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Does Gender Matter? The Influence of Tolerance towards Homosexuality and Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ Advertising and Brands among Gen Z in Vietnam

Luong Ngoc Thanh Tham[1], Ho Hoang Giang[2*]

[1]International Business Management, Foreign Trade University, Hanoi, Vietnam
[2]International School of Business, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: hohoanggiang298@gmail.com; ORCID iD: 0009-0005-8674-9980

ABSTRACT

The LGBTQ customer segment represents a market with substantial purchasing power and is increasingly gaining attention from businesses worldwide, accompanied by a growing presence of homosexual individuals in advertising campaigns. Advertisements featuring LGBTQ-related content have also become more prevalent across various media platforms in Vietnam. Generation Z (Gen Z) has emerged as a significant consumer group for brands targeting the two major cities, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. This study investigates the impact of homosexuality tolerance on Gen Z's attitudes towards LGBTQ-themed advertisements and brands. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) and independent samples t-tests to identify relationships among variables and to examine gender-based differences. The findings reveal that participants with higher tolerance levels exhibited more positive attitudes towards advertisements and brands. Furthermore, attitudes towards advertisements significantly influenced attitudes towards the brands. Notably, the study found no significant gender differences among Gen Z consumers, suggesting that this generation's evaluations and perceptions are primarily centred on core values and brand authenticity. These findings offer important implications for marketers and brands seeking to connect with Gen Z consumers in Vietnam while also contributing to the underexplored field of consumer behaviour research in the Vietnamese context.

Introduction

Context to Research on Consumers' Responses to LGBTQ+ Advertising

In recent years, LGBTQ+ representation in advertising has become an emerging trend as global corporations (e.g., Nike, Mastercard, Meta, etc.) wish to project inclusivity in advertising and stay

relevant to changing social mores. Part of the shift is the recognition that LGBTQ+ consumers are a lucrative segment of demographic markets as they have significant buying power and cultural influence. However, even with increased visibility in Western media, advertising specifically inclusive of LGBTQ+ people continues to have real limitations.

Brands must now carefully position themselves between recognizing diversity while also attempting to navigate backlash from conservative portions of their audience. Concerns about "rainbow-washing" and non-genuine portrayals of diversity for the sake of capital interest is not uncommon and speaks to the tension between performative allyship in advertising and genuine inclusion. Although the frequency of LGBTQ+ inclusive advertisements has increased LGBTQ+ advertisements are still statistically underrepresented. The only news outlets that publish statistics on the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in advertising as of 2022 were as follows in the U.S.A. LGBTQ+ people represented only 1.8 percent of television ads and in the UK - only 3 percent. These astonishing numbers also demonstrate the tension between advertising, messaging, and clear representations of the market situation where LGBTQ+ people's increasing visibility occurs in top-down branding strategies, even in a country where being a member of the LGBTQ+ community enjoys legal and social acceptance. A second complexity that is adapting to the complexities of the international context is the geographic variability in LGBTQ+ advertising. Many parts of the Middle East, and much of Eastern Europe, may have no representation in advertising for LGBTQ+ or, at best, cautiously depicted representation for LGBTQ+ models because of cultural conservatism surrounding the topic and legal implications to consider. The companies that do business in these geographical locations often self-censor LGBTQ+ content, or utilize numbing, generic messaging that does not reacquaint an audience with explicit references to sexuality or gender identity. Scholars articulate this as a "selective globalization" of queer representation, where global discourses of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion are either shaped-or suppressed-by local sensitivity (Vo et al., 2023). Thus, while LGBTQ+ visibility in advertising is often cited as an indicator for social progress, the reality is vastly more fragmented and uneven, needing contextual analysis that goes beyond Western models.

Vietnam is a relevant case to consider when thinking about the practical issues surrounding LGBTQ+ themes and issues, particularly in non-Western contexts. The country has made some progress in acknowledging LGBTQ+ identities, such as the decriminalization of same-sex relationships, and in having public Pride events. However, LGBTQ+ themes are still largely invisible in the mainstream media and advertising landscape, and there appears to be no intention from brands to tell any LGBTQ+ stories via advertising, be it via mainstream national television, radio, or print. The lack of LGBTQ+ stories create a situation where queer identities are legitimized and comprise visible identities yet still are not normalizable through collective practices. While research indicates that younger generations are more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals, aggressive culture remains inhibiting factor downwarding the ways in which queer objects manifest publicly in a mediated context due to regulatory influences as well (Nguyen-Thu, 2018). It is interesting to note that Vietnam's urban centers, particularly Ho Chi Minh City, have become informal LGBTQ+ livespace. A recent study indicated that about 66% of LGBTQ+ people in Vietnam live in Ho Chi Minh City, establishing it as the center of queer visibility and activism (Horton & Rydstrom, 2022). While Ho Chi Minh City and other urban centers are more tolerant than other parts of the country, it is still rare to see LGBTQ+ content in advertising, or when it happens, it is limited to stereotypical images or carefully worded messages only during Pride Month. This caution epitomizes a key practical concern – Vietnamese brands tend to exercise caution in face of potential public backlash, and many brands do not wish to incorporate LGBTQ+ narratives unless an ad was extremely carefully thought out to minimize controversy and backlash. As a result, the majority

of LGBTQ+ visibility in Vietnam has shifted toward digital platforms, where creators and audiences can bypass traditional gatekeepers. For example, the YouTube series My Best Gay Friends—created by queer Vietnamese artists—gained widespread popularity by offering authentic and humorous portrayals of gay life, a notable departure from mainstream silence (Wikipedia Contributors, 2025). Furthermore, communication studies show that LGBTQ+ individuals in Vietnam use word-of-mouth and social media as access to health, advocacy, and the infrastructure for community resources. In a study of 158 clients at the first public LGBT-friendly clinic in Vietnam, 65% of transgender clients reported learning of the clinic through peer networking and 48% of LGB individuals learned through social media—both with substantially higher frequencies than any combination of mainstream advertisement (Pham et al., 2024). This means that digital spaces can be understood as not only alternate sites of queer identity expression, but rather the primary furrow of LGBTQ+ messaging accessibility in Vietnam.

