Haaga-Helia

Authentic Rainbow Marketing – Avoiding Pitfalls in Pinkwashing

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Abstract

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This Bachelor's thesis examines rainbow marketing as a concept and the factors making it authentic or inauthentic. The primary aim was to give insight to companies on what consumers perceive as authentic or inauthentic rainbow marketing, thus helping to avoid the pitfalls of pinkwashing in their rainbow marketing and communication efforts in the future. The outcome of this thesis is to publish data based on LGBTQ+ consumers point of view on what rainbow marketing efforts they find authentic and to raise awareness on the importance of authentic rainbow marketing and inclusivity in marketing.

This thesis consists of a theory section and an empirical section that investigates the topic through case advertisements. The theory section goes over authentic marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their importance as well as introduces the concepts of rainbow marketign and pinkwahing based on relevant reference material. The empirical part focuses on responses and opinions on case advertisements and authenticity of different types of rainbow marketing.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this thesis. A self-completion survey was conducted among international respondents that identify as LGBTQ+ to gain the view of the target audience. A total of 101 responses were gathered and analysed using a SPSS statistics software.

The survey showed that the respondents did pay attention to wether companies participate in CSR or implement rainbow marketing, just like literature and current treds suggested. Their reactions to different types of rainbow marketing indicated that they found rainbow marketing more authentic if it has concrete benefits to the LGBTQ+ community or if it is done in some form of co-operation with members of the community.

Literature often suggests the importance of CSR especially currently in the context of sustainability and enviromental issues, but focuses less on the social responsibilities such as diversity and inclusion. This thesis study shows that participating LGBTQ+ consumers placed importance on the authenticity of rainbow marketing and the ways companies implement it. Therefore, it is necessary to keep LGBTQ+ issues and opinions in mind as part of CSR efforts and to implement the right types of rainbow marketing.

| **Keywords** |
| Pinkwashing, rainbow marketing, LGBTQ+ community, corporate social responsibility, authentic marketing |

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1   Introduction

This thesis is a research type of bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in the major specialization of Global Customer Management and Communications. This chapter will go over the objectives, scope, risks, benefits and key concepts of this thesis, defining the research question (RQ) and investigative questions (IQ).

1.1   Introduction

When June rolls around, so does a horde of rainbow logos. Companies show solidarity to the Pride movement and the LGBTQ+ community by changing their logo to a rainbow version of it from the very first day of June, the official Pride month, and often change it back the second June ends. But this gesture that is supposed to be conveying solidarity seems to feel empty for a lot of consumers these days.

During June 2021, among the Helsinki Pride celebrations, one topic seemed to circulate in the LGBTQ+ community: pinkwashing. Pinkwashing in companies happens when they exploit the Pride movement or use LGBTQ+ themes in marketing without supporting the movement or, worse yet, continue to mistreat their LGBTQ+ employees while pretending to be an ally to them in public. As a young marketing professional who belongs to the LGBTQ+ community, the author has long also wondered what she can do to make sure that in the future marketing represents her community accurately and that companies can show their genuine support to the LGBTQ+ community without falling into the pitfall of pinkwashing.

Companies have a low barrier to be involved in Pride and implement marketing with LGBTQ+ elements in Finland. However, it tends to occur only during Pride week or month, and it lacks concrete actions from the companies to support the movement or be inclusive in their operations beyond that (Torvinen 2019).

This can feel very inauthentic for the LGBTQ+ community and a company's effort to be inclusive can backfire and lead to accusations of pinkwashing and virtue signalling for the sake of profiting from Pride. Social media has changed advertising from a one-way street to a dialogue between companies and consumers, giving consumers the power to express their needs, likes, dislikes and opinions (Weber 2019, 27). While the LGBTQ+ community is increasingly being accepted by the general public, they now face a new dilemma in having to navigate which companies genuinely share their values and which ones just aim to exploit them to earn the so-called Queer Dollar.

How can we then make sure that diversity and inclusivity are implemented in a meaningful way in marketing and communications? What factors make rainbow marketing authentic or inauthentic?

1.2 Research Question

This thesis aims to give insight to companies what consumers perceive as authentic or inauthentic rainbow marketing, thus helping to avoid the pitfalls of pinkwashing in their rainbow marketing and communication efforts.

The international aspect required by degree programme of all theses is covered by an internationally distributed qualitative survey conducted in phase 3. This can provide important information on how inclusivity issues and LGBTQ+ themed marketing and communications are dealt with and perceived internationally, even though focus groups focus on the Finnish market and consumers.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis is **What do consumers perceive to be authentic rainbow marketing?** The research question was divided into investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ 1. What are the factors in the marketing activities and content that the target audience perceives as authentic rainbow marketing?

IQ 2. What are the factors in the marketing activities and content that the target audience perceives as inauthentic rainbow marketing?

IQ 3. How does the target audience react to different types of rainbow marketing?

Table 1 below presents the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework*	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
IQ 1. What are the factors in the marketing activities and content that the target audience perceives as authentic rainbow marketing?	Corporate social responsibility (CSR), authentic marketing	Quantitative survey spread internationally to LGBTQ+ identifying participants	4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6
IQ 2. What are the factors in the marketing activities and content that the target audience perceives as inauthentic rainbow marketing?	Corporate social responsibility (CSR), authentic marketing	Quantitative survey spread internationally to LGBTQ+ identifying participants	4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6
IQ 3. How does the target audience react to different types of rainbow marketing?	Consumer behaviour	Quantitative survey spread internationally to LGBTQ+ identifying participants	4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6

1.3   Demarcation

This thesis focused on LGBTQ+ themed marketing and communication, and finding the factors that consumers perceive to make it authentic or inauthentic, to in the future avoid pinkwashing.

It did not study how companies implement LGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives in their day-to-day operations, as that falls more underneath the jurisdiction of human resources rather than the marketing department. It should be noted though, that LGBTQ+ inclusive/friendly initiatives and operations should be implemented and sufficient. Otherwise, any LGBTQ+ themed marketing or communications done will fall under pinkwashing.

In the consumer segment, this thesis will focus solely on the perception of the main target group of rainbow marketing, the LGBTQ+ community. Rainbow marketing also uses and represents parts of their identity, which is why the emphasis should be on what they find inauthentic or authentic rainbow marketing. The thesis will therefore not investigate the general consumer perception of rainbow marketing, to ensure that the views of the target group are sufficiently present in the research.

1.4   Benefits

This thesis benefits companies and people in charge of marketing and communications to further ensure, that if they wish to use LGBTQ+ symbolism or themes in their marketing and show support to the community and the Pride movement, they do it in the way that it includes and honours them.

It benefits LGBTQ+ identifying people by letting their voice be heard on what they find to be authentic rainbow marketing and to make sure that the representation they see in advertising is positive and authentic.

The author benefitted from this thesis in their professional development and is now better equipped to be in positions where understanding of issues of inclusivity, diversity and authenticity are vital. She also has a personal interest as they are part of the LGBTQ+ community themselves. She can now better represent the needs of her community, especially when it comes to delivering authentic marketing and communication.

1.5   Key Concepts

LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (Merriam Webster 2021). This is often used together with a +-sign at the end, to further include any other identities in the sexual or gender orientation spectrum that are not straight or cis-gender. Therefore, that is used in this thesis research as well.

Rainbow marketing, LGBTQ+ marketing and Pride marketing are terms to describe marketing targeted towards LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, or marketing that uses symbols or themes of the LGBTQ+ community or Pride.

Rainbow capitalism is a term used to describe how LGBTQ+ symbolism is being used by companies to improve profits without leading to meaningful improvement for LGBTQ+ communities. (Zheng 2021.)

Pinkwashing is when an organization, country, or government uses gay-related issues in a positive manner to conceal their negative actions (Schulman 2011). In marketing terms, it refers to companies expressing solidarity to the LGBTQ+ community and exploiting the Pride movement only for marketing purposes and to grow purchasing intentions of the LGBTQ+ community (Pycha 2020). A term that can also be used is **rainbow washing**.

Consumer behaviour is the study of the factors that affect consumers' purchasing decisions. The factors are divided into cultural, social, and personal factors. (Kotler 2015, 179.)

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined by the European Commission as the responsibility companies have of their operations, over and above their legal obligations, on their impact on society. CSR can be achieved by companies if they implement social, environmental, ethical, and human rights concerns into their operations and strategy as well as by following the law. (COM/2011/0681.)

Corporate citizenship is when a company is seen as a member of society and it has responsibilities and obligations towards the society just like a private individual would (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 15). According to Blowfield and Murray (2019, 342) it can be used synonymously with **corporate responsibility.**

2   Marketing Authentically for the LGBTQ+ community

This chapter goes over the theory framework for this thesis. The theory framework covers rainbow and authentic marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and consumer behaviour.
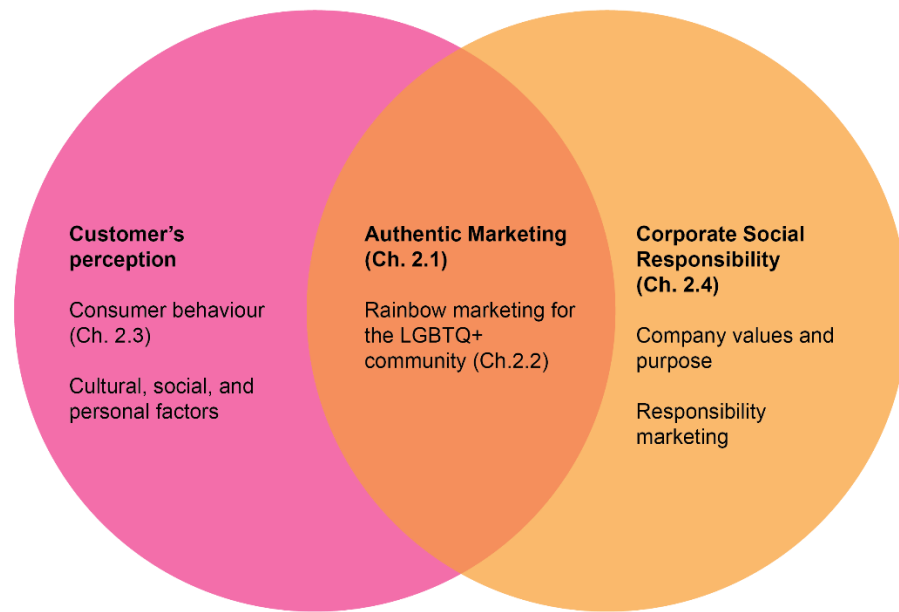

Figure 1. Theory Framework Graph for Authentic Marketing

As seen in figure 1, this thesis suggests that authentic marketing happens when customers' perception of the marketing, which affects consumer behaviour, meets with companies' values and purpose, CSR efforts, and marketing efforts. The theory framework also covers the concepts of rainbow marketing and pinkwashing.

