Main Takeaways

- Diversity and Inclusion Engaged Marketing (DIEM) is vital for consumer wellbeing and to sustain the relevance of the marketing discipline.

- Our international study identifies that current DIEM actions by individual organizations and marketers are insufficient in breadth and face several barriers, both internal and external, across the research, education and practice fields of marketing.

- We recommend six key steps for advancing systematic and integrated policies and actions to embed DIEM as a core tenet of marketing and leverage its positive impact.

- To facilitate and support this integration, we created the DIEM Initiative, a science-education-practice networking and knowledge sharing online platform and invite contributions from marketing researchers, educators, practitioners and policy makers.
Inclusivity is one of the top ten global consumer demand trends in 2020, signalling its importance for consumers in today’s multicultural marketplaces and the emergence of Diversity and Inclusion Engaged Marketing (DIEM) as an important shift the marketing discipline requires to sustain relevance. DIEM speaks to the priorities recently identified by the Marketing Science Institute, the International Advertising Association, and, more broadly, to the agenda of global policies such as the United Nations’ Sustainable Development ‘Ending Inequalities’ Goals. However, strategies and policies for DIEM advancement need evidence-based understanding of approaches that maximise their positive impact.

As a contribution to the evidence for the necessity of DIEM drive, through three multi-country studies, our paper identifies ten barriers that limit the scale of the current efforts to embed and align DIEM principles across marketing research, education and practice. The paper recommends that overcoming these barriers requires a comprehensive programme of actions that need to be systematically coordinated between the research, education and practice fields of the marketing discipline. The recommendations and policy mechanisms for encouraging, evaluating and rewarding field-specific and cross-field actions are presented in an integrated framework for embedding DIEM.

The first output from the integrated framework is the DIEM Initiative, a science-education-practice networking and knowledge sharing online platform for marketing and advertising professionals. The platform is currently being developed by the our network with funding support from the Association for Consumer Research and IESEG School of Management. DIEM Initiative will serve to build an online knowledge community and an open access database of the latest research, teaching and practical innovations for all interested in diversity-and inclusivity-informed marketing strategies and collateral. We invite participation and contributions from marketing researchers, educators, practitioners, as well as policy makers.
The evolution of contemporary markets into multicultural marketplaces and the increased public expectations of CSR are driving the growing engagement with the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) principles across all areas of the marketing discipline.

Over the last decade, marketing practice has seen an explosion of initiatives to diversify brand offerings and cultural representations in advertising campaigns. More recently, individual business and management schools, as well as their associations and accreditation bodies, have incorporated goals for advancing the D&I agenda as standards of professional practice among faculty, staff and students’ campus experience, research, and research-informed curricula.

Despite these positive advancements, the progress of mainstreaming DIEM requires scaling up. Concurrent with growth of marketing initiatives addressing D&I, many brands continue to receive criticism for cultural insensitivity and lacking in-depth insights into the nuances of inequality and discrimination in their campaigns, new product development and other areas of marketing activity. Marketing science and education sectors are only beginning to develop tools and practices for implementing D&I advancement goals.

What affects DIEM progress?

Our studies, conducted in the UK, USA and South Africa, identified ten pivotal barriers that limit the scale and impact of the current efforts to promote and embed DIEM principles across marketing research, education and practice. These barriers relate to how DIEM is defined and understood ('meaning' barriers), normatively accepted ('normative' barriers) and regulated ('rules' barriers).

*Details of the studies’ methodology are presented in the full paper.*
‘Meaning’ Barriers

‘Meaning’- Barriers represent the lack of holistic and consolidated knowledge base about D&I applied to the marketing discipline. Definitions of ‘D&I’ vary, and often encompass differing focus on specific diversity forms (e.g., disability, ethnicity, race, gender) and/or stakeholder groups (e.g. consumers, staff). This ambiguity and absence of commonly-shared definitions, results in simplistic applications of D&I principles and unequitable service to different stakeholders. Development, adoption and dissemination of DIEM knowledge is uneven. In marketing practice, it is concentrated within larger organisations while accessible knowledge resources for small and medium organisation are limited. In education. The majority of business and management schools do not specify teaching DIEM knowledge in their goals. Marketing science lacks the theoretical understanding of DIEM as a marketing performance indicator. Knowledge exchange between disciplinary fields is constrained by the lack of accessible DIEM-focused platforms.

1. Confounded definitions
2. Selective applications
3. Knowledge deficiencies
4. Lack of shared language

Data Insights

Marketing practice:

“I’ve seen many different definitions per industry. I’ve never seen one formal, unified definition of what this is. Folks just make it fit their needs.”

“I think a lot of the box ticking mentality actually stops people really getting to the bottom and understanding what is the humanity of the diversity.”

Marketing education:

10% of business/management schools in the USA sample, 10% in the UK and 0% in South Africa offer multicultural marketing courses;

Some universities (60% in the US, 40% in the UK, 0% in SA) cover international (country-level) diversity.