Research Gaps

Showing support for the gay community in advertising has helped many brands increase revenue, strengthen their brand position, and demonstrate social responsibility and human values, such as campaigns by Coca-Cola or Levi's. However, most of the existing research focuses on foreign markets, and the research subjects are mainly heterosexual customers in Western countries, where the LGBTQ community is more widely accepted, and there has been much progress in gender equality. In Vietnam, this topic is relatively new, and most studies related to the LGBTQ community often focus on issues such as social prejudice, discrimination and the rights of the gay community in the context of Vietnamese culture. These studies mainly consider the general public's views on the LGBTQ community and the image of LGBTQ in society but have not delved into the research of a specific customer group's response to advertising with gay elements. Studies in Vietnam have not mentioned the use of homosexual advertising to target Gen Z customers - a dynamic young generation with significant purchasing power and a strong influence on current consumer trends. Gen Z has great purchasing power and more progressive views on social issues, including the rights of the LGBTQ community. For brands, understanding the characteristics and reactions of Gen Z to homosexual advertising can help them build appropriate marketing strategies, effectively reach this customer group and increase their competitive advantage in the market.

Research Aims and Research Questions

The research sets out to achieve several key objectives, including determining the level of acceptance and attitudes of Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi towards LGBTQ+ advertisements, examining how tolerance towards LGBTQ+ identities influences their reactions to such advertisements and their perception of brands, and investigating gender-based differences within Gen Z in terms of attitudes towards LGBTQ+ advertising. Furthermore, the study intends to propose strategic advertising solutions that enable brands to develop LGBTQ+ advertising campaigns that align with the preferences of Gen Z heterosexual consumers. To achieve these objectives, the research addresses the following key questions:

Question 1: To what extent does Gen Z's tolerance level towards LGBTQ+ identities influence their attitudes towards LGBTQ+ advertising and the brands associated with such advertisements?

Question 2: Are there differences in attitudes towards LGBTQ+ advertising between male and female Gen Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi?

By answering these questions, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour in relation to LGBTQ+ marketing, allowing brands to refine their approaches and strengthen their connections with this influential demographic. Participants in the study are individuals who have previously encountered, engaged with, or are familiar with LGBTQ+ advertisements. The study employs secondary and primary data sources, with secondary data collected from verified studies and reports from 1969 to 2024. The research will be conducted between September 2024 and December 2024, with surveys administered from September 20, 2024, to November 15, 2024. This comprehensive approach ensures that the findings are well-supported and provide valuable insights into the evolving

consumer landscape in Vietnam.

Research Contributions

Studies on consumer reactions to LGBTQ+ advertising consistently highlight its positive impact and practical significance for brands. Research has shown that incorporating LGBTQ+ representation in advertisements not only allows brands to connect with the LGBTQ+ community but also fosters a positive perception among heterosexual consumers. This, in turn, helps build an inclusive and socially responsible brand image. Many well-known companies, such as Coca-Cola and Levi's, have successfully integrated LGBTQ+ representation in their marketing campaigns, increasing sales and reinforcing their brand position, demonstrating corporate social responsibility, and aligning with humanitarian values.

Literature Review

General Theory of Homosexual Advertising

Homosexual advertising can be broadly understood as marketing communication that explicitly or implicitly includes representations of gay, lesbian, or queer individuals, relationships, or communities. It is not merely about visibility but how LGBTQ+ identities are framed within commercial narratives. According to Schuch and Sistenich (2020), homosexual advertising has evolved from subtle signals to more open portrayals of same-sex couples, particularly in German media. They describe this as a transition from marginal "niche" recognition towards more normalised integration into mainstream advertising. Homosexual characters are increasingly shown in everyday contexts, such as parenting or romantic partnerships, often portrayed with "naturalised affection and interactions," yet still marked with certain symbolic cues to ensure they are readable as gay to the audience. In this context, homosexual advertising functions both as a tool of inclusion and differentiation. Essential factors associated with homosexual advertising focus on the inclusion of same-sex affection, Pride symbols, and representations of family structures outside patriarchal norms. The way such factors are framed presents differences in interpretations by the consumer. Audience reactions to homosexual advertising can be highly variable and will differ based on cultural, social and personal identity factors influencing the individual. The research has shown consistently across studies that the more tolerable the consumer is towards homosexuality, the more favourable the reception by consumers to LGBTQ+-themed advertisements and brands (Polkinghorne et al., 2022). On the other hand, those individuals demonstrating low tolerability or high intrinsic religiosity react unfavourably unless emotional framing is used (considering LGBTQ+ individuals as inspirational) and effectively diffuse biases from their transient reactions (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Additionally, for all audiences, the truthfulness of the brand matters; while brand manipulation or "gay-washing" may represent LGBTQ+ individuals as successful, the brand and associated perceptions are likely to be becalmed (Cassiano Tressoldi et al., 2023).

Multiple mechanisms influence consumer behaviour after they have been exposed to homosexual advertising. Most importantly, identity affirmation, where LGBTQ+ consumers see themselves as positively represented, strengthens emotional connection to brands (Gong, 2019). Generic positive affective responses like surprise and admiration create additional purchase intentions among LGBTQ+ consumers and heterosexual supportive consumers (Lewis et al., 2024). Further, most studies slightly forward in time find that even negative consumer reactions to gay-themed advertisements tend to dissipate, implying that exposure generally leads to a normalising impact on consumer behaviour (Bond & Farrell, 2020). To compound this, factors such as age and culture influence consumer reactions to homosexual advertising. Olson and Park (2019) found that younger gay male consumers had more positive perceptions of LGBTQ+ advertisements than older cohorts, which suggested a generational change in expectations and acceptance of LGBTQ+ advertising. Um's (2019) cross-cultural studies found that collectivist cultures (e.g. South Korea) exhibited less tolerance and had less favourable responses to gay-themed advertising than individualist cultures like the United States. They also found that even in individualist cultures, the advertising context, social values of consumers, and brand associations played a role in shaping consumer reactions (Um & Kim, 2019). The impact of homosexual

advertising can also be seen on brand image and how consumers view brand values and brand identity. Dassen et al. (2019) found that LGBTQ+ inclusive advertising had the potential to significantly influence brand associations in terms of brand values such as openness, modernity, and inclusiveness. These shifts in brand perception occur even when personal product usage experience remains unchanged, highlighting the symbolic power of representation.