2.1   Authentic Marketing

Social media has changed marketing in a way that advertising is no longer a one-way street but a dialogue between companies and consumers. This allows consumers to quickly express their needs, likes, dislikes, and opinions on companies and their advertising. Therefore, according to Weber (2019, ix), it is critical for companies to operate ethically and stay relevant authentically to survive in business today. This dialogue between consumers and the company does also offer opportunities to companies that implement authentic marketing well and implement actions that do "deeper good" on top of their immediate operations, as they can gain an even deeper brand loyalty from consumers. (Weber 2019, ix-27.)

2.2 Rainbow Marketing and Pinkwashing

Rainbow marketing is marketing targeted towards LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, or marketing that uses symbols or themes of the LGBTQ+ community or Pride. Most often it is implemented during June, as it is the international Pride week worldwide, or for local companies during local Pride weeks or events. Rainbow marketing can also be implemented year-round though, by use of LGBTQ+ presenting individuals and LGBTQ+ symbols or themes in non-Pride related advertisements, for example by having same sex couples in ads.

The ways companies can implement rainbow marketing can be very varied, both in types of rainbow marketing and its authenticity. Many companies participate on social media by changing their logo to a rainbow (or Pride flag) variant of their logo during June or by posting in solidarity on their social media channels when local Pride week takes place. Table 2 lists some other common examples of rainbow marketing and their explanations.

Table 2. Examples of rainbow marketing efforts

Type of Rainbow marketing	Explanation
Rainbow/Pride flag logo variant	Used on company website or social media channels in place of their original logo
Social media posts in support of Pride month or week	Can be implemented in many ways and in multiple channels
Rainbow or Pride edition products	Product lines with a rainbow print or otherwise Pride/LGBTQ+ related themes or symbols
Discounts during Pride week or month	Specifically advertised that discount(s) related to Pride celebrations, not all discounts during June or local Pride weeks
Use of LGBTQ+ presenting individuals in advertisements or campaigns	Hiring LGBTQ+ identifying people to appear in advertisements Featuring LGBTQ+ characters in advertisements
Use of LGBTQ+ language slang in advertisements or campaigns	Phrases or words such as yaas, slay, werk etc.
Sponsoring or partnering, or hosting Pride events	Events during Pride week or month, events to support LGBTQ+ community and cause
Donating to LGBTQ+ causes	Can be donations to LGBTQ+ associations or charities A separate donation or donating a part of sales of certain product(s) (for example Pride edition products)

The term pinkwashing in the LGBTQ+ context originated from an op-ed article written by Sarah Schulman (2011), where she used it to describe the Israeli governments efforts to promote a modern and progressive image and deliberately concealing violations of Palestinians' human rights by using Israeli gay lifestyle. Further, in a marketing context it stands for companies showing solidarity or support to Pride and the LGBTQ+ community with the sole purpose to make profit, without making any meaningful changes in their operations to ensure inclusivity or safety to the LGBTQ+ community.

Pinkwashing is also used as a term to describe the actions of companies that claim to be a part of the efforts to eradicate breast cancer, while still having practices that might be contributing to rising rates of the disease (Malkan 2007, 75). Therefore, it is important to note that whenever this thesis discusses pinkwashing it focuses solely on the LGBTQ+ issues and marketing efforts, not breast cancer.

2.3 Consumer Behaviour

As consumer behaviour studies consumer purchasing behaviours (Kotler 2015, 179), it can be argued that it also influences how the consumer perceives the marketing they see as the marketing is trying to influence their purchasing decision. Meaning, whether the consumer perceives the marketing to be authentic or not is likely influenced by the same factors as consumer behaviour is influenced by. The three factors affecting consumer behaviour are cultural, social, and personal (Kotler 2015, 179).

Cultural factors have the most weight on consumer behaviour of these three factors, as the culture a person grows up in shapes their behaviour. Subcultures, such as religions or nationalities, further shape the individual based on the ones they belong to, as they deepen the specific identifications of the individual and socialization to the subculture. (Kotler 2015, 179-181.)

Social factors are the influence of all the social links of the individual that affect their consumer behaviour either directly or indirectly. The influences are grouped into reference groups, which can be primary (informal) or secondary (formal). Primary reference groups the individual is in contact with frequently and informally, for example family and friends. Secondary reference groups have less frequent contact and are more formal in nature. Secondary reference groups can be for example religious or professional groups. (Kotler 2015, 181.)

Finally, personal factors are defined by who the individual is – for example their age, occupation, personality, lifestyle, and values (Kotler 2015, 183). For authentic marketing it could be argued that most important of these would be the values, as if the consumers values align with the company, they are probably more likely to see their marketing efforts as authentic. Though, the effect of the other personal factors should be considered as well.

2.4 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

According to study by Horizon Media (no date in Landrum 2017) 81% of millennials except companies to make public declarations of their corporate citizenship. This means that consumers see that companies have responsibilities to society just like private citizens do and that millennials have higher expectations for companies' social responsibilities aside from their immediate operations than before. Consumers generally demand companies to operate with better values and purpose than ever before (Weber 2019, 27). CSR, when emphasising corporate ethics, is about what kinds of moral responsibilities companies have globally and locally (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 14). Responsibility is also seen as an integral way to differentiate a product or a service and the company itself in an increasingly competitive fields and why responsibility marketing is currently an important part of companies' marketing strategies (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 145).

CSR can be divided to three main categories: economic, environmental, and social responsibilities. Companies can impact these categories both directly and indirectly and they also overlap and affect each other. Figure 1 illustrates the categories as well as some of the different indirect and direct impacts companies' CSR efforts can have. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012,17.)
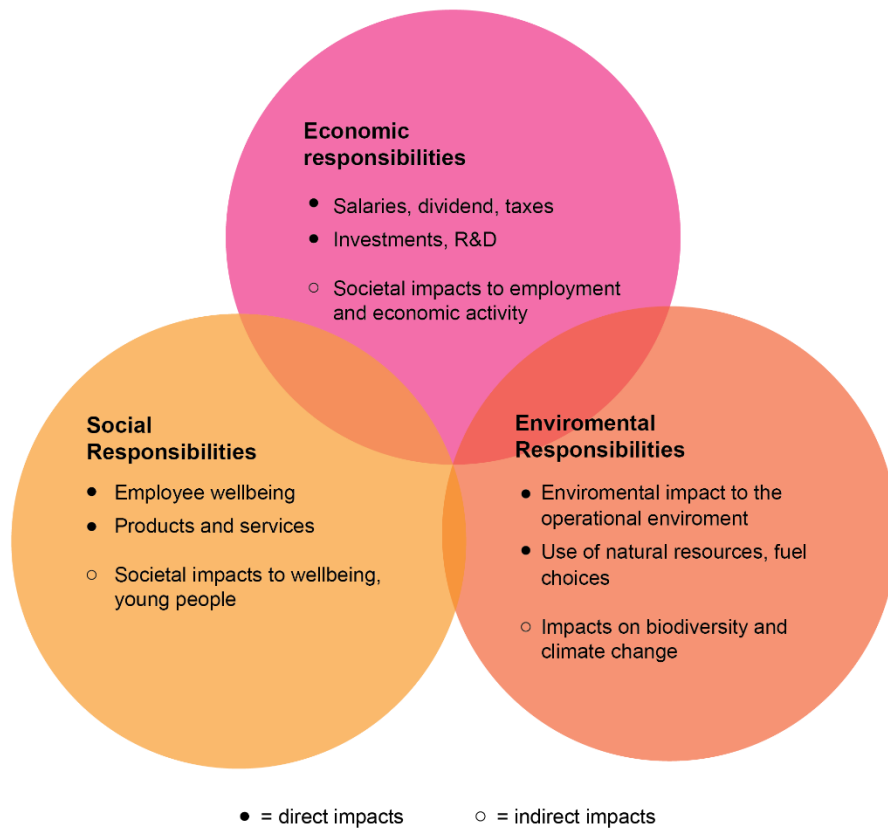
Economic responsibilities

- Salaries, dividend, taxes
- Investments, R&D
- Societal impacts to employment and economic activity

Social Responsibilities

- Employee wellbeing
- Products and services
- Societal impacts to wellbeing, young people

Enviromental Responsibilities

- Enviromental impact to the operational enviroment
- Use of natural resources, fuel choices
- Impacts on biodiversity and climate change

● = direct impacts ○ = indirect impacts

Figure 2. CSR Categories (adapted from Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 17)

When rainbow marketing and how companies handle diversity and inclusion in general is considered, it is related to the social responsibilities section of CSR. These impacts can be direct as employees or customers that identify as LGBTQ+ are directly impacted by the companies' actions, for example by if a store refuses service for LGBTQ+ individuals or by if LGBTQ+ issues are addressed badly or well at the workplace. The impacts can also be indirect, as for example advertisements featuring LGBTQ+ themes or symbols can be either good representation and give important awareness to LGBTQ+ issues or perpetuate harmful stereotypes and strengthen these harmful views in the general public's eye.

