirect meaning of the commercials. To be able to gain multiple insights about the commercials two main themes, Denotation and Connotation were used and since connotation is more complex, five subcategories were used to analyze the connotation in each commercial.

3.3.1.2 *Denotation*

The first step of the semiotic analysis is denotation which can be defined as the direct meaning of an image. It is not about what the image means it is about what it shows (Hansen & Machin, 2018). However, Barthes (2016) claims that since images often mean something, unconscious interpretations are made which affects the direct and obvious meaning. Denotation was fundamental for describing the obvious and direct composition of Nike's and Casal's commercials.

3.3.1.3 *Connation*

Connotation refers to the feelings and thoughts that emerge from the image. It is the ideas and values that are communicated (Hansen & Machin, 2018). Some explain connotations as associations that are based on social experiences. However, the feelings that appear are individually based on background, culture, and perception of the world of the receiver (Bignell, 2002). Connotation consists of different factors and the chosen factors in this research are pose, gaze, objects, settings, and participants which describe the connotation of a picture (Hansen & Machin, 2018). The authors have analyzed Nike's and Casall's commercials and what the various images connote to get a greater understanding of the meaning behind the commercials.

3.3.1.3.1 Pose

The first factor is the pose which refers to the body language and posture of the participants in the commercials. A pose can connote, authority, discipline, and control if the posture is straight. However, if a person kneels this connotes the opposite. The pose also refers to the angle of the photographer. If the image is taken from above this connotes inferiority and weakness and if the angles are oblique, this can create a feeling of energy or playfulness. How much place a person takes in a picture is also included in the pose, if a participant takes up much place in a picture this can connote both openness and self-confidence (Hansen & Machin, 2018).

3.3.1.3.2 Gaze

The second factor Gaze which coincides with body language refers to the gaze of the participants. The pose influences the feeling that the gaze connotes because the same gaze can be perceived differently depending on the participant's pose (Hansen & Machin, 2018). In other words, if a pose is strong the gaze often connotes the same confidence. Another factor that affects the gaze is where it is directed, at a specific object or whether it is directed into the camera or not. If the participant is looking into the camera this invites the viewer to be a part of the scene. If the gaze is upright or down also affects the connotation of the image. If a participant is looking down this could for instance connote low energy and depression (Hansen & Machin, 2018).

3.3.1.3.3 Objects

This factor refers to the objects included in the image. It could be clothes, accessories, symbols, or other objects that connote meaning which the objects represent. This factor interacts with the participants in the picture and explains who the person is or what it does (Hansen & Machin, 2018). If a group of people wears similar sports clothes, this

connotes that they are a part of a team. If they would wear different clothes it would indicate that they were participating alone. This factor can therefore be crucial for how a picture is perceived.

3.3.1.3.4 Settings

Another factor that can connote feelings related to the image is the setting. It refers to the surroundings where the scene takes place. The size of the setting plays a big part in what it connotes. An open outdoor space connotes freedom and peacefulness. This factor also includes the lighting in the image, bright or dark. If a scene takes place in a dark environment this connotes negative feelings while a brighter place connotes positivity (Hansen & Machin, 2018). If a picture takes place in a dark and cramped place this connotes a completely different feeling than if the same picture was taken in a bright and open setting.

3.3.1.3.5 Participants

The last factor included in the semiotic analysis is participants. This factor refers to the people participating in the commercials. When analyzing the participants there are three categories to keep in mind, Individuals and groups, categorization, and non-representation. The first one highlights the importance of individuals and groups and what difference it can connote in the image. The second one, categorization, explains whether there are stereotypes or not presented in the picture. The last one raises the participants that are not included and represented in the picture and what this connotes (Hansen & Machin, 2018).

3.3.1.4 Analysis schemes

Table 1: Analysis scheme 1

	Main character	*Characters in Background or Scenes without main character*	*Role*	*Man*	*Woman*
Non-minority inclusion					
Minority inclusion					

Note. Own elaboration

Analysis scheme 1 is conducted to get an understanding of the general representation of the participants in the commercials. First, the analysis scheme included non-minority inclusion and minority inclusion when it comes to ethnicities in each commercial. Thereafter, it also displayed gender inclusion for each commercial. This, to be able to make assumptions both regarding the diversity in each commercial and to be able to compare them to each other. Furthermore, what type of role the participants play in the story of the commercial was also established to be able to analyze how they are included.

Table 2: Analysis scheme 2

Scene	*Time*	*Denotation*	*Connotation*
		Denotation can be defined as the direct meaning of an image. It's not about what the image means it's about what it shows.	*Connotation refers to the feelings and thoughts that emerge from the image. It is the ideas and values that are communicated.* **Pose**: *Refers to the body language and posture of the participants, e.g., kneeling.* **Gaze**: *Refers to the gaze of the participants, e.g., looking directed into the camera or not.* **Objects**: *Refers to the objects included in the image, e.g., clothes* **Settings**: *Refers to the surroundings were the scene takes place, e.g., outside* **Participants**: *Refers to the people participating in the commercials as well as the people not participating in the commercials, e.g., Individuals and groups*

Note. Own evaluation

Analysis scheme 2 was conducted to analyze the different semiotic elements in each scene, where the first scene is the first image illustrated in each commercial. These factors were analyzed in every scene by the authors separately and the analyzes were then compared to gain more extensive insights. Using this approach two perspectives were considered since social experiences may affect the authors' way of analyzing the commercials. Thereafter the analysis schemes from the different commercials were compared which generated more nuanced insights into the study. The chosen connotation elements were crucial for this research, to make as relevant and insightful analysis as possible

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The first step to being able to analyze the data from the interviews was to transcribe them. This was done manually directly after the interviews in a shared document in a total of 58 pages, to be able to maintain all information that was raised by the participants during the interviews. Furthermore, the theoretical framework laid the ground for the interview guide which also

provided contextual guidance to help conceptualize the data from the interviews (See Table 3). This provided a procedure to organize, categorize and interpret the data to be able to draw conclusions (Brennen, 2017).

Crucial factors that define Grounded Theory is the expectations to come up with meaningful findings which can be used by people in contact with the researched problem as well as the intention of discovery through contact with the research phenomenon during the study (Malhotra et al., 2017), which is in line with the intentions and the execution of this research. Therefore, the data were analyzed with a technique rooted in grounded theory, repertory grid technique, which refers to categorizing the data based on the findings that emerged (Malhotra et al., 2017). The approach starts with open coding which landed in three themes; Inclusion and diversity in visual advertising, Effects of inclusion and diversity in visual advertising, and How inclusion and diversity affect the consumer. By coding the raw data social patterns were discovered by the authors which were converted into new theory in terms of the extended framework (Malhotra et al., 2017).

Table 3: Analyze scheme 3

Theory	Questions	Themes
Diversity in advertising	*What does inclusion of diversity in visual marketing mean to you?*	*Inclusion and diversity in visual advertising*
Diversity in advertising	*When do you feel included or excluded in visual marketing?*	*Inclusion and diversity in visual advertising*
Diversity in advertising	*What stereotypes are commonly used in sports commercials in your experience?*	*Inclusion and diversity in visual advertising*
Tokenism	*How do you think it could be problematic to work with inclusion in commercials?*	*Effects of inclusion and diversity in visual advertising*
Self-Congruity Theory	*How does visual communication affect you personally depending on how brands choose to portrait people in commercials?*	*How inclusion and diversity affect the consumer*
Self-Congruity Theory	*How does a commercial that reflects your personal values affect you as a person?*	*How inclusion and diversity affect the consumer*
Self-Congruity Theory	*How does a commercial that does not reflect your personal values affect you as a person?*	*How inclusion and diversity affect the consumer*
Socially Conscious Marketing	*How does commercials that deal with societal issues or debates affect you?*	*Effects of inclusion and diversity in visual advertising*
Socially Conscious Marketing	*What do you think about using commercials as a communication tool for important societal issues and debates?*	*Effects of inclusion and diversity in visual advertising*

Note. Own evaluation

3.4 Method evaluation

One of the most criticized factors regarding semiotic analysis is how replicable and how reliable it is. The analysis is built on the researchers´ cultural influences and individual interpretations which could make it insightful and a valid representation of the consumer.

Although, there is little guarantee that another researcher would detect the same codes and structures and draw the same conclusions (Malhotra et al., 2017). One way to mitigate biased results depending on the researcher's presumptions is to let the material be analyzed by more than one person (Lantz, 2011). To get as valuable results as possible, both the researchers analyzed the material as well as the commercials were included in the interviews and briefly analyzed by the participants. Another criticized factor is the logic of the interpretation since is not always clear exactly how the researcher arrived at an interpretation. There is no unique way to interpret this type of qualitative data and there is no interpretation that could be claimed to be the final one. An interpretation could rely upon shared knowledge, cultural background, and institution, which might be valid, but it is hard to validate (Malhotra et al., 2017).