The effectiveness and reception of homosexual advertising depend on numerous variables, including cultural context, audience demographics, and the explicitness of imagery. Eisend and Hermann (2019) conducted a meta-analysis, revealing that homosexual-themed ads do not inherently perform better or worse than heterosexual ones. Nonetheless, homosexual individuals considered heterosexual-oriented representations to be negative and excluding, which suggests that sincere representation is paramount. The concept of homosexual advertising in this context is broadened to examine both emotional and cognitive responses in both the intended audience as well as the general audience. The responses depend on various factors, such as gender, cultural openness, and religiosity, and more importantly, these highlight an awareness of the way that the meaning of the representation is co-constructed through the eyes of the viewer. Cultural interpretations further complicate the understanding. In highly stigmatised contexts of homosexuality like Jamaica and Nigeria, the heterosexual representation will also reflect exceedingly little, and homosexual representations are methodically obstructed and controversial. According to Touitou (2020), the study observes that any homosexual identity in an advertisement is simultaneously rare; however, it is also a social space to act against. In contrast, in Mexico, Laguarda (2025) found a historical arc where gay identities in media moved from criminalised and caricatured figures in the 1970s to more respectful portrayals of identity and pride. This shift reflects broader societal transformations and the increasing power of LGBTQ+ movements to influence public discourse and market imagery.

Altogether, homosexual advertising functions as both a marketing tactic and a cultural signal. Its power lies in managing the tension of properly balancing the accuracy of representation, sensitivity to audience diversity, cultural norms, and emotional framing. When homosexual advertising works, it improves brand equity, creates loyalty among LGBTQ+ and ally consumers, and slowly helps shift social norms towards greater acceptance.

Classification of Homosexual Advertising: Implicit and Explicit Homosexual Advertising

In recent years, the area of study examining people's reactions to explicit and implicit homosexual advertising has become increasingly prominent, along with its impact through attitudes and beliefs of both implicit and explicit nature. One major study by Um (2016) compared advertising through both implicit and explicit gay advertising across gay-specific media and mainstream advertising. They found that implicit advertisements, which provided more abstract suggestions without explicitly displaying a same-sex couple, produced a significantly stronger effect on brand favourability and purchase intention. Respondents low on homosexuality tolerance responded negatively to both advertisement types. In addition, the context of the media served a moderating effect, indicating the complexity of the interactions between the advertisement mode and the audience's receptiveness. Anselmi et al. (2015) also examined differences in implicit and explicit attitudes towards homosexuality. They found that lesbian women and heterosexuals demonstrated both types of bias. In contrast, gay men only demonstrated explicit bias, and bisexual individuals did not seem to follow a consistent pattern. This shows that sexual identity and sexual orientation play a significant role in implicit and explicit response types and reflects that these factors need to be considered in order to create an inclusive product and campaign approach.

In their foundational research, Banse et al. (2001) demonstrated the importance of measurement and knowledge of implicit attitudes. The study validated the Homosexuality-Implicit Association Test (IAT) and showed that implicit attitudes remain stable and resistant to change, even when participants were instructed to suppress their authentic attitudes. One implication of this research is that someone can overtly display support for LGBTQ causes while simultaneously being influenced by their implicit negative feelings and attitudes behind the scenes—this is important for marketers, educators, and policymakers. In the same vein, Steffens (2005) examined college students in Germany and revealed

that although the students expressed positive explicit attitudes towards homosexuality, implicit attitudes continued to be negative, particularly among male students. The contradiction between someone's conscious approval and unconscious bias is significant, especially within the grit of advertising, in which subtle subconscious attitudes are enabled to influence how a favourable framed message is processed. Along the same line, Lin et al. (2018) used a more involved approach, employing structural equations modelling to study how implicit associations drive individuals' explicit attitudes. The study found a direct and measurable influence of unconscious cognitive patterns over explicit views, while no relationship was present with emotional priming. This supports the idea that attitude change requires a longer foundation for social change beyond a just messaging effectiveness standpoint, which is especially valid for inclusive marketing.

In a culturally specific context, Yu (2021) studied Chinese undergraduates and found a similar divergence. While students expressed acceptance of homosexuality in explicit self-reports, their implicit attitudes remained negatively biased. This finding suggests that cultural norms and societal pressures may drive public expressions of tolerance without altering deeper, unconscious biases, posing a challenge for advertisers trying to promote inclusion in traditionally conservative regions. Finally, Owusu and Mathenge (2017) directly tackled perceptions of implicit and explicit homosexual marketing. The researchers reported that explicit advertising or advertising that includes openly gay characters or storylines is increasingly embraced by younger and more educated people, especially when consumers believe the brand genuinely supports LGBTQ rights. In other words, authenticity matters: it is seen as socially unacceptable when brands take on the appearance of being LGBTQ-friendly when they are not true allies. Overall, ads for a brand that utilised LGBTQ characters or storylines were accepted; only enfolding them was the brand's advocacy of LGBTQ rights, credibility, and previous history with LGBTQ communities.

The Impact of Homosexuality Tolerance on Attitudes towards Homosexual Advertising and Brands among Heterosexual and Gen Z Customers

Tolerance is about respecting diversity and accepting change in modern society. In contrast, traditional societies often stigmatised and rejected deviations from the norm (Corneo, 2009). Inglehart (1977) noted that younger generations tend to be more tolerant, although that tolerance may shift as they age.

The LGBTQ community has long faced discrimination and violence, but attitudes towards this minority group have shifted thanks to rapid cultural, legal, and political changes. For example, the increasing representation of LGBTQ individuals in media has led to more positive public attitudes towards homosexuality (Andersen & Fetner, 2008). According to Keleher and Smith (2012), a significant shift in societal tolerance towards gay individuals began around 1991. Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) showed that from 1973 to 1991, about 70–78% of adults believed homosexual relationships were wrong. By 2010, that number had dropped to 46%. The GSS study explored how tolerance depends on generational differences. Younger people are generally more accepting of homosexuality, but as they grow older, conservative tendencies may emerge, which can slow down overall progress in public attitudes. Fetner (2016) examined how attitudes towards homosexuality have changed and found that public support for gay rights has evolved faster than on issues like immigration or racial discrimination. Gallup Poll data showed that in 1977, fewer than 60% of Americans believed gay people deserved equal rights. By 2010, that number had risen to 90%.

Doan et al. (2014) examined whether accepting gay individuals reflects genuine beliefs or is limited to formal policy and human rights considerations. They studied how gay men, lesbians, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women responded to hypothetical scenarios involving three types of couples: a heterosexual couple, a gay male couple, and a lesbian couple. Participants were then asked whether the couples should receive state-protected benefits such as family leave or partner insurance. The study also asked whether these couples should be allowed to show affection publicly or disclose their relationships openly. This research was conducted before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage in 2015, so its findings on marriage attitudes are briefly mentioned. The study also found that heterosexual participants, regardless of gender, generally supported equal legal rights for same-sex couples. Meanwhile, gay and lesbian participants showed stronger support for same-sex couples' rights –

possibly due to the lack of legal protections available to the LGBTQ community at the time. The authors predicted that these attitudes might shift if legal rights became more widely accessible.