Marketing science:

“[I] encountered a number of challenges, given the lack of a general theoretical framework that could inform my findings, the multiple and overlapping conceptualizations for critical constructs used in my research such as “ethnicity”, “social inclusion”, “culture” or “wellbeing”, and the complex research questions that were yet to be answered.”
‘Normative’ Barriers refer to challenges encountered when qualifying D&I focused activities and their relevance. These challenges arise from a lack of evidence on DIEM’s commercial and social performance implications and associated anxiety about adopting and implementing DIEM. The anxiety is often related to the inability to counteract myths about the financial burdens of implementing DIEM. As a result, current marketing decision-making represents a dilemma of balancing, rather than integrating, the socially-responsible (advancing D&I) versus commercial (delivering on client/shareholder/employer expectations) imperatives. Our contributors stressed that developing an evidence-based ‘business case for DIEM’ requires concerted joint efforts between marketing researchers, practitioners and educators.

Data Insights

**Marketing practice:**
“Shareholders are nervous…. They’re quite willing to overlook the diversity angle of the whole thing, where they’re happy to just disregard big sections of the marketplace of which I think is totally foolhardy.”

**Marketing education:**
No evidence that DIEM is a mainstream topic in business/management schools in the sample.

Most business and management schools do not explicitly articulate the (moral or business) case for the training of future graduates.

**Marketing science:**
“…while targeting is a core principle of good marketing, it also by its very nature a form of exclusion. The question then is perhaps whether we need to constantly combine targeting and representation in our considerations.”
'Rules’ Barriers encompass deficiencies in formal and informal rules (processes, policies, methods) for embedding D&I principles in marketing disciplinary practices. Across marketing science, education and practice, procedures (sampling approaches, pedagogical and auditing frameworks) and instruments (metrics, measures, teaching and training curricula) are insufficient. Such deficiency in tools often results in lack of embeddedness of D&I as a core skill for professional marketing practice and failed outcomes when executing and evaluating performance of DIEM initiatives. Together, these findings signal the need for collaborative development of innovative policies, tools and techniques to establish and encourage DIEM disciplinary standards.

Data Insights

**Marketing practice:**
“So it’s just a new thing that I think sometimes people just jump onto it because it’s what everyone else is doing. But then if it’s not actually implemented the correct way, it doesn’t come out with the results that you want..”

“They [small businesses] care about it, but they don’t know how to do it.”

**Marketing education:**
Majority of business/management schools published curricula lack explicit statements of learning goals related to Diversity and Inclusion, even when articulated at university level.

**Marketing science:**
“Multicultural marketing should be introduced in the university curriculum in order to train future marketers in light of more inclusive and transformative marketing theories and practices.”
Based on our findings, we suggest six key steps for overcoming current barriers to DIEM progress:

1. Develop a common and holistic definition of D&I as applied to the marketing discipline.
Present understanding of diversity may be overlooking or under-privileging some characteristics. Collaborative efforts to develop a definition commonly accepted across disciplinary fields (science, practice, education) can maximise coverage of diversity forms and their integration to consider inequalities stemming from their intersections.

2. Establish and promote DIEM as an area of professional marketing practice.
Individuals currently working to promote the adoption of D&I principles in marketing lack a shared identity and a sense of a critical mass. This may be discouraging networking and knowledge exchange. Establishing DIEM holds promise of its wider recognition by leaders and professional standards bodies in each of the disciplinary fields.

Scarcity of accessible knowledge base to qualify, execute, and evaluate DIEM impact precludes its adoption and application. Establishing knowledge exchange resources and mechanisms will support wider diffusion and stimulate collaborative development of new DIEM-embedded techniques and skills for research, learning, and decision-making.

4. Organise and collaborate to scale up DIEM relevance and impact.
The realities of D&I in the marketplace can differ across contexts and evolve together with social developments. Fostering collaborations between disciplinary fields and locations adopting DIEM initiatives can provide important insights for DIEM’s contextual and temporal relevance.

5. Reward DIEM development work.
DIEM developmental efforts thus far are mostly voluntary initiatives by individual professionals committed to promoting D&I. Industry and policy leaders can strategically accelerate the pace of DIEM development by introducing formal mechanisms for recognising and rewarding this work and by supporting the grassroots DIEM movements.

D&I and marketing professional training are currently disconnected, resulting in lack of applied DIEM knowledge and practical skills. Embedding DIEM in curricula for marketing learning can serve to bridge these gaps.
Taking some of the above recommendations forward, this paper’s author team is developing DIEM Initiative – a science-education-practice networking and knowledge sharing online platform for marketing and advertising industry professionals, researchers, educators, and public policy makers interested in advancing Diversity & Inclusion in marketing. The platform will provide a space for interaction, knowledge-sharing and communication of DIEM projects, evidence and best practices. The platform’s development is supported by the Association of Consumer Research grant for Transformative Consumer Research and IESEG School of Management.

For more information or to collaborate in our DIEM Initiative, please contact one of our Multicultural Marketplaces network members:

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