By asking well-thought-out questions and encouraging the participants to elaborate their responses it is possible to achieve a high level of credibility through semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2016). To make sure the questions were well-refined the interview guide was derived from the theory provided as well as the quality of the interview questions were checked and approved by the supervisor.

One issue which has been discussed when evaluating qualitative interview methods is the reliability of the responses provided by the participants. Some researchers claim that respondents may be answering self-serving, tell the interviewer what they believe they want to hear, or intentionally or unintentionally lie in their responses. Specific factual information should therefore be verified from other sources if possible while personal opinions and perceptions could be considered as authentic responses (Brennen, 2017). Another issue connected to qualitative interviews is that there are no unprejudiced interviews, and thereby the data analysis will be impacted by the researcher's presumptions (Lantz, 2013).

3.5 Ethical considerations

In qualitative research, the content of the study is produced with the participants rather than by the researchers, and it is important to understand the moral responsibilities this entails. The ethical challenges in protecting the participants' privacy while supporting the freedom of the scholarship and in detail enlightened researched phenomenon is challenging. It is important as a qualitative researcher to build trust and induce collaboration with the participants and work with empathy to limit exploitation of at-risk individuals, groups, or cultures (Brennen, 2017).

Because the researchers have an active role in qualitative research it entails some ethical concerns. One fundamental concern is that individuals participating in the research need to be

voluntarily participating without any pressure. The researchers must also provide accurate information and the purpose of the research so the participants understand the motive. The participants need to be informed of all aspects of the research and be able to withdraw from the project at any time as well as the participant´s confidentiality and privacy should be protected and secured (Brennen, 2017). Therefore, the participants were provided with information regarding how their data would be processed by showing them GDPR statements before the interview, to make sure they felt comfortable with the process. There are also some ethical aspects to consider if the interviews are recorded (Malhotra et al., 2017) which the interviews in this research were. Therefore, the participants were asked to permit to be recorded before the interview.

The power balance between the interviewer and the participant is an important ethical issue to address while conducting consumer interviews. This imbalance might exist since the interviewer introduces topics and issues discussed and it might affect the direction of the conversation (Brennen, 2017). The researcher should make the participant feel comfortable, which is vital to get correct answers from the participants as well as to facilitate other ethical aspects (Malhotra et al., 2017). The interviewers have a moral responsibility to protect the participant from any emotional or psychological harm that might occur from the interview (Brennen, 2017).

There are also some ethical difficulties when discussing diversity and analyzing people based on physical attributes such as ethnicity and these subjects could be controversial and sensitive (Hübinette, 2017). Although, it has been established that there are differences in the portrayal of people based on these types of physical attributes in visual communication in commercials (Davis, 2020; Elliott and Elliott, 2005; Eisend, 2010; Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Martin and Kennedy, 1993) and are therefore relevant factors to discuss within this study. Since the purpose of the study was to explain how inclusion and stereotypes are portrayed in visual communication, discussing these attributes was vital to answer the research questions. The purpose was not to establish which person fits into what attributes but to research how minority groups are portrayed, how it differs between various groups of people, and what effect it might have on the consumer.

To get a nuanced idea of the research subject it is important with a diverse sample of participants, which also could raise ethical concerns since the research is based on purposive sampling. Therefore, the only factors that will be reviled for the participants as well as in the study are the participants' age and gender, since those are not assessed as sensitive attributes to

the same extent as other physical attributes discussed in the research. Other attributes deliberately considered to create a suitable sample will only be known to the researchers for purpose of considering previously discussed privacy factors related to consumer interviews.

4. Empirical findings

In this chapter the empirical findings are introduced. First, the findings from the semiotic analysis from each commercial is presented through the themes denotation and connotation. Thereafter findings from the consumer interviews are shown through three main themes, Inclusion and diversity in visual advertising, Effects of inclusion and diversity in visual advertising and How inclusion and diversity affect the consumer. The empirical findings from the consumer interviews then ends with the findings related to the commercials.

4.1 Semiotics analysis

4.1.1 Casall

4.1.1.2 Denotation

The Casall commercial denotes people working out in various environments, but mostly outside in an open and sunny environment or inside in a large well-equipped gym. There are also some scenes where the participants are doing yoga or meditating in their homes as well as performing other everyday activities. Some participants are displayed more than others, which denotes the main characters and background roles of the story of the commercial. According to analysis scheme one, there are slightly more women included in the commercial, and only one person included in the minority groups related to ethnicity which were discussed in the theory chapter. Other than that, the commercial denotes a happy family life interspersed with occasional workouts in nice environments. The commercial is filmed with the same lighting and relatively same angle throughout most scenes.

4.1.1.3 Connotation

Overall, this commercial connotes a harmonic and healthy lifestyle. In the entire commercial there is only one scene that connotes negative feelings, where one participant steps on toys laying on the floor early in the morning, otherwise there are only positive or neutral connotations mediated. The scenes that take place indoors displays nice houses and gyms with a lot of space which connotes luxury. The outdoor settings are only showing nice and sunny weather which also results in positive connotations. The fact that the storyline does not include any obstacles in their lives also connotes positive feelings and a sense of happiness and easy life.

There are several images with open views and beautiful nature which connotes freedom both physically and mentally. For example, in scene 7 (See figure 4) where one of the participants is running with the wind in her hair and sun in her eyes, or scene 9 (See figure 4) where another participant is running in an open field with trees in the background.

Figure 4: Scene 7 & 9

Note. Casall (2020)

The settings in the indoor scenes often take place in open and stylish environments which connotes luxury and a wealthy lifestyle, both at home and when they are visiting the gym. In scene 20 the mother is in the kitchen cooking with her child (See figure 5). The objects surrounding them, as well as other objects from scenes taking place in their home, and the clean kitchen connotes a relatively wealthy living situation. The interaction between the mother and the child connotes joy and peacefulness. There are also some other connotations occurring in this scene, especially since the story implies that the man and the women are a couple, and it is their child. In this context, the images connote that the woman is inside cooking and taking care of the child while the man is outside cutting the grass (See figure 5). In this context and in combination with other scenes that will be further discussed, this could connote stereotypical gender roles.

Figure 5: Scene 20 & 24

Note. Casall (2020)

There are also some connotations related to how the participants are displayed while working out. The man is mostly shown with heavyweights and in dark settings which connotes that he does heavy weight training to build strength. The women on the other hand are displayed doing cardio or yoga, they are never exposed in the same image where objects like weights are displayed, even if they are working out in a gym environment (See figure 6). Even if their poses and gazes sometimes connote that they are working hard, it is only in a context where it is implied that they are training cardio. And even if they are connoting that the women are training hard in some scenes, they are never sweating. In most scenes, they have perfect hair and makeup and, in some scenes, even neutral gazes and facial expressions. This connotes how females should look while training. All the participants are thin and physically fit and all the women participating in the commercial have very similar body types whilst the man is muscular. This connotes that this is the way you look if you have the healthy lifestyle they are showing in the commercial. There is also a difference between the genders when it comes to the colors of objects they are using (See figure 6). The man is only wearing black clothes and using black training equipment whilst the women are wearing clothes in various colors, both dark and bright colors, and are using different types of equipment in various colors. In this context, this connotes masculinity vs femininity and could also suggest gender stereotypes.

Figure 6: Scene 16; 21;12;30

Note. Casall (2020)

The different blond women and the man are seen in the same environment as well as they are eating dinner together in scene 28 which connotes that they are family and friends and have a relationship with each other (See figure 10). This scene also connotes community feeling and

that they share life. There is one participant which is not included in this scene or displayed in the same environment as the other participants (See figure 7). She is not seen interacting with any other participants in the commercial nor seen in the same environments, which connotes that she does not have a relationship with any of them. She occurs in three different scenes 11, 14, and 18, but alone in all three of them.

Figure 7: Scene 28 &11

Note. Casall (2020)

Throughout the commercial, the participants´ gazes are not directed towards the viewer. They are either interacting with each other or has the gaze focused on other objects which does not invite the viewer to interact and react to the participants' feelings. All the participant´s gazes and poses throughout the commercials connote peacefulness which is also connotated by some of the outdoor settings. All the scenes are very light which also connotes positive feelings.

4.1.2 Nike

4.1.2.1 Denotation

The Nike commercial denotes various athletes performing during various conditions. It shows both teams and individual athletes as well as professionals and amateurs. The scenes take place in different types of environments like big arenas, in public spaces, and at home. Based on analysis scheme 1 there is also a variety of people participating when it comes to ethnicity and gender. There are different participants in every scene and all scenes are cut in half, showing two different images at the same time. The scenes are filmed from various perspectives, and they shift in the lighting and environment. There are scenes taking place in various countries and across various social classes. Throughout the commercial, they show both people who succeed and people who fail.