Tolerance for same-sex relationships has risen across most continents in recent years, with young people leading this change (Ayoub & Garretson, 2017). This shift began more prominently in the 20th century than in the 19th (Kuyper et al., 2013). Increased acceptance of minorities has been linked to greater personal contact with LGBTQ individuals (Kimmel & Garnets, 2002), more LGBTQ representation in media (Garretson, 2016), rising belief that homosexuality is biologically based rather than a lifestyle choice (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008), and supportive changes in political and governmental institutions (Reynolds, 2013). Various factors, including gender and age, also shape tolerance towards homosexuality. Women tend to be more tolerant than men (Elliott-Dorans, 2020), and younger people tend to be more accepting than older generations (Lewis & Gossett, 2008). Changes in pop culture and direct interaction with LGBTQ individuals are crucial in shaping tolerance and support for gay rights among younger individuals (Kimmel & Garnets, 2002).

On a narrower level, Bhat et al. (1998) were pioneers in studying how consumers react to gay-themed advertisements. They found that an individual's tolerance level towards homosexuality influenced their reaction to such ads and the brands behind them. People with low tolerance showed negative emotional responses to gay ads and brands, while those with higher tolerance often responded more positively (Bhat et al., 1998). Further studies confirmed that people who are more accepting of homosexuality tend to have a favourable view of brands that use inclusive advertising (Hester & Gibson, 2007). Tolerance levels vary based on demographic factors, sexual orientation, and political beliefs (Herek, 2002; Strand, 1998). Women, for example, are more tolerant than men (Hester & Gibson, 2007). Research focusing on Generation Z known for its progressive and inclusive values, shows that this demographic strongly prefers authentic LGBTQ representation in advertising. They see inclusive marketing as reflecting modern values and fairness, strengthening brand loyalty and trust (Shaikh, 2023). Ads that genuinely portray LGBTQ identities and avoid stereotypes tend to resonate positively with Gen Z, building emotional connections between the consumer and the brand. However, Gen Z's demand for authenticity presents a challenge. Studies show that campaigns perceived as exploitative or symbolic—those that use LGBTQ themes solely for marketing without broader organisational commitment—often face backlash. This generation values substance and expects brands to support the LGBTQ community beyond just their advertising actively (Francis & Hoefel , 2018). Gen Z's progressive stance also helps reshape social norms. Their support for LGBTQ-inclusive advertising contributes to normalising diversity and challenging traditional biases. Surveys show overwhelming support among Gen Z for including LGBTQ topics in public discourse. This generational shift highlights the importance of authenticity in building effective marketing strategies (Hayes, 2023).

Research has shown that tolerance is influenced by factors such as age, gender, political orientation, and personal contact with LGBTQ individuals. In marketing, consumer responses to LGBTQ-themed advertisements are strongly linked to their tolerance level: more accepting individuals respond positively, while those with lower tolerance show resistance. Gen Z, in particular, values authenticity in inclusive advertising and expects brands to support LGBTQ rights beyond surface-level messaging. Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Homosexuality tolerance has a positive impact on Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards gay advertising.

H2: Homosexuality tolerance has a positive impact on Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards brands.

The Relationship between Attitudes towards Homosexual Advertising and Attitudes towards Brands

Kotler and Keller (2012) define attitude as "a person's evaluation—favourable or unfavourable—emotions, and behavioural tendencies toward san object or phenomenon." Attitude is critical in understanding and predicting consumer buying behaviour, reflecting their preferences, desires, or objections towards a product, service, or brand (Oskamp, 1997). A positive and stable attitude often leads to long-term brand attachment and contributes to customer loyalty (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In

the context of LGBTQ-themed advertising, Hester & Gibson (2007) showed that a consumer's attitude towards homosexuality directly influences their reaction to the ad and, in turn, affects their attitude towards the brand. Attitude towards advertising refers to the emotional and cognitive response of consumers when they are exposed to an ad over a period of time. This response may be positive or negative, depending on individual perception and experience (Biehal et al., 1992). Consumer reactions to gay-themed advertising are not always positive. Although acceptance has increased over time, such ads still face resistance from certain consumer groups, which can negatively impact brand perception (Angelini & Bradley, 2010). Brand attitude is defined as the consumer's tendency to respond after exposure to brand-related advertising stimuli (Phelps & Hoy, 1996). Consumers often evaluate a brand based on the message and imagery in the ad. For unfamiliar brands, attitudes towards the ad heavily influence initial brand perception. However, for well-known brands, existing beliefs tend to override the ad's influence (Campbell & Keller, 2003; Machleit & Wilson, 1988). Brand trust also plays a key role in shaping brand attitudes when consumers engage with advertising. According to Meuhling and Laczniak (1988), brand trust can affect consumer attitudes towards the brand if they are actively involved in interpreting the ad's message. On the other hand, if consumers do not engage with the ad, prior trust may not significantly affect their perception. This suggests that brand trust is essential for influencing consumer response to advertising, especially when the content touches on sensitive topics like homosexuality.

Overall, these findings emphasise that consumer attitudes towards advertising shape their perception of the ad itself and strongly affect how they view the brand. For brands considering LGBTQ imagery in advertising, factors such as whether the portrayal is subtle or explicit and the gender of the LGBTQ characters should be carefully considered to avoid negative reactions. Positive attitudes towards an ad can help foster customer loyalty, while negative responses may lead to brand rejection and reduced purchase intent. Understanding the link between ad attitude and brand attitude is crucial for marketers aiming to develop inclusive, effective campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences. Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards gay advertising have an impact on brand attitudes.

Gender differences (Gen Z) in Attitudes towards Homosexuality and Homosexual Advertising

Heterosexual men tend to have different attitudes towards homosexuality compared to heterosexual women. Research suggests that heterosexual masculinity is often built on dominance, which is maintained by rejecting alternative forms of masculinity—such as male homosexuality (Van der Walt, 2007). Between the 1970s and 1990s, studies consistently found that men exhibited more negative reactions towards homosexuality than women (Holland-Muter, 2018). One study involving over 345 participants found that women were significantly more tolerant of LGBTQ issues. This may be because women are more likely to have personal relationships with gay individuals, and such relationships tend to reduce negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community (Vivien, 2002).