According to Harmaala and Jallinoja (2012, 3) it is important for companies to also consider all stakeholder groups aside from economic activities and sustainability issues. Therefore, these days it is important for companies to better take into consideration the LGBTQ+ community as well.

3 Research Methods

This chapter goes over the design of this thesis research, its population and samples, data collection, data analysis methods, reliability, validity and relevance of the data, as well as data analysis.
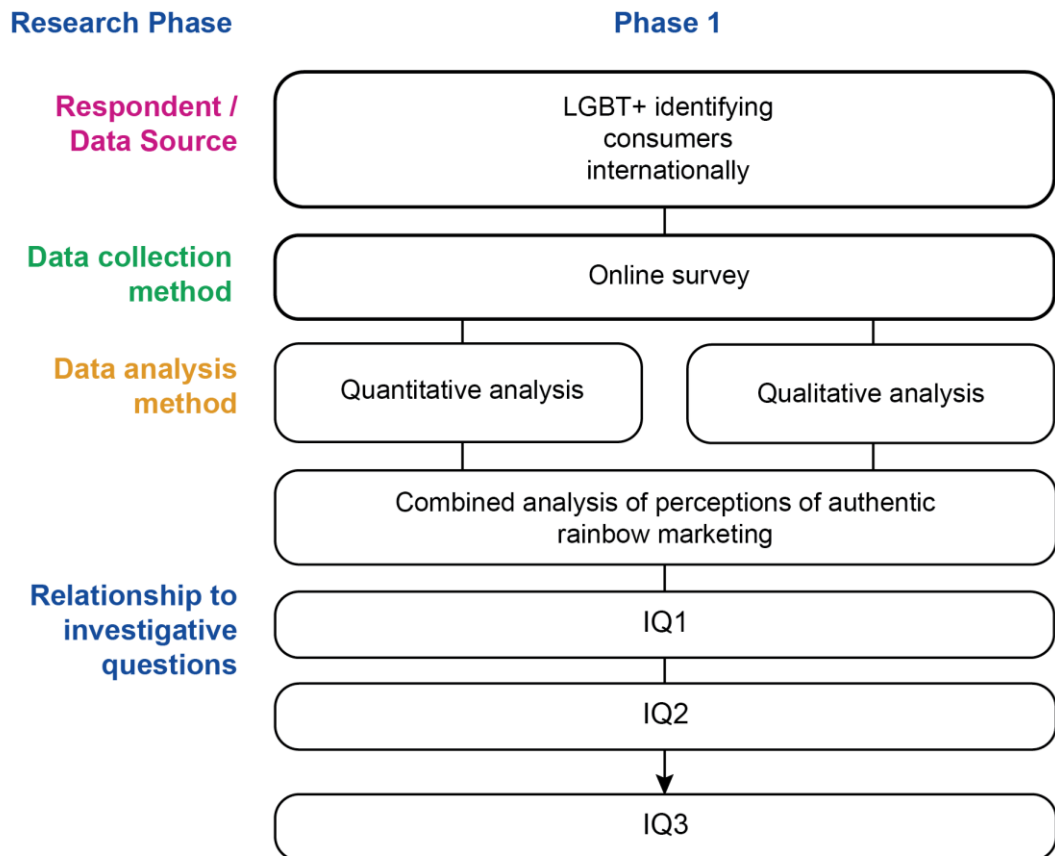
3.1 Research Design

Figure 3. Research design

As seen in figure 3, this research was conducted in one primary phase. To collect data on the target audience's opinions on rainbow marketing a survey was distributed as widely as possible. The survey developed data on what are the reactions to advertisements that are deemed inauthentic rainbow marketing by asking some general questions around CRS and rainbow marketing. The respondents were also shown three examples of rainbow marketing and to answer some questions on their reactions based on them. This was also the main international aspect of the thesis as it sought out as many LGBTQ+ identifying respondents internationally as possible. The primary phase aimed to answer all three IQs presented before.

3.2   Population and Sampling

The survey population was LGBTQ+ identifying individuals internationally. As discussed in the demarcation chapter previously, a focus on the LGBTQ+ community was chosen as they are generally the main target audience of rainbow marketing. The target sample size was 100 participants and the survey managed to reach a total of 135 respondents out of which 101 were valid participants and included in the sample.

Non-probability methods were used to gather the sample. The method used was so called snowball sampling, where respondents, if willing, would share the survey on to their contacts thus recruiting more respondents. The decision to use this method was made based on the resources of this study and the convenience of the method.

3.3   Data Collection

The data was collected by using a self-completion survey which was distributed internationally and hosted on Webropol. The survey was accessed via an open weblink that was open from 1st of February 2022 until 20th of February 2022, and all data was collected anonymously.

3.4   Data Analysis Methods

This thesis used qualitative methods for data collection. Quantitative survey was used to gain an understanding of the perception of authentic rainbow marketing. According to McGivern (2013, 201), a self-completion quantitative survey is a cost-effective way to collect data from a population that can be otherwise hard to reach. That is ideal for this thesis, as it aimed to gain an international sample in the survey and was looking to gain data in cost-effective ways.

According to McGivern (2013, 146) qualitative data is rich and detailed descriptions and aims to understand and give insight to the topic research rather than measuring it. That is why some open questions were included in the survey conducted to support the quantitative data and therefore qualitative methods were used to analyse these open questions.

3.5   Reliability, Validity and Relevance

This chapter discusses some of the ways reliability, validity, and relevance were planned to be ensured during the process of this thesis' empirical research phase.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it was decided to use a quantitative survey to collect data from the target group, as it allowed for a cost-effective way to collect relevant data. The survey was to be designed in a way to ensure that questions or the survey structure would not lead the respondents in any way and affect their answers or opinions.

For data collection the tool to be used Webropol, which is an online survey tool. It would allow for the data to be collected securely, easily, and anonymously. It also would allow for screening questions, ensuring that all respondents in the sample were part of the target group and therefore relevant respondents. All participants should identify as LGBTQ+ to gain relevant data from the target group. The survey data sample needed to be international as well, to fulfil the international requirements of the degree programme and to gain as relevant data as possible internationally.

For the data to be relevant to be analysed the quantitative survey should gain as many respondents as possible, a minimum of 100 participants belonging to the target group. Therefore, there was a significant risk of not acquiring enough relevant data from the target group. The sampling method snowball sampling was chosen so that the survey would reach as many valid respondents from the target group as possible, as participants belonging to the target group could recruit others from their social circles.

The tool chosen for data analysis was SPSS statistic software, and the data was to be analysed quantitatively or qualitatively depending on the type of question. Data analysis would take into account all data, not emitting any results that would be relevant to the results to ensure reliability and validity of the results.

3.6   Data Analysis

As discussed in the previous chapter, the main tool used to analyse the quantitative data collected was a SPSS statistic software. The data was imported from Webropol to the software where necessary analysis could be carried out. The data was further categorized, examined, and formatted in Excel before including them to the report. Qualitative data was exported from Webropol to Excel where it was categorized, analysed, and formatted before including them to the report.

4 Results

This chapter discusses the results of this research. The first subchapter goes over the demographics of the respondents. Then, the results are divided into chapters by first looking into the general questions on rainbow marketing and corporate social responsibility and then moving on to results one by one of the advertisements shown to participants in the survey. The final chapter covers the authenticity of different types of rainbow marketing.

4.1 Introduction To Respondents

This chapter briefly goes over the demographics of the respondents of the survey.
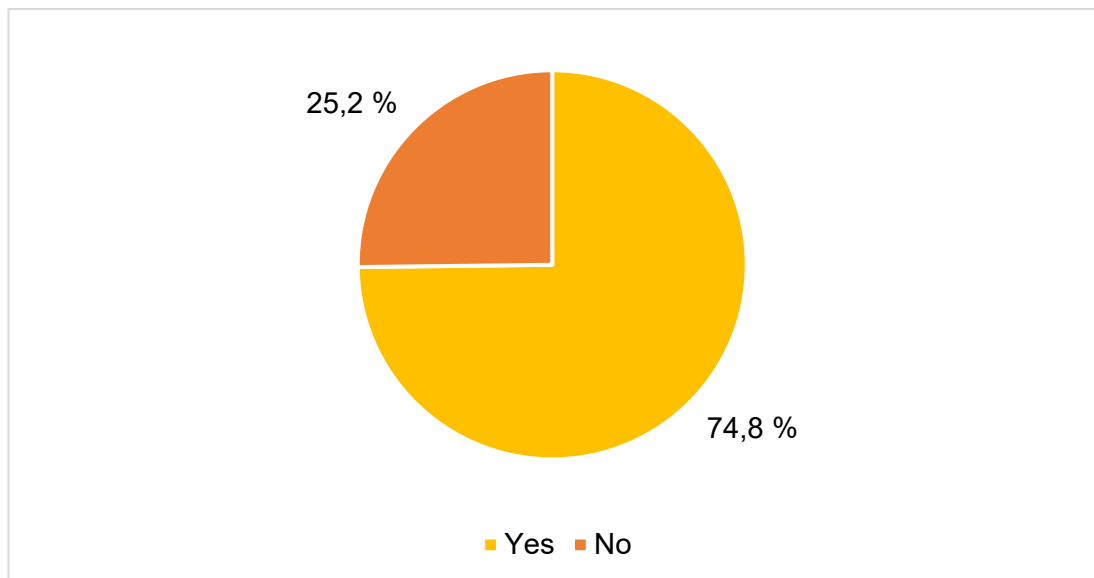
Figure 4. Respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ (n=135)