4.1.2.2 Connotation

The scenes are divided into two parts that create an image together throughout the commercial. This connotes the feeling of being from two different worlds and having different presumptions, but still being united through the love of sports. The fact that the two images create a scene together also connotes solidarity, even if the participants are different from each other. There are a few scenes where this is extra distinct, one example is scene 14 (See figure 8), where a boy and a girl play tennis with each other but they are in different places. This scene connotes several implications about having different presumptions. They are clearly from different social classes, genders, and ethnicities which connotates that despite that, they can still face the same challenges as well as play with each other.

Figure 8: Scene 14

Note. Nike (2020)

There are many scenes in this commercial in which the participants look at the viewer and invites the viewer to feel and react through their gaze (See figure 9). This camera angle where the participants "make eye contact" with the viewer creates an intimacy which makes the connotation of the participant´s feelings or mood more impactful for the viewer.

Figure 9: Scene 4

Note. Nike (2020)

There are some scenes where the divided picture results in progress or change which in the context connotes a change in a larger sense. There is one scene where a girl is practicing gymnastics at the beach and then a jump takes the viewer to the next scene which takes place in a big arena with a crowd, which connotates progress and moving forward (See Figure 10). Another scene that, among others, connotes mowing forward is scene 9 where two participants move forward on skateboards. One is a female wearing a niqab and one is a male holding a pride flag (See Figure 10). This scene is very impactful since it connotes many feelings. The participants are included in minority groups in various ways and the scene connotes that they can be included in the sport as anybody else. At the same time, it acknowledges societal stereotypes, that these people are not always displayed in this type of image. It implies that change is needed in this matter and thereby, the scene also connotes moving forward towards equality.

Figure 10: Scene 6 & 9

Note. Nike (2020)

Another scene that symbolizes moving from weakness to strength is scene 19 where a professional basketball player falls which connotes defeat (See Figure 11). The other half of the image illustrates a skater, a nonprofessional, walking towards him. The pose and gaze, looking down at the basketball player, is connotating superiority over the man that has fallen. Then the skater chooses to reach out a hand and help him up. What is also notable in this scene is that it is a female amateur skater helping a male professional basketball player, which connotes equality and includes norm-breaking illustrations. The gesture of reaching out a hand connotes solidarity and the feeling that there will be someone there to help you if you fall.

Figure 11: Scene 19

Note. Nike (2020)

Throughout the commercial there are objects connotating pain and obstacles for example people falling on a hurdle while running, getting injured, or failing within their sports in various ways (See Figure 12). One scene that very explicitly connotes this is scene 11 where two women playing football during different conditions have fallen and their pose and gaze connote injuries and pain. It connotes that no matter what you look like and what presumptions you have, you can fall and get hurt, and these "different worlds" do not necessarily mean they do not deal with the same problems.

Figure 12: Scene 11

Note. Nike (2020)

Among other acts towards equality, the BLM movement is also included in this commercial. In scene 16 (See Figure 13) there are images of teams kneeling and their gaze is low which connotes inferiority. They are all wearing team clothes some with BLM symbols on them, which strengthens the connotation of fighting a battle together, and some are doing the gesture representing BLM. There are also both male and female athletes included in these scenes.

Figure 13: Scene 16

Note. Nike (2020)

There are also athletic actions like scoring a goal or running over the finish line in a race which in the context connotes victory and success in a greater sense than just the act of winning within the respective sports. At the end of the commercial, several scenes connote victory through gestures raising hands and celebrating combined with poses and gazes that connoted happiness (See Figure 14). What is relevant to highlight in these scenes is that there are many different types of people when it comes to gender, ethnicity, teams, individual athletes, and types of sports that are included. In the context, it connotes the feeling that they are celebrating together which in turn connotates very strong feelings of affinity.

Figure 14: Scene 24;18;2;27

Note. Nike (2020)

In general, throughout the commercial, several objects and actions connote solidarity and the feeling of fighting battles together. It is through objects like similar clothing representing a team and gestures within this team connoting team spirit. People from different conditions and parts of the world with different genders, ethnicities, body types, and disabilities are displayed fighting the same battles which connote affinity. The message "we are never alone" does not only apply to the sports situations illustrated in the commercial but also the political issues raised in the video. It connotes that these issues as racism and equality that are not something that one person should face alone or can solve alone. Everyone is responsible which also means that everyone is responsible for fixing the problem.

4.2 Consumer interviews

4.2.1 Inclusion and diversity in visual advertising

When asking the participants about inclusion and diversity in visual advertising they agreed that it is about including different types of people. “It's about including everyone. (…) So that it is not just one type of person who is represented” (P11). However, the participants had different ways of explaining it. The majority of participants raised that inclusion and diversity are about including different ethnicity, genders, and body types, while others also included age (P8 & P11), sexual orientation (P1; P4; P6), and social class (P1; P2; P4 P5; P9; P10; P12).

Some participants (P2 & P7) expressed that inclusion and diversity in visual advertising are about excluding stereotypes and represent society. “I think it is about not using the stereotypical person in marketing” (P7). When asking the participants about stereotypes in sports advertising, the majority claimed that athletic bodies, white skin tone, and beautiful appearance were common among the models in sports advertising.

> It's never a fat guy or girl who poses for sports brands, it's never someone who's not fit, which is a bit funny since the majority of those who buy training clothes are still normal people. So even though most people who buy training clothes work out, there is still a very small part that looks like the ones in the commercials. But it's a bit manipulative too like if you buy these clothes you will look like this (P10).

> I would say slim and athletic people are common in sports advertising, both men and women, but I still think it is a mix of ethnicities in advertising today. But perhaps more typical European white people, I would say (P5).

Some participants (P1; P2; P8; P10) raised that the portrayal of men and women differ, and men are often portrayed as very athletic and muscular while women are portrayed as skinny. However, the majority experienced that diversity and inclusion have become better in advertising and are more frequently included today. Even though diversity and inclusion have become better the participants still experienced that it feels like advertising tries to portray a picture that everything is perfect which does not reflect reality.

> First, I think people in sports advertising look very nice and polished while working out and it feels like everything should look perfect. (...) and that's not what I look like when I work out, and I would say this is not representative of society (P8).

Furthermore, some participants explain their concern about inclusion and diversity in visual advertising. Many participants (P1; P2; P4; P6; P11) experience when inclusion and diversity are a part of advertising, it is many times portrayed in a way that it feels stereotype or like the company has been forced to include diversity.

> When it comes to ethnicity and diversity, I experience a lot of stereotypes. And even though many companies try to live up to some type of diversity, you often have ten white, blonde people and then include one person who has an Asian background or a darker skin tone just to try to mediate that you care about diversity even if it is not genuine (P1).

P4 and P6 continue to explain that inclusion and diversity are not about including everyone in society. They believe that this type of inclusion and diversity which is not done in a normalized way can cause even bigger problems.

> Sometimes I think that as a marketer you make the mistake of trying to include everyone (...) one gay, one lesbian, one Muslim, one Christian, and someone in a wheelchair. Then I think it will have the opposite effect, life does not actually look like that, in one room the whole world is not represented. (...) So what I think is the inclusion of diversity is when you do it in a way that feels normalized and not like people are included just to include diversity (P6).

However, all participants express that it is important to work with inclusion and diversity, but it is about finding a balance. “I think it's important to find a balance so that it still feels real” (P4). When asking the participants about when they feel included in marketing and vice versa they mostly had the same opinion. The majority explained that they feel included in marketing when the advertising reflects them. “I feel included when there are people with regular body types in marketing because it is something I can identify with and then I feel included” (P2). However, the majority of the participants claim it is not only about the reflection of the participants in the advertising, but it can also be included in form of interest.

> Well, that's when you can relate and when there is relevance in it. Not only if they have the same look or the same body shape as me, but more when it feels relevant to me. Like for instance, this person talks a lot about what I'm talking about, and that makes me feel included (P12).

4.2.2 Effects of inclusion and diversity in visual advertising

When asking the participants to share their thoughts regarding actively working with the inclusion of diversity the majority of the participants had a positive attitude towards this at first. Arguments like norm-breaking behavior are a must until the norms regarding inclusion change were brought up, and until then it needs to be an active choice. There were some participants (P3; P6; P12) that specifically expressed that even if inclusion does not permeate the whole organization yet, it must start somewhere, and actively working with inclusion in commercials could be a start of changed behavior and changed norms.