Within Gen Z, gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality persist, particularly in terms of acceptance and empathy. Studies have shown that women are generally more open-minded and accepting of homosexuality than men. (Doan et al., 2014) found that heterosexual women were more tolerant of both gay and lesbian couples in hypothetical scenarios, whereas heterosexual men held more rigid views, especially towards gay male couples (Kimmel, 2000). Furthermore, Gen Z women are more accepting and often more active in supporting LGBTQ rights. They are more likely to support gender equality policies and same-sex marriage rights compared to their male counterparts (Williams, 2015). Although Gen Z men tend to be more open than previous generations, they often retain conservative views in certain contexts, particularly when it comes to public displays of affection between same-sex partners (Doan et al., 2014).

In contrast, Gen Z women generally react more positively to LGBTQ-themed advertising. They not only welcome the inclusion of LGBTQ elements in advertising but also appreciate the messages of inclusion and equality conveyed by brands (Tsai, 2010). This reflects a greater sensitivity among women to social issues and a stronger appreciation for cultural diversity. Interestingly, both male and

female Gen Z consumers are generally more comfortable with lesbian imagery in advertising than with depictions of gay male couples. This could be due to societal and cultural perceptions that lesbian relationships are less threatening to traditional norms (Doan et al., 2014).

Additionally, the growing presence of LGBTQ-supportive movements in education and media has had a significant impact—particularly on young women. However, educational initiatives and advertising strategies need to focus more on challenging gender-based biases, especially among men, to promote deeper equality and inclusion. These findings indicate how gender differentiation can affect homosexuality tolerance in homosexuality advertising attitudes. Thus, we have the following assumption:

H4: The impact of homosexual tolerance on homosexuality advertising attitudes differs between male and female Gen Z consumers.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
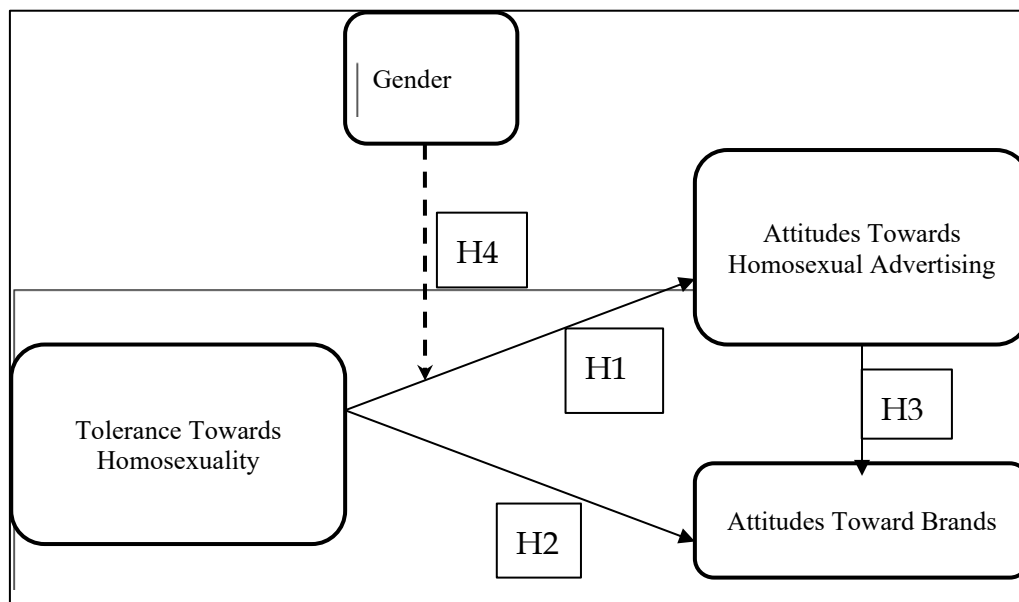
Methods

Research Design and Data Collection

The research was conducted using a quantitative methodology, encompassing both data collection and analysis. A questionnaire was created via Google Forms and distributed to young individuals residing in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi to gather relevant data for the study.

This research approach enabled the researcher to determine the sample, calculate means, and examine the relationships between proposed hypotheses using numerical data collected from the perspectives of survey participants (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The survey was disseminated through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Zalo to ensure accessibility for respondents.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only Gen Z individuals with prior exposure to LGBTQ-themed advertisements participated in the study. A total of 400 valid responses were collected between September and November 2024.

Generation Z was selected as the target population for two main reasons. First, Gen Z represents a socially progressive and media-savvy demographic that is highly engaged with digital content and advertising. Second, prior research suggests that Gen Z is more likely to respond positively to inclusive brand messages, making them a critical audience for studying responses to LGBTQ-themed advertisements.

This study refers to the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (1998) to determine the expected sample size. Accordingly, the minimum sample size should be at least five times the total number of observed variables, with a ratio of 1:3 applied for both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and a minimum of 200 samples required for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The chosen sample size also aligns with recommendations from prior SEM studies to ensure adequate statistical power and generalisability of the findings.

Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the study sample, including age, gender, place of residence, and education level. The sample comprised 59% male and 41% female participants, indicating a slightly higher proportion of male respondents. In terms of age, the largest groups were 20–22 years (32.5%) and 22–25 years (27.3%), together representing nearly 60% of participants and reflecting the study's focus on Generation Z. Older youth aged 25–30 accounted for 31.3%, suggesting some overlap with late millennials, while only 9% were under 20. Participants were relatively evenly distributed between Hanoi (45.5%) and Ho Chi Minh City (54.5%), ensuring representation from Vietnam's two largest urban centers. Educationally, 36.5% of respondents were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 30.8% in postgraduate studies, 21.3% had completed high school, and 11.5% were employed either part-time or full-time. Overall, the majority of respondents were highly educated or in higher education, making them well-positioned to engage critically with advertising content and related social issues.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	236	59
	Female	164	41
Age	Below 20 years old	36	9
	20 - 22 years old	130	32.5
	22 - 25 years old	109	27.3
	25 - 27 years old	56	14
	27 - 30 years old	69	17.3
Education level	High school	85	21.3
	Degree/Diploma	146	36.5
	Postgraduate degree	123	30.8
	Worker	46	11.5
Whereabouts	Ho Chi Minh City	218	54.5

| Hanoi Capital | 182 | 45.5 |

The research utilised a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5, with the levels: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree) to measure and quantitatively assess the response level of Generation Z customers to homosexual advertising in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The measurement scales utilised in this study were validated and considered reliable in previous research. The scale for tolerance towards homosexuality was validated by Herek (1988) and Kite and Deaux (1986), and a 5-item scale was constructed for this purpose. To measure attitudes towards homosexual advertising and attitudes towards brands, 5-item and 6-item scales adapted from Spears and Singh (2004) were applied, respectively.