The survey started with a screening question, as the intended sample target audience was individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. Therefore, if respondents chose no, as in they do not identify as LGBTQ+, the survey would end for them, and they would not be a part of the sample. From the total number of respondents, 74,8% identified as LGBTQ+ and continued to fill out the rest of the survey.
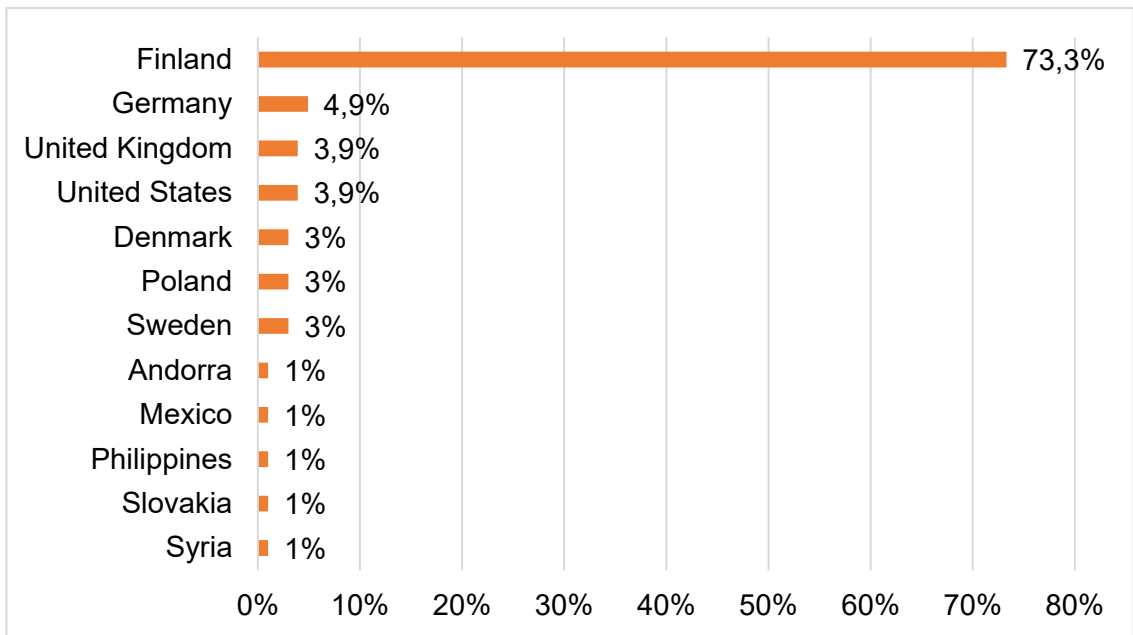
Figure 5. Survey sample demographics by country of origin (n=101)

The sample consisted of mostly Finnish respondents, as 73,3% were from Finland. International respondents were 26,7% of the sample, many of them coming from Europe.
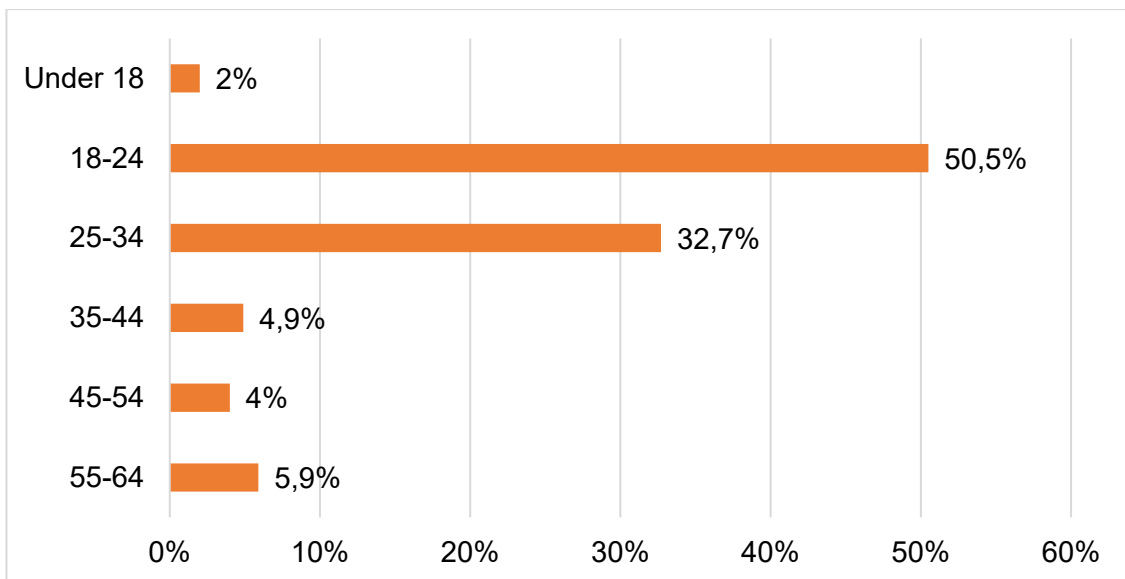

Figure 6. Survey sample demographics by age of respondents (n=101)

Around half of the sample were between the ages of 18-24, with 50,5% respondents reporting that as their age range. Total 85,2% of respondents were 34 years or younger and 14,8% were above the age of 34.

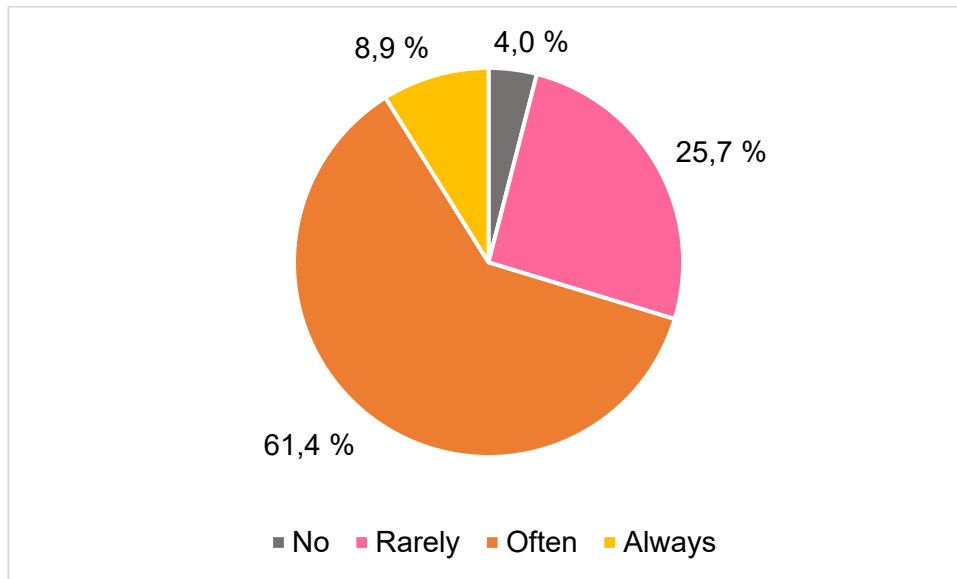## 4.2 Corporate Social Responsibility and Rainbow Marketing

Figure 7. Frequency of paying attention to whether companies participate in CSR (n=101)

Majority of the respondents pay attention to whether companies participate in CSR often, with 61,1% of respondents choosing this option. Additionally, around 9% of respondents reported paying attention to CSR implementing always. About a quarter of respondents said they rarely pay attention and 4% said they do not pay attention to whether companies participate in CSR.
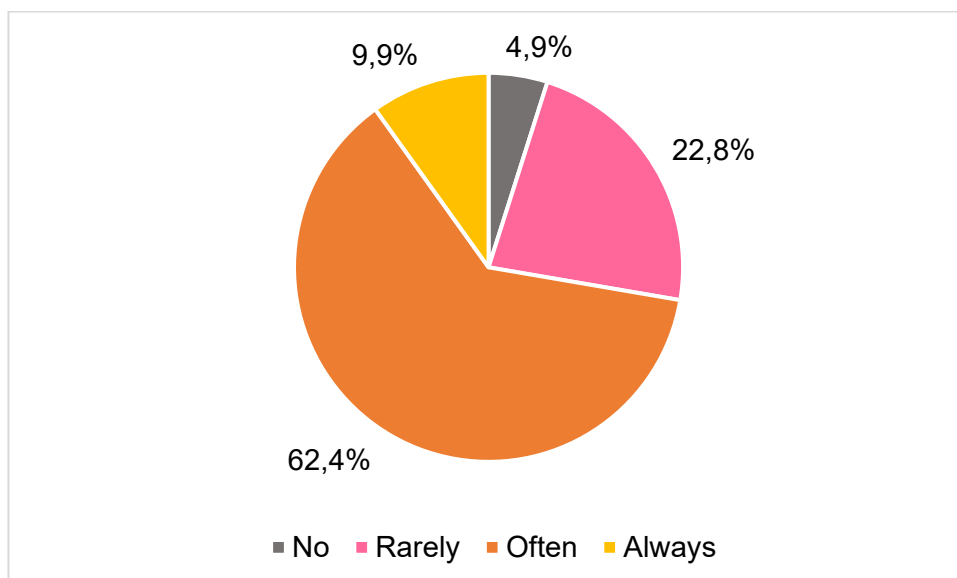

Figure 8. Frequency of paying attention to whether companies implement rainbow marketing (n=101)

Majority of the respondents pay attention to whether companies implement rainbow marketing often, with 62,4% of respondents choosing this option. Around 9,9% of the respondents answered that they always pay attention to whether companies implement rainbow marketing. Rarely paying attention was 22,8% of the respondents and 4,9% said they do not pay attention to whether companies participate in CSR.