> I think it is only positive. Sometimes it is obvious that they have made an effort to include diversity, but that does not necessarily mean something negative, it is better that way than to stay within the norms. If it is going to be a change it might be some effort needed and active choices before a mix of people and bodies become the norm. (P3)

Although when discussing the subject further, some situations were actively working with inclusion in advertising could be problematic emerged. One example that was raised by participant 6 was when campaigns that are explicitly expressed to be addressing diversity or inclusion are conducted.

> I think it could be problematic if companies claim that they are doing things right, for example launching a diversity campaign and claim to include everyone. Then they might line up different people in the commercial, but it might still be someone that does not feel represented or included. Then they have not understood the essence of what inclusion means. (P6)

There are several other aspects of how inclusion in advertising could be problematic which occurs during the interviews. Participant 4 mentions one angle of problematization which could occur if diversity is an activity included unnaturally.

> The point is to include people of different ethnicities in a normalized way and emphasize the fact that everyone is equally worth. If it is brought up in a startling way, I think minority groups could feel that it is brought too much to the attention which might foster for example racism or other inequalities instead of promoting equality. (P4)

One factor that is frequently brought up is if the commercial is perceived as genuine or if the company tries to use societal debates to make a profit "The most important factor when producing this type of commercials is that the message is genuine" (P1). Several participants (P1; P2; P4; P6; P8; P9; P11) expressed that if the commercial was not perceived as genuine it could result in negative effects instead, both for them as consumers and for the company itself.

> I think it is an important tool to reach out to people and mediate a message because if nobody talks about it, these important subjects are easily forgotten. Although, I think it could be problematic to peruse a company for-profit and also show people that you care about social issues without those two interfering with each other (P8).

But even if it is not perceived as completely genuine two of the participants (P9; P11) still claim that despite that, the fact that the issue is brought to consumers´ attention might still generate positive effects in terms of spreading information "Then, of course, it could still result in a positive effect, more proliferation and that these issues are more frequently talked about" (P9).

When discussing commercials as a suitable choice of communication tool to bring attention to societal debates and issues, such as inclusion and equality, there were some differences in opinion among the participants. Three participants (P4; P10; P12) brought up the possible problematic aspects of commercials almost always being angled as well as the possible problematic differences in how the message is perceived depending on the receiver's interpretation. Although, the majority of the participants perceived commercials as a suitable tool for reaching out to people and shut the light on important societal debates, especially in today´s information society when commercials reach so many people. There were also participants (P6; P7) who explicitly mentioned that they believe it is extra important to reach and attract the younger target audience "I think it is great and that it should be used more, especially by knowledgeable people who can communicate it in a good way to reach people that do not watch traditional television or news, for example, young people" (P6). So, the discussions within the interviews generally lead to a positive reaction towards working with inclusion in advertising with some premises, a citation from participant one expresses it very conclusively.

> As long as it reflects what the company stands for, I only think it has positive effects. Companies are a vital component to change within the society since they drive the

economy, and therefore it takes actions from companies to make a change, but they cannot use a societal debate to sell (P1).

4.2.3 How inclusion and diversity affect the consumer

The opinions about how the participants get affected by inclusion and diversity varied and some claimed that they got more affected than others. However, all the participants were united that inclusion and diversity affect them in some way. “I clearly think it affects me and how I look at myself, but I do not think it affects me on a conscious level” (P10). In addition, P10 explains that it can be hard to explain how inclusion and diversity affect the consumer since it is not always something people reflects over. The majority of the participants agree and explain the difficulty to explain concrete effects of inclusion and diversity in advertising. “I think it's hard to say how a commercial affect me, but I think by watching stereotypical commercials it affects one in general” (P9).

All participants mean that advertising regarding inclusion and diversity affects them in various ways, both negatively and positively, depending on how it is depicted. There is a disagreement among the participants whether the good or bad inclusion of diversity impacts them the most. Participants 5, 7, 9, and 11 mean they would be more affected by advertising that actively works with inclusion and diversity in a good way. “I would be more affected if a company does something good than if they do something bad, especially when it comes to companies that are well established” (P8). P2, P4, and P10 disagree and argue that advertising that is not in line with their values would affect them more. “If I see an advertisement that is very offensive towards any minority group, I react more (...) So, there will be a greater reaction towards the negative side than the positive side” (P10).

When asking the participants regarding the effects' inclusion and diversity in visual advertising would have on them some participants (P1; P2; P4; P5; P10) explained that it could have long-term effects on them. Participants 1, 2, and 10 explain that their thoughts about themselves are influenced by how advertising portrays people as well as how they include diversity. “Advertising absolutely shapes our thoughts about ourselves and society. (…) Somehow, commercials that reflect a nice and polished side of reality convey that I have to look like the stereotype and get a fit body” (P1). Participant 4 agrees and explains the problem with portraying a skewed picture of society. Furthermore, P4 explains the feeling of inadequacy that advertising gives young people today.

> The problem today is that advertising portrays a picture of society and how people should look, a skewed picture that few people can identify with. Not everyone can achieve the ideal that is presented in advertising today. Even the people who can reach the ideal, need to make many sacrifices that can affect them negatively in terms of desperation or similar effects. Today there is a normalization of something that is very difficult to achieve (P4).

All the participants highlighted the importance of working actively with inclusion and diversity in advertising. Even though most of the participants are not directly affected by it, they believe it is common among the younger audience. “I think that young people feel more hope and even though they are not like everyone else, it's okay they still get included and have the same rights as everyone else and the same opportunities to succeed in life and training as everyone else” (P5)

4.2.4 Casall

The common descriptions among the participants were nice, peaceful, unclear, and stressful. Some participants (P2; P6; P8; P10; P11; P12) explained that Casall’s commercial wanted to explain a typical day in life, however, almost all participants agreed that it did not reflect the reality. Instead, it was described as a perfect version of life.

> You get the point that they visualize some everyday life, but there are still three physically fit persons with nice houses in nice areas and so on. Everything looks so wonderful, but it is not the reality of training. The message is that training should be a simple part of everyday life, such as trying to include it as an everyday thing and that it does not always have to be a gym workout or going for a run. But it still feels a little too good to be true (P12).

When asking the participants about diversity and inclusion in the commercial the majority of the participants described it as deficient. This, even though the majority of the participants highlighted that Casall used both white and black models. “They do not include different people at all, it was just slim people with white skin tone and even though they have included one black woman, it does not feel genuine” (P1). Participants 7 and 9 claimed that the advertisement only represented white people. “, I did not reflect on inclusion In Casall's commercial in the same way, but I think it was only white people” (P7). Furthermore, some of the participants (P1; P2; P5; P6) explained the inclusion of diversity as something forced and unnatural.

> I think they may have felt forced to include a black person. If it was not such a big issue in society right now, I do not think the person would have been included in the marketing. Also feels like they have included her to not receive criticism due to not including (P2).

Another issue raised by some participants (P1; P5; P6) was the portrayal of the black woman. Many participants expressed a feeling of exclusion. Even though the black woman was included in the commercial she was not included with other people.

> Casall is rather excluding in their commercial, and only includes one type of people. In this commercial, it does not feel like they have thought about including different people, they are mostly slim people who look very Swedish and even though they have included a black woman, they have included her when she is alone and training, she is not integrated with the others (P5).

When discussing the participant´s perception regarding the usage of stereotypes in the commercial all participants agreed that the use of stereotypes was very prominent. "In the Casall commercial, there was no person who differed from the stereotype, it was the classic portrayals that you often see in commercials, young, white, slim" (P1). The majority of the participants explained that Casall chose to use stereotypes in the commercial. Furthermore, when discussing the portrayal of the people in the commercial, some participants (P1; P2; P8; P10) experienced a difference in how men and women are portrayed, which goes in line with the stereotypes. "When it comes to body language, the men trained harder and lifted heavy while the women trained calmly and did yoga or running. Which feels stereotypical, that men should have muscles while women should be slim" (P1). Participants 2 and 10 agree and experienced a difference in portrayal when it came to household chores. "The man cut the grass and was more powerful or what to say and the woman was calmer and took care of the house. The body language differed very much between man and woman" (P2).

Some participants (P4; P5; P6; P7) explained that Casall's settings and objects did not reflect reality since everything seemed perfect. The Participants (P4; P5; P6; P7) also expressed a feeling of exclusion of various social groups. "I cannot say a specific object but more that all the objects together radiated as if it felt rich, everything was tiptop. They portrayed a perfect life, for example, they did not include different social classes in that way" (P4). Furthermore, participants 1 and 4 expressed a feeling of being affected by the commercial, not directly but in the long-term perspective.