Given that all data were collected using a single survey instrument from self-reported responses, the potential for common method bias (CMB) was considered. To mitigate CMB, several procedural remedies were incorporated into the questionnaire design. These included ensuring respondent anonymity, assuring participants that there were no right or wrong answers, randomising the order of items, and separating constructs across different survey sections. These measures are consistent with the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003) and help reduce the likelihood of inflated correlations due to method variance. All measurement items are listed in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The study employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyse data and evaluate multivariate relationships among latent variables. SEM serves as a bridge between theoretical frameworks and empirical data, allowing researchers to test and compare theoretical assumptions with observed evidence (Fornell & Bookstein, 1981). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed using AMOS 24.0 to examine the relationships between tolerance towards homosexuality, attitudes towards LGBTQ-themed advertisements, and brand perception. Independent samples t-tests were also conducted to explore potential gender differences.

Although normality was not formally tested through skewness and kurtosis, the use of SEM and parametric tests was supported by acceptable model fit indices in CFA (e.g., CFI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.048) and the robustness of maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) under a large sample size (n = 400). As such, the data were considered appropriate for parametric analyses. The acceptable thresholds for model fit indices and validity assessments were adopted based on established literature. Specifically, CFI ≥ 0.90, TLI ≥ 0.90, and RMSEA ≤ 0.08 were used to evaluate model fit (Hair et al., 2009). For convergent and discriminant validity, AVE ≥ 0.50 and CR ≥ 0.70 were required (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Additionally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender-based differences (male and female) in two key constructs in the model: attitude towards homosexual-themed advertisements and attitude towards the brand. The aim was to determine whether gender significantly influenced participants' attitudes toward these factors.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three constructs in the study all exceeded the threshold of 0.6, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the observed variables. Furthermore, the corrected item-total correlations for each observed variable were above 0.3, confirming that each item was strongly correlated with the overall scale and contributed meaningfully to its structure. The composite reliability (CR) values of the three constructs ranged from 0.922 to 0.954, all surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.6, suggesting high reliability. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.663 to 0.806, all exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.5, indicating that the constructs effectively captured the variance in the data. The results presented in Table 2 confirm the adequacy of the measurement indicators.

Table 2

Measurement Properties of Dependent and Independent Constructs

Research Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
TH: Tolerance towards Homosexuality					
TH1	3.28	1.137			
TH2	3.27	1.133			
TH3	3.26	1.158	0.951	0.951	0.951
TH4	3.24	1.137			
TH5	3.25	1.113			
AA: Attitude towards Advertisement					
AA1	3.14	1.037			
AA2	3.05	1.080			
AA3	3.05	1.085	0.921	0.922	0.663
AA4	3.44	1.302			
AA5	3.18	1.142			
AB: Attitude towards Brand					
AB1	3.20	1.291			
AB2	3.60	1.193			
AB3	3.29	1.198			
AB4	2.92	1.125	0.946	0.946	0.780
AB5	3.27	1.259			
AB6	3.24	1.207			

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

After assessing the reliability of the measurement scales using Cronbach's Alpha, the next step in the research process was to conduct Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). In this study, EFA was implemented to ensure analytical rigour and comprehensiveness. The selection of significant factors followed strict criteria: factor loadings were required to exceed 0.50, eigenvalues had to be no less than 1, and the total explained variance needed to reach at least 50%, in accordance with the recommendations of Gerbing and Anderson (1988). In addition, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin)

measure of sampling adequacy was expected to exceed 0.50, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity had to produce a p-value below 0.05, providing strong statistical support for the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

As demonstrated in Table 3, the results of the KMO and Bartlett's tests indicated a high level of suitability for conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Specifically, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.937, significantly exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.5. This suggests that the sample size was sufficiently large and that the observed variables were adequately correlated for factor analysis. Moreover, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a chi-square value of 6156.923 with 120 degrees of freedom and a p-value (Sig.) of 0.000. This result confirms that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, meaning that the observed variables are significantly interrelated and thus suitable for factor extraction. These findings validate the adequacy of the dataset for EFA, allowing the research to proceed to the next analysis stage.

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett Coefficient Test Results

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.937
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6156.923
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Additionally, the factor loadings exceeded 0.5 and the total variance explained reached 79.3%, indicating a strong factor structure.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the adequacy of the measurement model. Several fit indices were used following the criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2009) and Fornell and Larcker (1981). The model fit indicators met the recommended thresholds: Chi-square/df = 3.093 (acceptable if < 5), CFI = 0.966 ($\geq$ 0.95 is excellent), TLI = 0.959 ($\geq$ 0.90 is good), GFI = 0.915 ($\geq$ 0.90 is good), and RMSEA = 0.072 ($\leq$ 0.08 is acceptable).

Additionally, all standardised factor loadings exceeded 0.5, composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.922 to 0.954, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.663 to 0.806, all above the recommended thresholds of 0.7 (for CR) and 0.5 (for AVE). These results demonstrate the convergent validity and internal consistency of the measurement constructs.