There is a slight increase in respondents who pay attention to whether companies implement rainbow marketing often or always compared to the number of respondents who paid attention to whether companies participate in CSR often or always. This could be explained by LGBTQ+ identifying individuals paying more consciously attention to rainbow marketing than other CSR activities as the sample consisted of only members of the LGBTQ+ community. Although, there is also an increase in the number of respondents who said that they do not pay attention to whether companies implement rainbow marketing compared to the number of respondents who do not pay attention to whether companies participate in CSR.
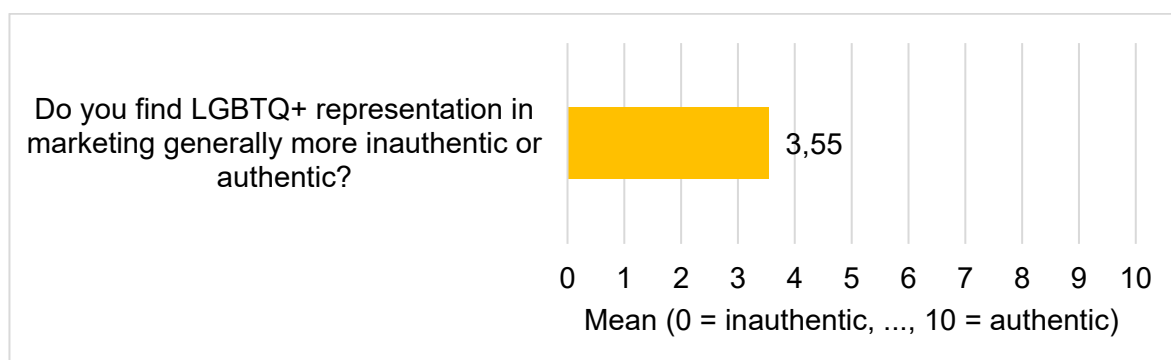

Figure 9. Mean opinion on LGBTQ+ representation in marketing (n=101)

The participants were asked of their opinion on the general authenticity of LGBTQ+ representation in marketing. The mean opinion came out to a value of 3,55, meaning that respondents overall found LGBTQ+ representation in marketing generally more inauthentic than authentic.
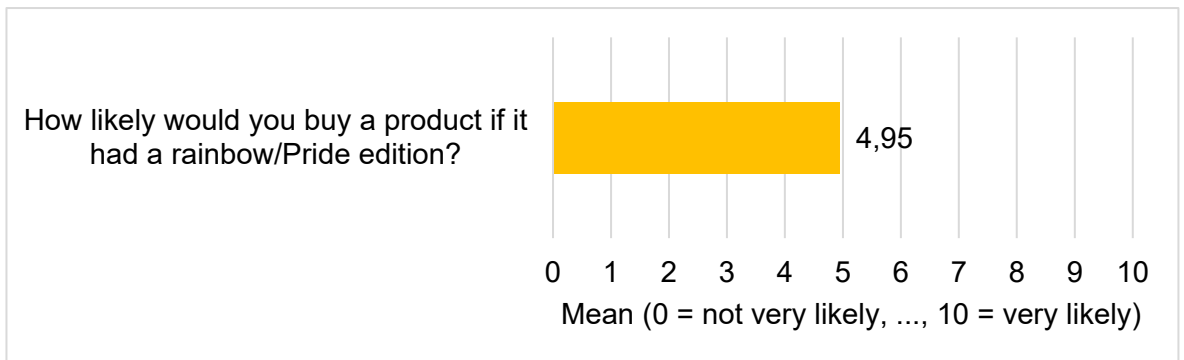
Figure 10. Mean likeliness of purchasing a rainbow/Pride edition product (n=101)

The mean likeliness of purchasing a rainbow or Pride edition of a product is very close to the middle with the mean value of 4,95. Based on this, respondents would overall be neutral to rainbow edition products, neither clearly likely nor not likely to purchase one.

4.3   Case Advertisement – Burger King

Figure 11. Image from campaign by Burger King (BURGER KING Suomi 2021)

The first advertisement shown to respondents Pride campaign by Burger King. The advertisement shows the Burger King mascot kissing the McDonald's mascot Ronald McDonald with the slogan "Love Conquers All".
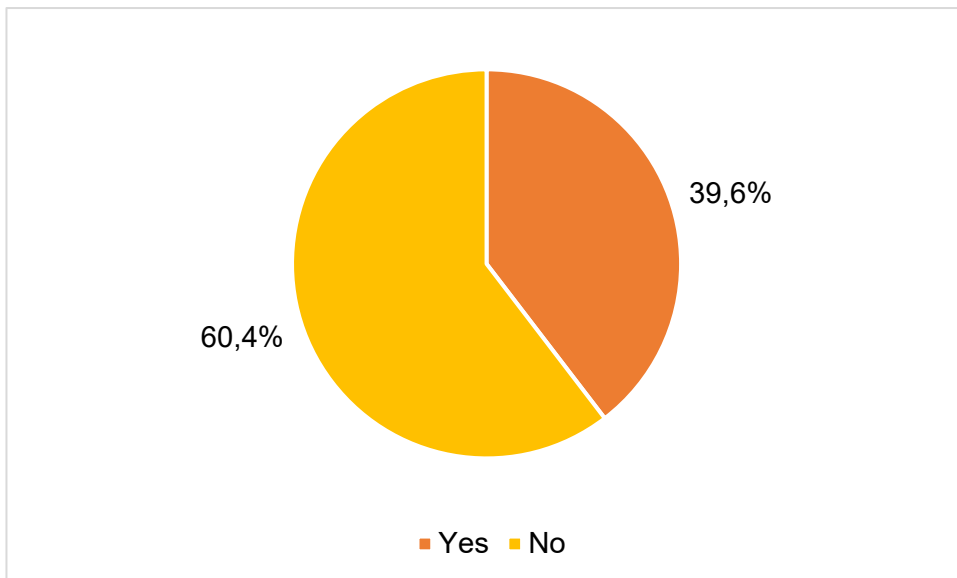
Figure 12. Previous familiarity with advertisement – Burger King (n=101)

Majority of respondents were not previously familiar with the ad, with 39,6% of respondents saying they had seen the ad before and 60,4% respondents stating that they had not seen the ad before. This advertisement was the most well-known of the three shown to the participants.
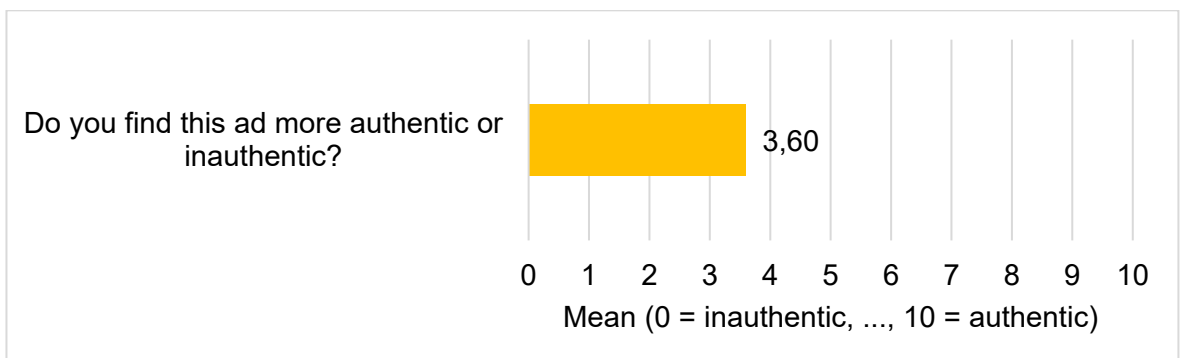

Figure 13. Mean opinions on advertisement authenticity – Burger King (n=101)

The mean opinion on for the Burger King advertisement was fairly low, and it got the lowest mean opinion out of all the presented advertisements with the mean value of 3,60. This means that respondents found the advertisement more on the side of inauthentic than authentic rainbow marketing.
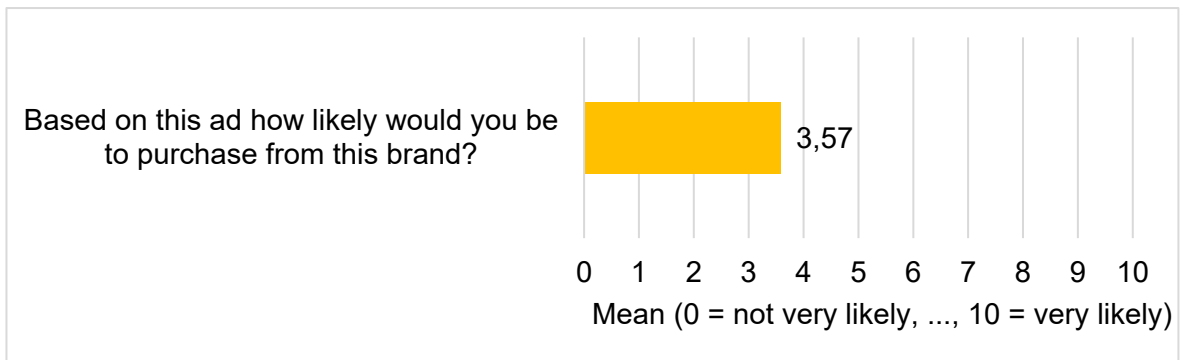
Figure 14. Mean likeliness of purchasing from brand based on advertisement – Burger King (n=101)

The mean likeness to purchase from presented brand based on advertisement was similarly low to the mean opinion on authenticity of advertisement for the Burger King advertisement presented, with the mean value of 3,57. Based on this, respondents were not likely to purchase from the brand based on the advertisement shown. The Burger King advertisement had the lowest mean likeliness to purchase compared to the other brands.