> It is difficult to say that an individual video affects a person, but it is in people´s minds that women should train more cardio than heavy lifting and commercials like Casall are definitely a reason why I believe people view themselves and others this way, it absolutely shapes our thoughts about ourselves and society (P1).

Participants 2, 7, and 10 expresses that they believe commercials like Casall, which works actively with stereotypes, can affect their view of themselves negatively. Some participants (P4; P5 and P11) agree and explain their concern about how young people could be affected by these types of commercials. “When young people watch the Casall commercial, I think they are shocked, and think, is this what the norm looks like? And is this what I should look like? And then I think many people feel left out and excluded” (P5). Even though many participants felt neutral or negative feelings when watching the Casall commercial some participants (P2; P3; P5; P12) felt positivity in form of joy and happiness. “In Casall's commercial, I felt warmth and joy and it looked like they were having a very nice time. I felt the warmth of happiness and well-being" (P2). Even though the participants got affected in different ways all participants agreed that Casall portrayed a perfect picture of the reality, which affected some negatively, some positively, some neutral, and some a mix of all.

4.2.5 Nike

After showing the participants the Nike commercial, all participants perceived a message of inclusion of diversity and a feeling of affinity. Although, when further discussing how they perceived the inclusion, some different aspects of positive and negative reactions emerged. The majority of the participants perceived a diverse inclusion of different ethnicities and genders. “It was a very clear inclusion of different people, it felt genuine and like everyone has equal worth no matter what ethnicity, gender social class, etc. they have.” (P1). What several participants (P1; P2; P4 P5; P9; P10; P12) also frequently mentioned was the inclusion of people from various social classes “Nike were good at including different types of environments, both rich and poor places, which showed that all people do not have the same conditions or the same presumption” (P5).

When discussing the participant´s perception regarding the usage of stereotypes in the commercial all participants got the impression that they actively tried to avoid stereotypes. Despite that, some participants (P6; P8; P11; P12) perceived some stereotypes that are commonly used within sports commercials, mainly the stereotype of the physically fit athlete and a lack of various body types.

> "I think this commercial had some stereotypical images (…) I think they failed to include people with different body types, which is negative since the idea of an ideal body is the reason why many people work out. I think this lack of inclusion of different body types often occurs in sports and training commercials which is a shame. I feel like it is still a problem that it is often stereotype-fit people displayed in this type of commercials (P12).

All participants claimed that they were very affected by the emotions in the commercial and that they felt an inviting feeling. "I did not feel like I was interacting with the commercial, but it made me want to do something and to engage in something" (P3). The majority of the participants explained that they got affected by Nike's commercial because of the real feelings that were meditated through the participants. There were also some participants (P3; P7; P8; P9) who mentioned that it might be a connection between their positive feeling towards inclusion and equality and their tendencies to get affected by the emotions communicated.

> In the Nike commercial, I felt invited to interaction, but I think it might have something to do with that the message is clear and that it includes diversity. When I noticed it was very inclusive, I also became more open-minded which might also have made me more receptive to the message and emotions in the commercial (P7).

When discussing different objects and settings in the commercial and how they affected the participants it was mainly two scenes that came up, scenes 9 and 14. Scene 9, previously described in the semiotic analysis (See figure 13), awoke different emotions for the participants. Participants 1,2, 7, and 12 had positive reactions towards the scene. "I noticed the scene with the girl in the niqab that shifted to a guy with a pride flag, it was very nice, and I think it mediated a message that everyone should be able to be themselves" (P1). According to participant 6, the scene was startling, but not only in a positive matter.

> I think it was a bit unclear with the woman in the niqab on the skateboard and that they connect it with the scene with the pride flag, but it could also be based on lack of knowledge from my side, I don't know. (…) but it bothers me and feels a bit stereotypical that the pride flag is included like that, because it is not that open and easy for everyone that struggles with those types of things (P6).

Scene 14 is also described in the semiotic analysis (See figure 11), where two participants (P10; P12) expressed that the scene positively caught their attention and that it indicated that sports are for everyone, no matter what social class you belong to. The general inclusion of different

environments was something the majority of the participants brought up as a positive inclusion of different societal classes and an indication that sports are for everyone and can be performed everywhere. “They were very good at including different types of locations, both rich and poor. They displayed various environments and showed that everyone does not have the same presumptions, but everyone can do sports” (P5).

The majority of the participants mentioned that the commercial affected them positively overall, and other objects which were mentioned as norm-breaking and inclusive was for example the inclusion of women. “I did notice that it was a lot of women included and that they really fought within their sports. It is beautiful that what sports can accomplish, and that people can take a stand through sports” (P3). Several participants also mentioned that the commercial affected them positively by making them feel energized, happy, and inspired to work out or fight harder, both while working out but also in other battles like societal debates about equality. “It makes me want to be a part of fighting for equality for everyone. It made me feel motivated and willing to make a difference within these issues but also to make a difference for myself” (P2).

5. Analysis and discussion

In this chapter the frame of reference and the empirical findings is going to be analyzed and connected. The structure of the chapter is based on the themes from the proposed framework, Diversity, Stereotypes, Tokenism, Socially Conscious Marketing and Self-Concept. Lastly, the extended framework is introduced and explained followed by a discussion of the analysis.

5.1 Diversity

Multicultural representation has been a part of advertising since the 1970s (Giroux, 1993), however, it has been established that poor representation and stereotypes still occur in modern advertising (Tukachinsky et al. 2015; Hobbs, 2017). This is consistent with the responses from all participants, who pointed out the lack of diversity, especially in sports advertising. Research in the US context has shown a lack of inclusion of ethnic and racial diversity in commercials across different media channels (Mastro and Stamps 2018). However, the participants experienced a development when it comes to inclusion and diversity in advertising in recent years, which indicates that it is going in the right direction in the Swedish context. Although all participants agree on the fact that exclusion still occurs, which was also found during the semiotic analysis.

When the participants were asked when they feel included, the majority claimed they feel included when the advertisement reflects them somehow, meaning when they see images they can identify with in terms of looks, interest, feelings, or values. According to Brown (2018) commercials illustrate the company´s target audience using or interacting with their products. So, the diversity or lack of diversity communicates those companies' feelings towards society and the people they choose to include or not include (Brown 2018), which thereby agrees with the participants' feelings towards if they feel included or not.

Something that was highlighted in previous research was the media's major role and impact on consumers (Scharrer and Ramasubramanian 2015; Åkestam 2017). Both commercials included diversity, but in various ways, which provoked different reactions among the participants. The main reactions raised by the participants were Casall’s choice of including the black woman and the problematization regarding how Casall chose to portray her. It has been established in previous studies that different portrayal among ethnic groups is commonly used in advertising. These studies found out that black people were often included in commercials as secondary or

background characters (Jacobs Henderson and Baldasty, 2003; Törngren´s and Ulver´s, 2020). Which was something that participant 5 reacted to and mentioned a feeling of exclusion since the black woman was not integrating with the other people. Instead, she was portrayed as lonely and not a part of the community. This also goes in line with the other participants' experience and the semiotic analysis of Casall's commercial. However, this was nothing that occurred in Nike´s commercial, since all ethnicities were equally portrayed.

5.2 Stereotypes

When discussing stereotypes with the participants the majority had the same idea of the stereotypes commonly used in sports commercials, athletic or slim bodies, white skin tone, and beautiful appearance. This agrees with the traits of skinny and beautiful which Cankaya (2013) concludes to be often shown in stereotypical advertisements. The lack of inclusion and the image of the stereotypical athletic and skinny body was something the participants perceived in both commercials but to various extents. All participants agreed that it was displayed in Casall´s commercial and participants 6, 8, 11, and 12 perceived these tendencies in Nike´s commercial as well. Participant 12 expresses that even if they include different types of people in other aspects, they fail to defy the stereotypes, which is often the case when it comes to sports commercials, and this could have negative effects since the stereotypical body ideal is the reason that many people workout. This is also stated in Grabe et al.´s (2008) research which showed that stereotypes can affect people's self-esteem and body satisfaction by showing women with slim bodies and men with muscular bodies.

According to Eisend, (2010), Kay et al., (2015), and Stanković et al., (2018) there are still differences in how men and women are portrayed in commercials. This was also something the majority of the participants emphasized, especially after they watched the Casall commercial, but it was also something they perceive is commonly used in sports commercials in general. According to Döring & Pöschl (2006), advertising and the way stereotypical gender roles are communicated reinforce how society perceives masculinity and femininity. According to Eisend (2010), the continuous usage of these stereotypes strengthens these gender roles, especially the female ones. Participants 1, 2, 8, and 10 experienced clear differences in how men and women were portrayed in Casall´s commercial and described it as stereotypical gender roles, which was also prominent in the semiotic analysis. The participants mentioned the same indicators which were found in the semiotic analysis in terms of differences in the way the men and women trained, the men more strength, and the women more cardio. They also mentioned differences in the household, the man was doing outdoor chores while the woman was inside

cooking and taking care of the child. This is also in line with Cankaya´s (2013) studies which showed that women are often shown in a context home with children and Khandeparkar´s and Motiani´s (2015) research which concluded that stereotypes of women in advertising do not reflect the modern women.