The model yielded a Chi-square value of 312.407 with 101 degrees of freedom, resulting in a Chi-square/df ratio of 3.093 (P = 0.000). Other fit indices included a Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) of 0.915 (values > 0.9 indicate good fit), a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.966 ($\geq$ 0.95 is considered excellent), a Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.959 ($\geq$ 0.9 is good), and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.072 ($\leq$ 0.08 is acceptable). Overall, these indices demonstrate a relatively high level of model fit, suggesting that the measurement model is well-suited to the observed data (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis
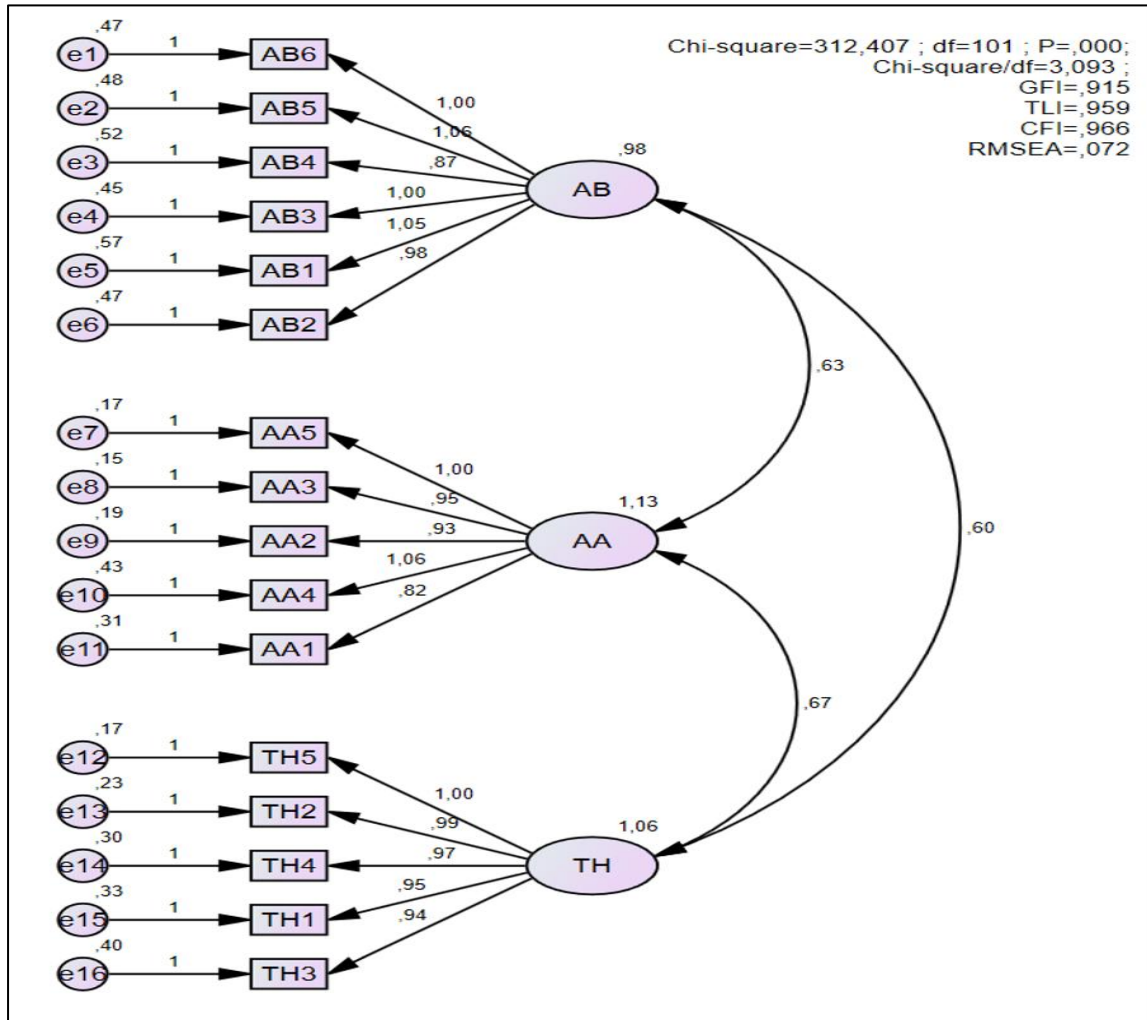
Assessment of the Structural Model

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised relationships in this study. Based on the fit indices (Figure 3), the structural model fit well with the survey data. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised relationships in this study. Based on the fit indices (Figure 3), the structural model fit well with the survey data, demonstrating acceptable levels of statistical validity. Key goodness-of-fit indicators included a Chi-square/df ratio below the recommended threshold of 5.0, along with high values for the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and an acceptable Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

These fit indices suggest that the model adequately captures the relationships among the latent variables: tolerance towards homosexuality (TH), attitude towards advertisements (AA), and attitude towards the brand (AB). Path coefficients were analysed to determine the direction and strength of these relationships, and the level of significance was evaluated to confirm the validity of each hypothesised path. The findings are summarised in Table 4 and discussed in detail below.

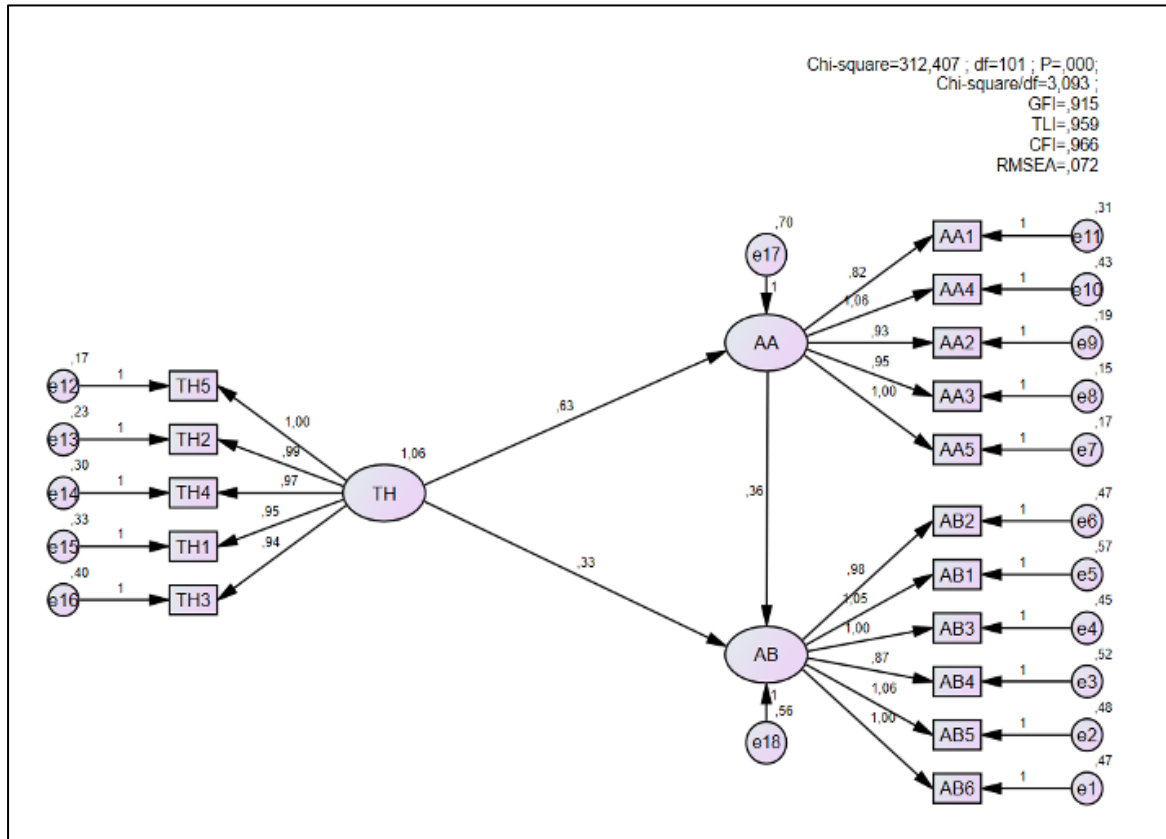**Figure 3**

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis Results

Table 4

Results of Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	Standardised β	P	Result
AA <---TH	,614	***	Accept
AB<---TH	,348	***	Accept
AB<---AA	,381	***	Accept
TH --> AA --> AB	,234	0,001	Accept

Note:
TH = tolerance toward homosexuality
AA = attitude toward advertisement
AB = attitude toward brand

In Table 4, the results of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicate that tolerance towards homosexuality has a significant direct impact on both attitudes towards LGBTQ-themed advertisements ($\beta = 0.614$, $p < 0.001$) and brand perception ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, ad attitude positively influences brand perception ($\beta = 0.381$, $p < 0.001$) while also serving as a partial mediator in the

relationship between tolerance and brand perception (indirect effect $\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.001$). The model accounted for 37.7% of the variance in ad attitude ($R^2 = 0.377$) and 49.4% in brand perception ($R^2 = 0.494$), indicating a moderate-to-strong explanatory power of the proposed model.