Table 3. Respondent reactions to advertisement – Burger King

Positive comments	Fun, good representation, good that big companies acknowledge LGBTQ+ community, just mascots kissing
Neutral comments	Neutral, did not seem like an ad
Negative comments	Feels like it's trying to just use shock value, looks like it is meant to be funny or a joke, does not feel genuine, does not represent the LGBTQ+ community or advance their issues, companies' previous negative brand image takes away from the authenticity (ethical issues), monetizing from Pride

This advertisement got generally more negative responses from the respondents than positive or neutral ones. Most of the negative responses from the respondents seemed to be on the possible use of a same sex kiss as shock value and the feeling that the advertisement felt like it was supposed to be a joke. The feeling of the advertisement being for shock value purposes was explained by respondents for example by the fact that the brands represented in the advertisements have had previous troubles with ethical business practices as well as by the confusion as to why the mascots were kissing as either have never previously been represented as being LGBTQ+.

On the other hand, positive reactions from respondents found the ad to be fun in a positive way and a good representation of the LGBTQ+ community. They also appreciated

that big companies acknowledge the LGBTQ+ community in their marketing and spread awareness.
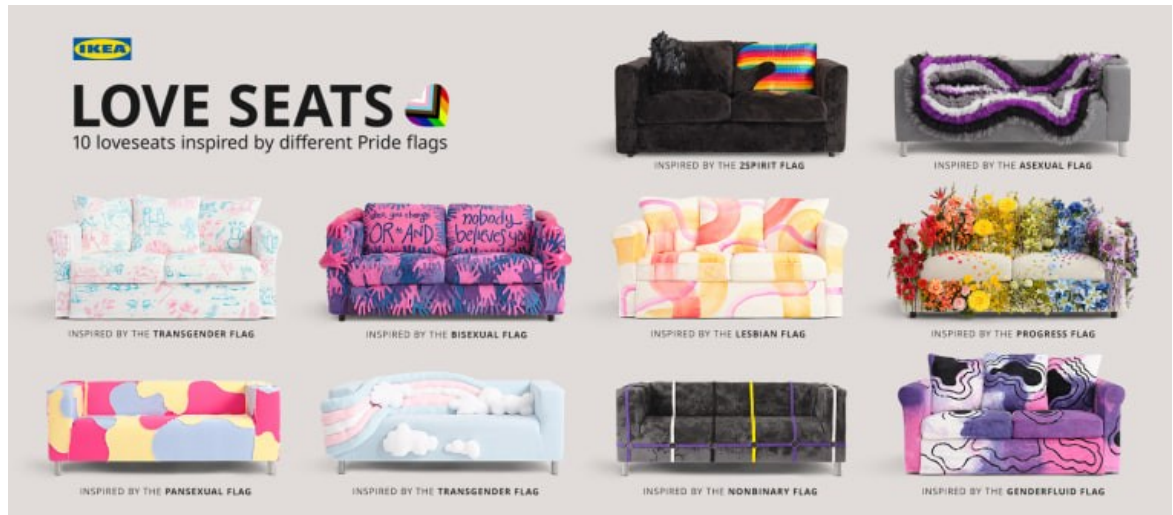
4.4   Case Advertisement – Ikea

Figure 15. Image from a Pride campaign by Ikea Canada (Panchal 2021)

The second ad shown to participants was a campaign by Ikea Canada. The campaign collaborated with LGBTQ+ artists to design loveseats inspired by different Pride flags. The loveseats were display only and not available for sale.
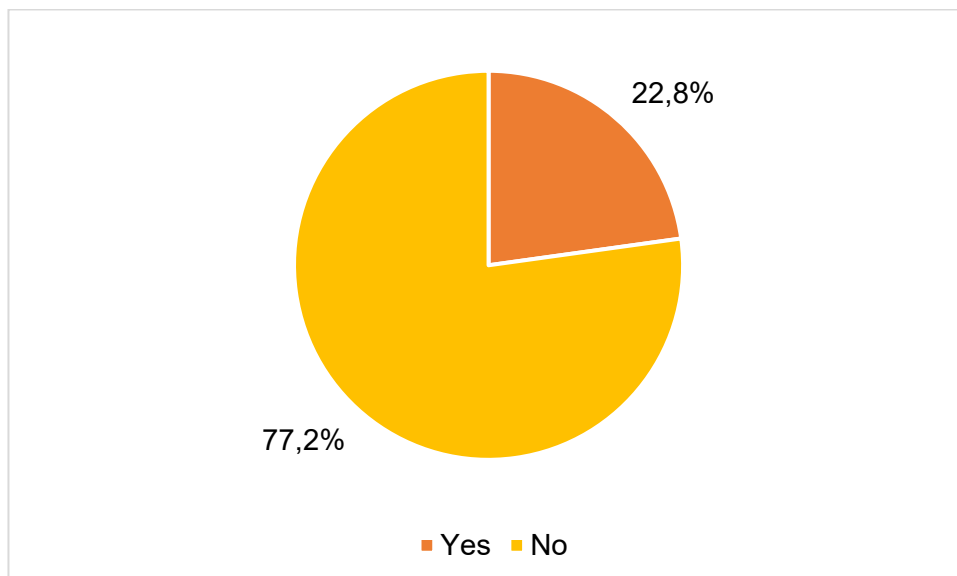

Figure 16. Previous familiarity with advertisement – Ikea (n=101)

Majority of respondents were not previously familiar with the ad, with 22,8% of respondents saying they had seen the ad before and 77,2% respondents stating that they had not seen the ad before.
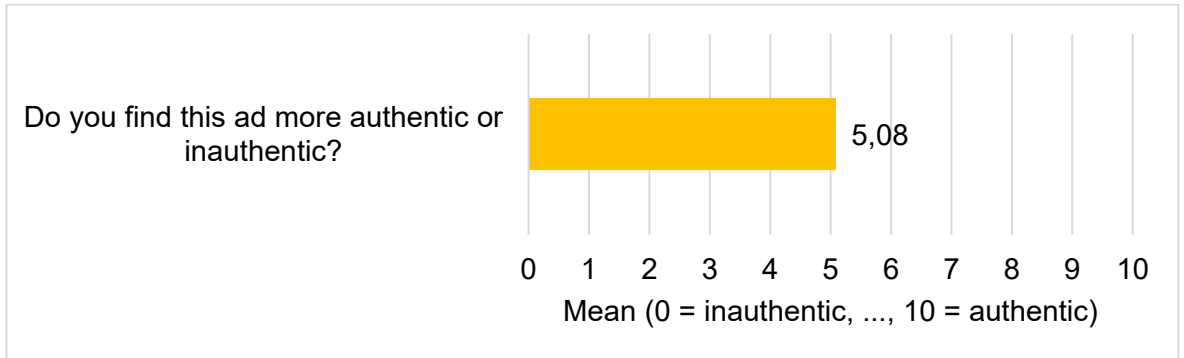
Figure 17. Mean opinions on advertisement authenticity – Ikea (n=101)

The Ikea advertisements mean opinion falls nearly right in the middle of the scale between inauthenticity and authenticity, as it got the mean value of 5,08. Based on this, the respondents felt the most neutral about this advertisement overall compared to the other advertisements presented.
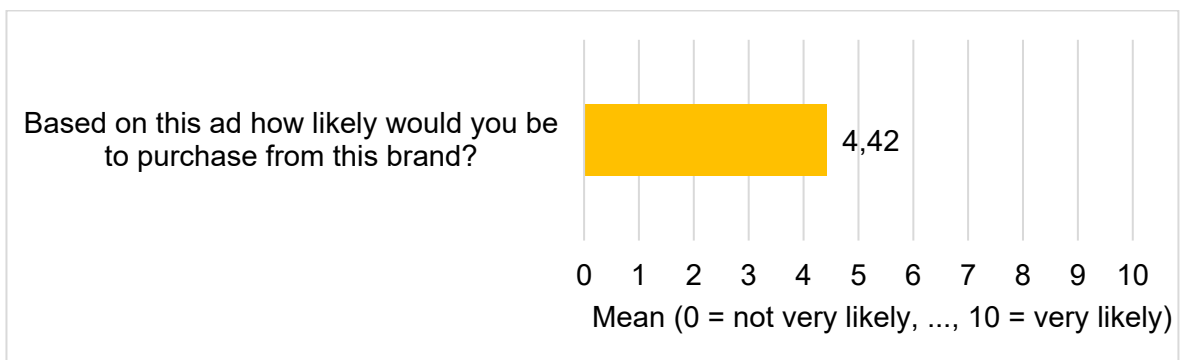

Figure 18. Mean likeliness of purchasing from brand based on advertisement – Ikea (n=101)

Mean likeliness of purchasing from brand based on advertisement for the Ikea advertisement is slightly below the middle of the scale, with the mean value of 4,42. Based on this, respondents were generally neutral or not likely to purchase from the brand based on the advertisement shown.