Another stereotypical factor that the majority of the participants mentioned was the stereotype "the perfect life" which they perceived was illustrated in Casall's commercial. The participants mentioned things like they were always happy, the sun was always shining, and they had perfect hair and makeup even though they were working out. This polished image of reality was also prominent in the semiotic analysis. Some researchers (Davies et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 2008; Kay et al., 2019) claim that these type of stereotypes does affect the society negatively. Several participants (P2; P7; P9 & P10) also claimed they believe these stereotypes harm them and people in general and that marketers should work to avoid them in sports commercials, something they perceived was deliberately done in Nike´s commercial.

What several participants (P5; P6; P7 & P9) also indicated while discussing inclusion in advertising was the importance of not including minority groups in a stereotypical way. This is also emphasized in Borgerson´s and Schroeder´s (2002) research where they claim that consumers interpret ads subjectively and create meaning from that interpretation, which was also raised by participants 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, and 12. Therefore marketers need to avoid stereotypical images, especially those constructed from colonialist, racist, and sexist positions, to foster change (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002).

5.3 Tokenism

According According to Warner (2017), minority groups are included in advertising more than ever, but there are questions raised regarding how they are being portrayed. This issue was also addressed by some of the participants (P4; P6) who claimed that it is not only about including diversity but doing it in a normalized way. They emphasize the importance of finding a balance and making it look real and genuine rather than trying to include every minority group in society. They explain that if people of minority groups are included for the solar purpose of creating a diverse advertisement, they have missed the point of what including diversity really means and it might have a negative effect instead. So, these participants explain the concept of tokenism as negative without being familiar with the concept. As argued in Borman´s (2020) research, tokenism is often experienced as a week attempt to encourage diversity by including

people from underrepresented groups to give an appearance of equality and does not foster any meaningful impact to people or inclusion of minority groups.

Some participants (P1; P2; P4; P6; P11) also explain their concerns about advertisements where diversity is included in a way that feels forced and unnatural. Participant 1 brings up an example of this when an advertisement for example includes ten stereotypical blond Swedish people and one person of color just to show that you care about diversity, even if it is not genuine, a concept which Warner (2017) refers to as plastic representation. It is used to "check a box" of diversity by including people of color but failing to create an authentic role for the person which creates an idea that the person is included for the wrong reason. He explains it further as a combination of synthetic elements that are put together to create what looks like a meaningful imaginary, but what is actually hallow if one view it more thoroughly (Warner, 2017). When analyzing Casall´s commercial more thoroughly through a semiotic analysis some of these tendencies were identified. Breaking down the commercial into separate scenes made it clear that the only character who was not white was only displayed alone and in different environments than the other characters, who were integrating and had some kind of relationship with each other. Similar reactions were also provided in the interviews, especially participants 1, 5, and 6 perceived the colored woman depicted alone as a sign of exclusion rather than inclusion. The typical token role is according to Borman (2020) a person that is not important to the story other than being the only colored character in the cast, which is how several participants (P1; P2; P4; P5; P6; P11) perceived the character. This was also how the character was perceived in the semiotic analysis. Additionally, the fact that participants 7 and 9 did not even notice her says something about the character´s relevance in the commercial´s story. According to Osanami Törngren and Ulver (2020), it is common that people of color are included in commercials as secondary or background roles. Stewart´s (2013) research concluded that there is also a lack of interracial romantic relationships as well as interracial families displayed in advertising and that people of color were often displayed in a token role, which is also tendencies shown in the semiotic analysis of Casall´s commercial.

Gent (2017) argues that rather than foster minority groups, tokenism reminds them that they are different from the dominant norms and that they need to present themselves in a certain way to be included, which agrees with some of the negative aspects that were discussed in the interviews. Another negative aspect of tokenism which was raised by several participants (P1; P2 P4; P6; P8; P9) and presented in Peñaloza´s (2018) research was that if the inclusion

represented in commercials does not reflect how the company organization looks, it indicates it is not genuine, and thereby according to the participants harmed them.

5.4 Socially conscious marketing

When it comes to integrating politics, societal debates, or issues like the lack of inclusion in marketing, there were some differences among the participants regarding how important it is. Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) and Åkestam (2017) explain that consumers' attitudes, values, perceptions, and behavior are factors that are widely influenced by media today, which makes communication like advertising vital to enlighten the diversity debate and how people relate to these social issues. This was also brought up by the majority of the participants who implied that advertising is a suitable tool for reaching out to people and shut the light on important societal debates, especially in today´s information society when marketing can reach so many people. There were also some participants (P6; P7) who mentioned that they think it is extra important for reaching out to younger people, which were also raised by McDonald et al. (2020), who argues that SCM is an efficient way to attracts the attention of desirable segments like young, affluent and educated people. Participants 6 also mentions that it is important that this type of advertisement is created by knowledgeable people, so the message is communicated in a good way. This agrees with De Oca´s (2020) implications that if SCM is executed correctly it will appeal to consumers that want to make a difference at the same time as it favors the company by combining its charitable activities and marketing efforts.

As most participants (P1; P2; P4; P6; P8; P9; P11) brought up the advertisement needs to communicate a genuine feeling for them to be affected by it, otherwise, it might have the opposite effect on them as consumers. Some also questioned if it was possible to make an SCM advertisement completely genuine by a for-profit organization. According to McDonald et al. (2020), brands can make genuine advertising based on societal issues if they connect them to their core purposes in a successful way. The bottom-line for the researchers (De Oca, 2020; McDonald et al., 2020; Sobande 2019) as well as for the participants (P1; P2; P4; P6; P8; P9; P11) is that it needs to be authentic and genuine to not be perceived as woke-washing. Examples that could be perceived as woke-washing from participant 6 were when companies explicitly expressed that they were doing a diversity campaign and still failed to include all minority groups, or as participant 2 mentioned, if the advertisement communicated diversity but the rest of the organization does not align with this message. Participants 4, 10, and 12 mentioned the possible problematization of commercials being angled, and the risk of including such important subjects in angled communication. They also implied that the fact that people

perceive and interpret visual communication differently could be problematic discussing these issues. Furthermore, participants 9 and 11 thought SCM could have some positive effects in terms of spreading information and encourage discussions, even if it did not feel completely genuine. This aligns with Cohen & Dromi´s (2018) opinion that SCM is about brands capitalizing on the solid meaning created by societal problems such as the inclusion of minoritized groups, however, it also works as a channel for politics.

According to Sobande (2019), it is beneficial to connect the brand´s purpose to what is important to the consumers. Some of the participants (P3; P7; P8; P9) mentioned that the reason they felt emotionally affected by Nike's commercial might be because they raised societal issues that they care about, and which are important to them. This could be right since De Oca (2020) argues that SCM commodifies the energy of the emotions that occurs from racial activism or woke politics. So, the advertisement can induce the same feelings for the consumer as the societal debate does.

5.5 Self-concept

Previous research explains self-concept as the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings that define a person (Ulmerich, 2020). However, others claim that the self-concept that consumers use when identifying with a brand is the ideal self-concept rather than the actual self-concept (Aguirre-Rodríguez et al. 2012). This can be strengthened by the consumer interviews since all participants expressed that their thoughts about themselves should match the brand. This indicates that the participant's ideal self got more affected than the actual self. If the consumers are negatively portrayed or not included this can have a negative effect on the consumer and its self-concept (McDonald et al., 2020), which was also brought up by the participants during the interviews. The majority of the participants mentioned that they feel included in marketing when it reflects them. Some participants (P1; P2; P4; P5; P10) mentioned that how marketing portray people affect their thoughts about themselves, others, and society. Participant 1 expressed that seeing slim bodies and beautiful appearance in advertising makes it feel like everyone needs to look like that. Participants 4 and 5 agree and explained that especially young people can feel excluded and insufficient.

Furthermore, the participants also mentioned that it is not only the inclusion of different people that affects them but the inclusion of elements in the commercial that matches their self-concept. Participant 12 expressed that it is not only about seeing yourself in advertising but also about seeing your interests and values reflected in marketing. This goes in line with

previous research, indicating that consumers are not only affected by the brand because of the product but because of the values around the product and brand (Hosany and Martin, 2012). Some participants (P2; P4; P10) claimed that commercials that expressed values incongruent to their own affected them the most in a negative matter since it could affect their way of seeing themself and others. This can be connected to previous research (Sirgy, 1986), which argues that a brand's identity that does not match the consumer's identity can result in dissonance and uncertainty around the consumer´s self-concept. Other participants (P5; P7; P8; P9; P11) agree, but they argue that the congruent values are the ones that affect their emotions the most. This was also highlighted by Kang, Tang & Lee (2015) who explained that high self-congruity also can create an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand.