Table 4. Reactions to advertisement - Ikea

Positive comments	Diverse and inclusive representation of different LGBTQ+ identities, cool and innovative, feels authentic and well thought out, not sexualized
Neutral comments	Subtle message, wishing for human representation as well even if diverse identities represented, silly and strange, not knowing if loveseats designed by LGBTQ+ individuals
Negative comments	Ugly and lazy designs, too striking, trying to profit from Pride, stereotypical deceptions, forced, not anything anyone would ask for, some designs offensive

This advertisement got an overall balanced spread of all negative, positive, and neutral responses from the participants. Starting with the neutral comments, they were mainly on how the advertisement felt silly and strange, and how the statement it was making was too subtle. Some respondents were wondering if the loveseats were designed by actual LGBTQ+ individuals and others would have liked to see some humans represented together with the loveseats.

The positive responses were happy about the diverse representation of different identities in the advertisement and found it cool, innovative, authentic and well thought out. Some respondents were also pleased to see an advertisement with LGBTQ+ elements without sexualizing the community.

The negative responses were mainly about how the designs were ugly and lazy or too striking and how no one would buy them or ask for this form of representation. Some found parts of the designs offensive, for example one respondent found that the text used in the loveseat inspired by the bisexual flag is a stereotypical way to think about bisexuals and feels off. Some commented how the advertisement felt like it is just trying to profit from Pride and how it feels forced.

4.5   Case advertisement – Lush

Figure 19. Tweet by @lushcosmetics advertising for Valentine's Day (Lush North America 2017)

For the third advertisement shown to participants a non-Pride related ad was chosen. This tweet by Lush North America is a good example of an ad that is not directly related to Pride or posted during Pride month or week, but simply features a same sex couple.
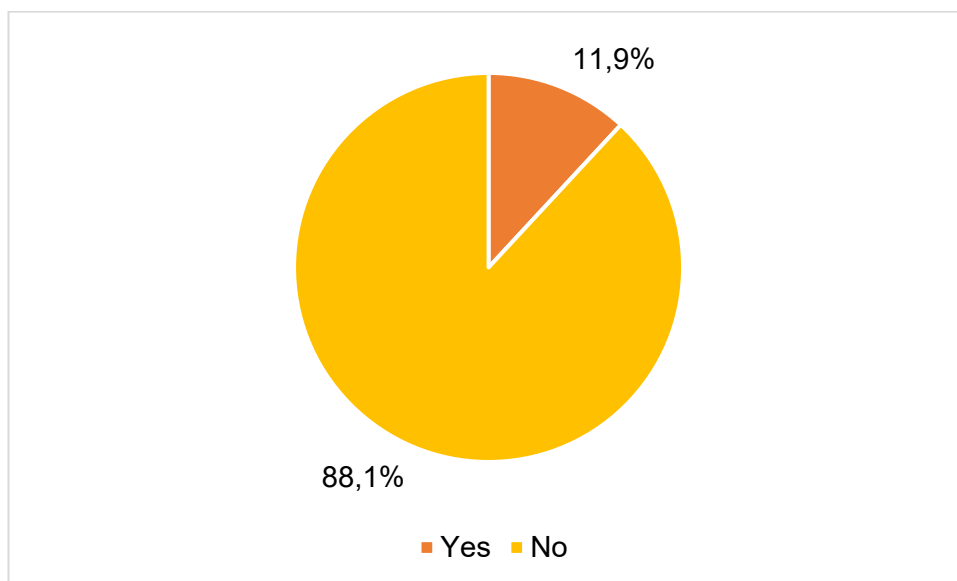

Figure 20. Previous familiarity with ad – Lush (n=101)

Majority of respondents were not previously familiar with the ad, with only 11,9% of respondents saying they had seen the ad before and 88,1% respondents stating that they

had not seen the ad before. This advertisement was the least well known to the participants.
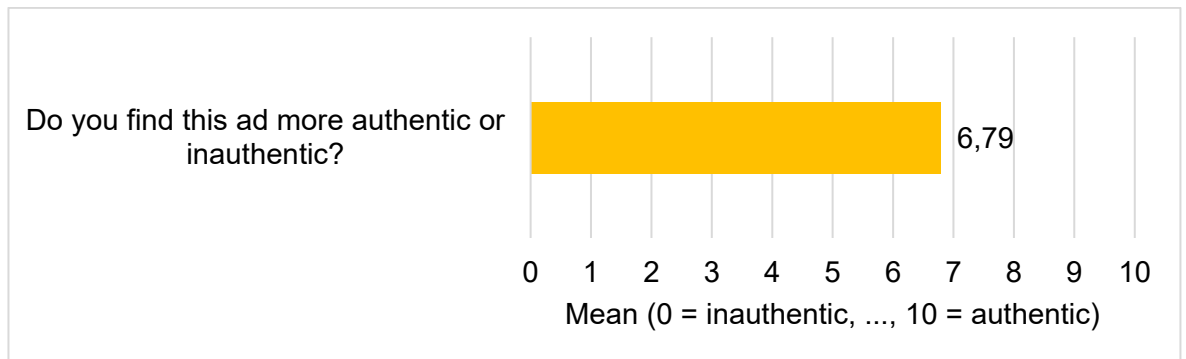

Figure 21. Mean opinions on advertisement authenticity – Lush (n=101)

The mean opinion on advertisement was higher than the other advertisements, as it got a mean value of 6,79. This means that respondents found the advertisement more on the side of authentic than inauthentic rainbow marketing, and the most authentic rainbow marketing out of all the advertisements presented.
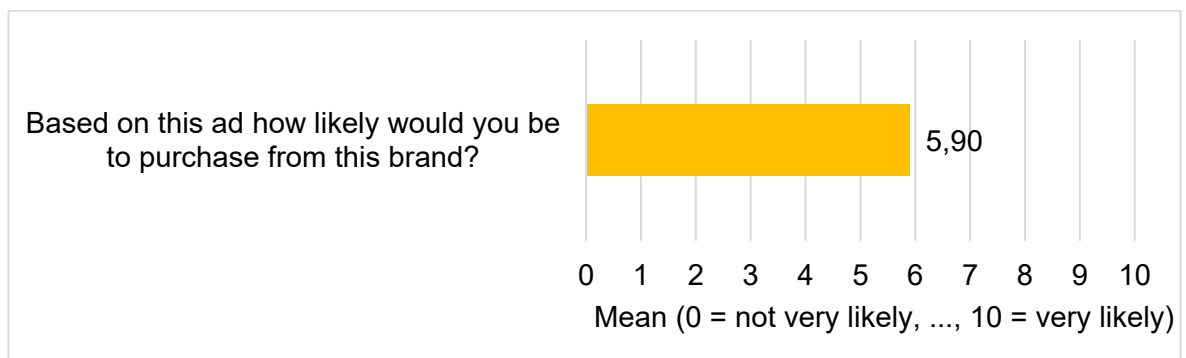
Figure 22. Mean likeliness of purchasing from brand based on advertisement – Lush (n=101)

The mean likeliness to purchase from the brand based on the presented advertisement is similarly to the previous graph (figure 21) above the middle point of this scale, at the mean value of 5,90. Based on this, the respondents would overall be a little likely to purchase from Lush based on the advertisement shown. The respondents would also be the most likely to purchase from this brand based on the advertisement compared to the others.

Table 5. Reactions to the advertisement - Lush

Positive comments	Casual, authentic, cute, ordinary, normalizes same sex couples, looks natural and loving, not Pride related advertisement, likeable, friendly, same sex couple as "just a regular couple" in place of a straight couple
Neutral comments	Strategic choice for the company
Negative comments	Stereotypical, boring, staged, cheesy, underlying homophobia

The overall reactions to the Lush advertisements respondents gave in the open comments were more positive than negative. Most respondents found the image used in the advertisement to be very natural, authentic and praised it for presenting a same sex couple in a very ordinary way, just as a straight couple would be in any other advertisement. Respondents were also pleased to see LGBTQ+ representation in other than Pride related advertisements, as this advertisement was for Valentine's Day.

Negative or more neutral comments focused mainly on the stereotypical aspects of the advertisement; how gay males are portrayed in pink water. Some respondents found this very stereotypical and cheesy, others found the advertisement just overall boring and staged. Some comments were otherwise fairly pleased with the advertisement but felt that the use of LGBTQ+ representation was just a strategic choice from the company to increase profits or gain brand recognition.

4.6   Authenticity of types of rainbow marketing
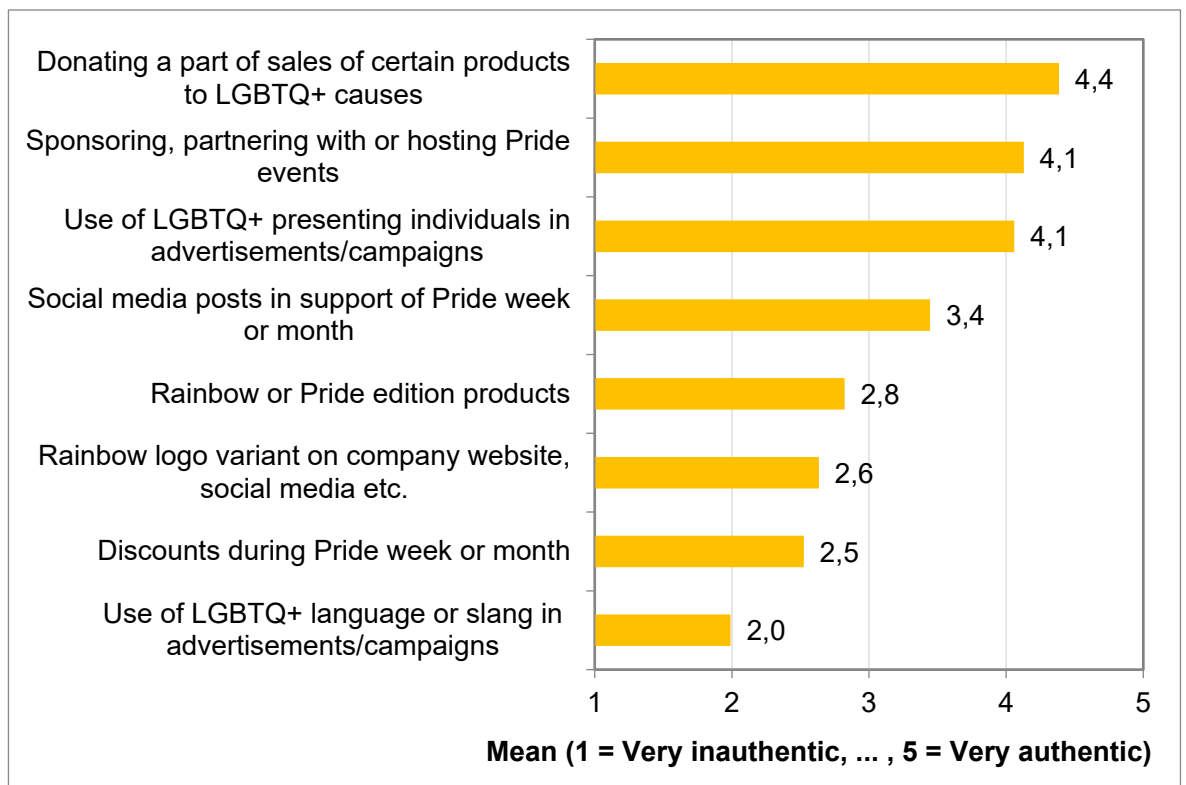
Figure 23. Authenticity of different types of rainbow marketing (n=101)

The respondents found donating a part of sales of certain products to LGBTQ+ causes to be the most authentic type of rainbow marketing out of the options given. Other types of rainbow marketing that got a score over 4 were sponsoring, partnering with or hosting Pride events and the use of LGBTQ+ presenting individuals in advertisements or campaigns.

The least authentic type of rainbow marketing is the use of LGBTQ+ language or slang in advertisements or campaigns. Other types of rainbow marketing respondents found less authentic as well are discounts during Pride week or month, rainbow or Pride flag logos on company websites and social media as well as rainbow or Pride edition of products.

5   Conclusions

This chapter discusses the key findings of this thesis, recommendations and further research as well as the reliability, validity and relevance of this thesis research. It also discusses reflections on learning during the process of this thesis.

5.1   Key Findings

When asked how much respondents pay attention to companies participating in CSR and how much they pay attention to if companies implement rainbow marketing, majority of the respondents in both questions reported paying attention often. There was also not a lot of difference between the responses for the questions, indicating that likely respondents that care for rainbow marketing being implemented also care generally about companies participating in CSR.

What is common with the three types of rainbow marketing respondents found the most authentic is that they all include some sort of co-operation or direct involvement with the LGBTQ+ community (for example, hosting Pride events or hiring LGBTQ+ presenting individuals to advertisements) or concrete actions for the community (for example, donating part of sales to a relevant charity). Respondents also commented especially on the Ikea advertisement that they would have liked to see human representation together with the loveseats, for example with members of each identity sitting on their own loveseat. They also wished to know if the loveseats were actually designed by LGBTQ+ individuals themselves. Therefore, the respondents clearly valued when companies took concrete actions for the community and involved members of the community directly in their rainbow marketing efforts.

The rainbow marketing effort that respondents found to be the most authentic out of the advertisements shown – the Valentine's Day Sale promotion tweet from Lush - was the most ordinary out of all of them and not related to Pride. Respondents also specifically gave praise to the advertisement for feeling very ordinary and authentic and valued that a same sex presenting couple was chosen instead of a straight couple, but still shown just as any straight couple would be.

The rainbow marketing types that the respondents found the most inauthentic could potentially feel performative and exploitative to the consumers. The rainbow logo variant is easy to implement, and many companies do it every June these days, but it lacks any concrete actions behind it. Discounts can feel exploitative, as the company is still profiting from the occasion and using Pride as means to profit and get consumers to purchase from

them. Use of LGBTQ+ language or slang is likely just perceived as performative, as it can seem like its used as a gimmick.

The Burger King advertisement got the lowest mean opinion on authenticity, and it also gained a lot of criticism from the respondents. They felt that their identity was being used as shock value and not authentically represented by the mascots or supported by the brands. Existing image of the brand also had effect in the negative perception of the advertisement. One respondent stated that they found the Burger King advertisement more inauthentic just because they knew of other ethical issues with the brands represented in the advertisement and felt that support for Pride was used just to shine light away from this.

Based on this study, one main reaction to rainbow marketing depending on its authenticity is the purchasing intent. Advertisements that were seen as more inauthentic had respondents report a lesser likeness to purchase from the brand, whereas with the more authentically perceived advertisements had a higher purchasing intent from the brand.

5.2   Recommendations

Recommendations based on this thesis research focus mainly on things to keep in mind when implementing rainbow marketing to avoid pinkwashing accusations.

To begin with, companies should always make sure that their operations and values align with their marketing, and it's no different when discussing rainbow marketing and LGBTQ+ issues. It will feel extremely inauthentic if a company is running advertisements to celebrate Pride and show support for the LGBTQ+ community if for example their operations are somehow discriminating LGBTQ+ individuals or if their LGBTQ+ employees are treated unfairly.

Other CSR related issues such as not being sustainable or having trouble with diversity in other areas can also lead to the rainbow marketing to be perceived as unauthentic, as it can seem like the company is trying to improve their image by using Pride and the LGBTQ+ community to take focus away from the other issues they are facing. This is not to say that a company should be perfect on every front in order to implement rainbow marketing, but extra care should be taken so that rainbow marketing is not used to polish a brand's image for example after a scandal or to hide away other CSR issues, or its authenticity will be likely questioned.

If rainbow marketing is implemented, it would likely be a good idea to have an LGBTQ+ individual or someone who is familiar with LGBTQ+ and diversity issues be a part of the planning process to ensure authentic representation of the community. The rainbow marketing efforts should also somehow directly involve members of the community or benefit them in concrete ways to feel authentic.

It is also important to remember that rainbow marketing can be implemented as part of any other marketing. Meaning, that LGBTQ+ individuals can and should be represented in marketing campaigns and advertisements outside of specifically Pride related marketing. Choosing to show for example a same sex couple just as any straight couple would be shown in an advertisement is a way to be inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community, that based on this study, feels the most authentic to LGBTQ+ consumers. It is also important to remember that the community is diverse, and the even though the ones represented tend to be white, cis gender, and male, there are many other identities in the community.

To conclude, as consumers are very conscious of the social responsibilities companies have and expect CSR efforts from them, rainbow marketing is important to consider as a part of the social responsibilities in the CSR. If implemented, it should align with the company values and be genuine and involve as much co-operation with the LGBTQ+ community itself as possible. Rainbow marketing does not have to be tied to Pride celebrations and will in fact feel authentic if implemented throughout the year like any other marketing efforts.

5.3   Reliability, Validity and Relevance

Overall, the methods to ensure reliability, validity, and relevance discussed in chapter 3.5 were implemented well. Although there are some matters that could have been done better.

The survey design was successfully implemented so that the language used in questions, or the survey structure would not lead the respondents or affect their answers. The survey also gained a big enough sample where it could be argued that the data would be reliable and relevant. Despite that, majority of the respondents were from Finland, which makes the data less valid to apply for an international population.

Data collection was done via a self-completion survey hosted online as planned. All data was anonymous so no responses can be linked to the participants. On the other side, as it was an online survey accessible via an open weblink where the respondents are fully

anonymous, there is always the risk of false or untruthful responses. As the sample size is so small, even a few of these would have an impact on the reliability of this study. Based on the data though, there seems to be nothing to suggest any deliberate false responses. Data analysis was done as planned, and all data was taken into account in the analysis process.

In further research, the author would give even more emphasis on the means on gathering the sample and to make sure the data is as relevant as possible by getting both a larger and a more diverse sample.

5.4   Further Research

During the process of this thesis, it became apparent that LGBTQ+ issues in the context of business and marketing especially could be explored and researched much further, as up-to-date, relevant and diverse pre-existing academical research was hard to find on the topic.

The topic would highly benefit from further research that could gather bigger sample sizes for more conclusive results that could be applied to the population more accurately. More international samples would be highly beneficial as well, as results would likely vary a lot for example in countries where LGBTQ+ discriminating legislation or attitudes are still more prevalent.

Future research could also widen the types of advertisements analysed and the means of analysis. It could also be beneficial to look more into if knowing the company and if pre-existing opinions of the brands or companies has effects to the perceived authenticity of rainbow marketing.

Overall based on this study, there is much more to investigate for this topic, and it would be great to see more awareness and importance given to it. There are vast possibilities for further research, especially if done with better resources than this study.

5.5   Reflection on Learning

The process of conducting this study and writing this thesis has given the author a lot more insight into the current state of LGBTQ+ issues in the business and marketing context. It was especially interesting to hear reactions straight from others in the LGBTQ+ community, and how even within the LGBTQ+ umbrella opinions on different advertisements and their authenticity can differ. This has increased the confidence for the

author to speak on LGBTQ+ issues more comprehensively even in a professional context, and she hopes she gets to use this in her career in the future.

Additionally, implementing an academic study and writing this bachelor's thesis was a culmination of three years of studying. It was very fulfilling for the author to see how past studies and skills supported the process to bring this thesis to completion. To be able to utilize the knowledge acquired during this degree to a topic that is important to the author on both a personal and a professional level was a very valuable experience. She hopes to see further awareness to the topic and for companies to really think of what authentic rainbow marketing would look like for them.

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