Another aspect that was raised by the participants when watching the two commercials was the fragmented thoughts that appeared. As mentioned before, previous research highlights that consumers get affected by the values around the brand, and if it is relatable, it affects the consumer positively (Hosany and Martin, 2012). However, previous research has not explicitly discussed how one image can affect the consumer in multiple ways, both positively and negatively. Even though all participants agreed that Nike's commercial generated positive feelings it was not the only feeling all participants perceived. Participant 6 mentioned the uncertainty when watching the scene with the women in the niqab skateboarding transforming into a man skateboarding with a Pride-flag. However, the participant also thought that the inclusion of both pride and religion was positive. This can also be connected to why the majority of the participants thought it was hard to explain how the commercials affected them since there are multiple effects.

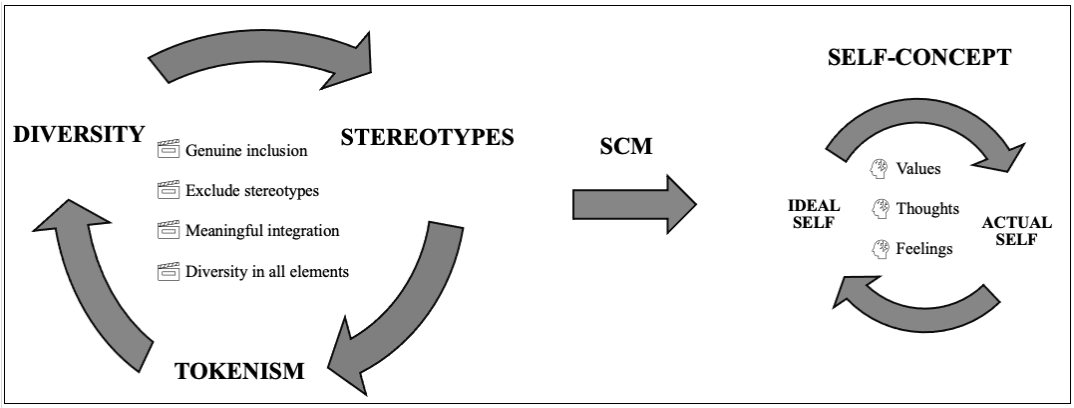
Previous research has established that consumer´s self-concept varies depending on their cultural origin as well as their personal attributes (Triandis, 1996). This can be an explanation of why the participants perceived the commercials differently. Some explained Casall's commercial as peaceful and nice while others explained it as stressful and skewed. When analyzing the commercials through semiotic analysis, it was established that the Nike commercial was more integrative with the viewer through the connotative elements, gaze pose, and participants. This was also raised by the majority of the participants in the interviews who mentioned that they felt more involved watching Nike´s commercial and that they felt more affected by the emotions expressed by the participants in the commercial. Some participants (P3; P4; P7; P8; P9; P10; P11) also mentioned their emotions were enhanced because they meditated both positive and negative feelings, which according to the majority of the

participants was not the case in the Casall commercial. Another explanation could be that everyone felt included in Nike's commercial which influenced their reactions. This could also be strengthened by the theory previously discussed which claims that when consumers are negatively portrayed or not portrayed it can have a negative effect on the consumer and its self-concept and vice versa. (McDonald et al., 2020).

5.6 Extended Framework

When analyzing and connecting the secondary and primary data, some discoveries were made regarding how the proposed framework could be developed. The prominent factors discovered as the most important ones to consider to successfully conduct inclusive and diverse sports advertising were: *Genuine inclusion, Exclude stereotypes, Meaningful integration*, and *Diversity in all elements*. If doing this correctly the possibilities of reaching out to the consumers through SCM will increase and become more natural. It was also established through the analysis that the consumer´s *ideal self* and *actual self* were affected in various ways which in turn is connected to the consumer´s *values*, *thoughts*, and *feelings* towards the commercial and the various elements included in the commercial.

Figure 15: Extended Framework, Commercial's effect on the consumer's self-concept.



Note. Own elaboration

5.7 Discussion

The findings from this research show that diversity is a complex phenomenon that needs to be carefully considered since the interpretations could vary to a large extent depending on the consumer's previous experiences, which affect their values, thoughts, and feelings. So, cultural origin and personal attributes, like ethnicity and gender, influence the consumer and its way of perceiving diversity in advertising (Triandis, 1996) and the effect it will have on the consumer´s self-concept. Furthermore, these elements also influence whether diversity and inclusion in

advertising have negative or positive effects on the consumer's self-concept. The negative effects can cause devastating consequences on the consumer's self-concept, in terms of exclusion, uncertainty, and insufficiency. If including diversity with a holistic approach that makes the consumer feel included, it can affect the consumer´s self-concept positively in a way that makes them feel represented and sufficient. This will in turn make the consumers feel good about themselves and others.

It was also established that if diversity is included in a commercial in a way the consumers can relate to in terms of the consumer´s values, this could also be connected to their ideal selves. This could have a more extensive effect on the consumer's emotions than a commercial including their actual self in terms of physical attributes. So, to influence the consumer is more about reflecting and including their thoughts and values rather than their looks. This can also be connected to the level of self-congruity effect that emerges between the brand's identity and the consumer's identity when they match (Ulmerich, 2020). However, it is not only about the match between the overall perception of the brand and the self-concept, but also about the match between multiple elements communicated by the brand and the consumer´s feelings towards those elements. This means the consumer could have various feelings towards objects and settings exposed in the same image, and therefore the scene induces multiple feelings. This indicates that one commercial does not have a unilateral effect on the consumer´s self-concept. The same image can provoke both positive and negative feelings for the consumer since the consumer´s thoughts and values towards the different diverse elements in the same image could vary.

Furthermore, inclusion and diversity in visual communication can be implemented through different approaches which in turn can affect how the advertisement is perceived by the audience. The integration of diverse elements needs to be meaningful and genuine for the commercial to have a positive impact on the consumer. To achieve meaningful integration of diversity in visual communication it was clear that it is more than just including different types of people. By using a holistic approach where all different elements e.g., different ethnicities, genders, social classes, environments, and feelings are included the advertisement meditates a more genuine inclusion of diversity. To achieve a feeling of genuine inclusion, it also needs to be communication that aligns with the brand´s values (De Oca, 2020) as well as it needs to imply that they don't include diversity in the purpose of capitalizing on societal issues (Sobande 2019).

When including diverse elements, it also needs to have a meaning to the advertisement and the story, besides the meaning of being a diverse element, for the inclusion to have a positive effect

(Warner, 2017). It is vital that diversity is not included through stereotypes for the consumer to perceive it as positive. If diversity is included in a stereotypical way or by including only one diverse element, it can be perceived differently than intended and questions could be raised whether diversity is included or not. This indicates that even though commercials include diversity they can be perceived as excluding if it is done in a stereotypical or token way. Including stereotypes in sports commercials can also affect the consumer's self-concept. The direct effect in the long-term perspective could have devastating consequences on the consumer, like the feeling of exclusion and inadequacy. It was also prominent that the exposure of these stereotypes affected the consumer in terms of how they perceived their ideal self when it comes to ideal bodies and looks. The participants claimed this effect was something that incuses consumers around them as well, especially young consumers. Even if some participants claimed they were not affected directly, they claimed such images could affect them in terms of how they feel about others, which is also connected to their self-concept since the ideal self also includes a person´s view of others.

Furthermore, this study showed that if inclusion and diversity were communicated in a way the consumers perceived as positive and genuine, it affected the consumers emotionally. These feelings are similar to the ones the consumer has towards the societal debate regarding the inclusion of diversity. Therefore, including diversity in commercials can provoke these same feelings (De Oca, 2020) and can thereby be used to affect the consumer emotionally. These feelings are connected to the consumer's ideal self since they are based on the consumer´s thoughts of what is right in society and their opinions in terms of what they believe is important. This in turn makes the consumer want to act towards becoming more like their ideal self, which in this case could be making them feel energized and inspired to work harder, both while working out but also in societal debates about equality to make a difference.

6. Conclusion and implications

In this chapter the conclusion of the findings from this research is presented. Thereafter, the managerial and theoretical implications limitations and future research will be discussed.

6.1 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to get a deeper understanding of how sports brands include diversity in their visual communication through socially conscious marketing. Furthermore, the study aimed to contribute with deeper insights regarding marketing communication of visual character from the consumer perspective and how it influences the individual and its self-concept in the matter of diversity and inclusion. The results of the analysis, with the guidance of the extended framework, landed in four core themes; genuine inclusion, exclude stereotypes, meaningful integration, and diversity in all elements, which are all connected to visual communication and how they influence the consumers' self-concept. The self-concept was affected through the three identified elements; values, thoughts, and feelings, and could thereby help explain how diversity in visual communication affects the consumers.

In conclusion, sports brands work with including diversity in various ways, by including one diverse element such as people or by including several diverse elements such as people, objects, environments, and feelings. Sports brands also use stereotypes to various extent to include people in their visual communication, and this research shows that including diversity through stereotypes might have a negative effect. It was concluded that advertising which includes diversity in several elements as well as avoids stereotypes affects the consumer positively in terms of making them feel included and sufficient. The inclusion must also be meaningful and genuine to have an emotional impact on the consumer. If the advertisement contains stereotypes, only one diverse element, or if the inclusion does not feel genuine, this might have the opposite effect than intended, and the consumers might feel excluded and insufficient instead. It was also stated that stereotypes in sports commercials affect the consumer´s self-concept, more specifically their ideal-self. This since the stereotypes affect the image of their ideal self in terms of what they should look like and how they are supposed to be. Not being able to reach this ideal self makes them feel inadequate and affect the consumers negatively, especially young consumers, and therefore stereotypes in sports commercials should be avoided.

they care about, such as equality in this case. This research also concluded that a commercial does not have a unilateral effect on the consumer´s self-concept, they can have various feelings and perceptions towards various diverse elements in the same image. So, one participant can make them feel insufficient whilst another makes them feel included and the diverse environments make them feel energized and inspired whilst an object can make them feel excluded, all included in the same scene.

6.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

The theoretical implications in terms of the extended framework contribute to a clearer picture of how to use SCM and how to successfully include diversity in commercials. The framework can be used as a guideline regarding which factors are the most important to consider when conducting diverse commercials. It can also be used to explain further how inclusive and non-inclusive visual communication affects the consumer and thereby increase the marketing practitioners understanding regarding the importance of working towards diverse marketing communication.

The study highlights that a successful marketing strategy should be based on inclusive and genuine advertising that makes the consumers positively perceive diversity. It is not only about including various genders and ethnicities in visual communication but also about including them in the right way. Indeed, if they are included but in a stereotyped or token way like it was perceived in the Casall commercial, the consumer might instead perceive the inclusion as negative. To avoid stereotyped and token inclusion marketers need to work with meaningful integration, which means the diverse elements need to have a meaning to the advertisement beyond just an inclusive appearance. One way of avoiding this is to make sure all characters are integrated with the story at some level, which is especially important to avoid tokenism. This could be made by integration among the participants in the commercial but also by integration through other elements such as objects and settings in the commercial. It is also vital to think of diversity as more than just a diverse sample of people in terms of physical attributes. It could also be about including elements that help indicate diversity and inclusion in the advertisement, for instance, objects and settings. These elements can imply to the viewer that the people have various origins, social classes, religions, and so on, which in turn creates a diverse commercial.

If these factors are taken into consideration while conducting sports advertisements, it will make the inclusion perceived as more genuine. This will in turn make it more natural for

practitioners to use SCM to reach out and successfully affect consumers. SCM has proven to be an effective marketing strategy if used right, and in the context of inclusion and diversity, considering these elements while conducting sports commercials will help marketers to authentically include diversity and thereby affecting consumers in a positive way. To gain positive effects of working with diverse and inclusive advertising, practitioners within the sports industry need to be aware of how it should be done. This implies that research within this area is important to spread this knowledge. More research of this character needs to be conducted to gain more theoretical knowledge regarding how to work with inclusion and diversity within the sports industry in a way that has a positive effect on the consumer as well as the industry itself.

6.3 Limitations and further research

Limitations in semiotic research in general, and therefore also in this research, are that semiotic interpretations are subjective (Malhotra et al., 2017). The connotations made are based on the researcher's previous experiences, and since both researchers are not included in any ethnic minority groups, this could limit the insights generated in the semiotic analysis regarding the subject of diversity and inclusion.

There are also limitations in this research due to the number of commercials analyzed. The study generates a deep understanding of two different approaches to how sports brands work with inclusion in their visual communication, but there are more approaches to be discovered and analyzed. Since the conclusion is drawn that the perception of how diversity could differ between consumers there might also be limitations in this research due to the number of consumers interviewed. So, a larger sample of commercials and participants could generate more extensive insights into how sports brands work with the inclusion of diversity and how it affects the consumers' self-concept.

Limitations to this study are also that it is conducted based on Swedish consumers within generation Z. Further research could be extended to other generations or another country to see if those factors have an impact on the effect on the consumer. It could also be interesting to conduct comparative studies between different nationalities or genders to research if there are differences in their perception of inclusiveness and diversity. Other suggestions could also be to study the phenomenon within other industries to see if it affects the consumers differently depending on the industry. Finally, an interesting angle could be to research the subject from another perspective, for example interviewing marketers instead of consumers.

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Appendixes

Appendix A, Interplay of marketing and society

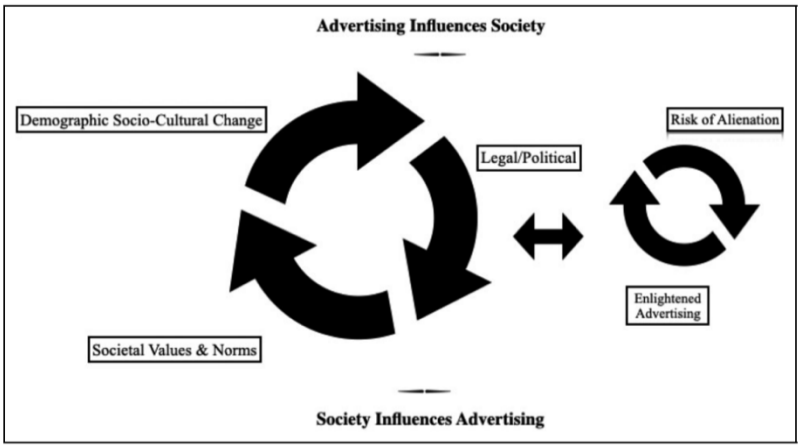

Figure 1. Framework of interplay of marketing and society.

Note. McDonald et al., 2020

Appendix B, Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Date	Length
Participant 1	Female	1998	2021-04-12	35 min
Participant 2	Male	1996	2021-04-12	32 min
Participant 3	Female	1995	2021-04-12	27 min
Participant 4	Male	1999	2021-04-13	34 min
Participant 5	Female	1996	2021-04-14	26 min
Participant 6	Male	1995	2021-04-14	41 min
Participant 7	Male	1998	2021-04-14	41 min
Participant 8	Female	1997	2021-04-15	39 min
Participant 9	Female	1999	2021-04-15	40 min
Participant 10	Male	2000	2021-04-15	35 min
Participant 11	Female	2000	2021-04-19	33 min
Participant 12	Female	1997	2021-04-19	30 min

Note. Own elaboration

Appendix C, Semi-structured interviews

Race and ethnicity

- What does inclusion of diversity in visual marketing mean to you?
- When do you feel included or excluded in visual marketing?
- What stereotypes are commonly used in sports brands commercials in your experience?

Tokenism

- How do you think it could be problematic to work with inclusion in commercials?

Self-Congruity theory

- How does visual communication affect you personally depending on how brands choose to portrait people in commercials?
- How does a commercial that reflects your personal values affect you as a person?
- How does a commercial that does not reflect your personal values affect you as a person?

Socially Conscious Marketing Theory

- How does commercials that deal with societal issues or debates affect you?
- What do you think about using commercials as a communication tool for important societal issues and debates?

The Commercials will be presented – Nike and Casall

- How would you describe the commercials messages?

Participants

- What do you think about the inclusion in the two commercials?
- Would you say that you recognize some stereotypes in the commercials?
- How do you perceive the usage of stereotypes in the two commercials?

Pose

- What do you think the participants body language mediates in the commercials?

Gaze

- When you watch the commercials, do you feel like you are watching from the outside or that you are involved with the commercial, and in what way?
- How do you get affected by the participant´s feelings in the commercials?

Object

- What objects did you notice that stands out in the commercials and what do they represent to you?

Settings

- What do you think the different environments in the commercials mediates?

General Questions

- How does the two different commercials affect your thoughts about yourself?
- How do you think the commercials enlighten societal issues or debate?
- How does it affect you personally?
- Do you have any further thoughts regarding the commercials that you would like to share?