Independent Sample T-Test Mean Test Results for Gender Variable

As shown in Table 5, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances yielded a significance value of 0.077 (> 0.05), and the F-test showed a significance level of 0.069 (> 0.05). These results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in Attitude towards Homosexual-themed Advertisements (AA) and Attitude towards the Brand (AB) across different gender groups in the overall sample.

Table 5

Independent Sample T-Test Mean Test Results

Group	Sig. value of Levene Statistic Test	Sig. value of T-TEST table
Gender	0.077	0.069

Discussion

Research indicates that tolerance towards homosexuality plays a pivotal role in shaping Generation Z's positive attitudes towards LGBTQ advertisements. This aligns with previous theories, notably those of Oakenfull and Greenlee (2005), who assert that individuals open to diverse cultural values tend to favour inclusive and representative advertisements. Generation Z, having grown up during significant gender equality movements, strongly identifies with these messages.

Moreover, studies show that this generation, characterised by its inclusive and progressive social values, is particularly receptive to LGBTQ representation in advertising. Generation Z views marketing efforts that embrace inclusivity as a reflection of modern and just societal values, which in turn foster trust and loyalty toward brands that effectively integrate these principles (Shaikh, 2023). In today's competitive landscape, brands must go beyond merely offering products; they must also create an image that reflects positive social values, thus strengthening customer loyalty and standing out in the eyes of younger consumers.

Attitudes towards LGBTQ advertisements also serve as a crucial intermediary factor, directly influencing consumer perceptions of brands. According to Spence's Signalling Theory (1973), advertising functions not only as a product communication tool but also as a means of signalling a brand's values and identity, demonstrating respect for the needs and viewpoints of its target audience.

Importantly, there is no significant gender difference within Gen Z regarding attitudes toward LGBTQ advertising. This reflects a broader shift in the social consciousness of this generation, where the influence of gender on social issues has diminished—an influence that older generations may have been more susceptible to. A study by Chang et al. (2021) found that Gen Z holds a more favourable view of LGBTQ representation, shaped by the social, cultural, and political influences that have defined their formative years. This trend allows brands to adopt gender-neutral marketing strategies, focusing on core values such as inclusion, equality, and respect for diversity—values numerous studies have identified as central to Gen Z's concerns (Yousaf et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This study examined Gen Z consumers' responses to LGBTQ-themed advertisements in the urban contexts of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The results indicated that tolerance towards homosexuality significantly influenced attitudes towards advertisements and brand perception. Additionally, ad attitude served as a partial mediator between tolerance and brand perception, highlighting the

importance of emotional and value alignment in shaping consumer evaluations. The absence of significant gender differences further suggests a broader generational shift toward inclusive values.

This research contributes to the limited literature on advertising and consumer behaviour in Southeast Asia by providing empirical insights into how social values influence young consumers' perceptions. It also offers practical implications for marketers seeking to engage Gen Z audiences through inclusive and socially relevant messaging.

Indeed, this research has limitations. First, using a cross-sectional design limits the ability to assess attitude changes over time. Second, data were collected through self-report measures, which may introduce response bias. Lastly, the study focused solely on Gen Z in two major cities, which may not represent the entire generation across Vietnam. These limitations open up several avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies could explore how attitudes towards LGBTQ-themed advertisements evolve over time. Additionally, future studies may incorporate multiple generations or expand the geographic scope to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Including qualitative approaches may also provide richer insights into the motivations behind consumer responses.

Implications

Academically, it contributes to the present conversation by confirming and expanding the social science models of consumer attitudes and advertising effectiveness. The finding that personal values, such as tolerance towards homosexuality, can be important precursors of positive attitudes towards an LGBTQ-themed advertisement and its associated brand fits theories of attitude formation and brand perception. Furthermore, it fills an important gap in consumer literature in Vietnam, where relatively little research has examined this issue. The study also confirms a relationship between ad content and brand perception, presenting ads not only as a marketing method but also as a method of connection and emotional trust with consumers. In practical terms, it could be noteworthy for marketers and brands developing relationships with Gen Z consumers who are known to be open, socially aware, and impactful in the marketplace. Other outcomes from the study showed that Gen Z participants were more likely to be receptive to inclusive and social messaging (or advertising) than non-inclusive and non-social messaging (or advertising). In particular, advertising aimed at the LGBTQ can potentially create long-term positive impacts on the brand image and feelings of connection with consumers if a level of wisdom (e.g., authenticity, empathy, and/or cultural awareness) is considered. The study also implied that marketers do not need to differentiate their messages for male or female consumers because male and female Gen Z consumers did not seem to demonstrate significant differences in responses, allowing for a more streamlined and inclusive marketing effort towards a broader spectrum of consumers in Gen Z or the chosen audience/marketplace segment while also saving time and costs for the brand or agency. The study underscores that the ad content should be creative and knowledgeable while being mindful of creating content that is in accordance with Gen Z's values, and that it should not be wrongfully perceived as tokenism or misrepresentation that could backfire. In addition, the study highlights that the advertising industry has the social responsibility to further culture by breaking down stereotypes and normalising acceptance and support of marginalised communities. By operating in LGBTQ inclusion ions, brands attract a certain consumer segment and assume an active role in embracing and supporting equality and acceptance. There is an increased expectation on the part of consumers to actively participate in creating awareness and social responsibility. In this sense, the research not only gave marketers suggestions on how to connect more effectively with and support their Gen Z audience but also offered an opportunity to employ strategic marketing efforts to help facilitate an empathetic, inclusive society through thoughtfulness and consideration in advertising.

Limitation

The research provides important observations on the changing attitudes towards LGBTQ-related advertising in Vietnamese society, specifically among urban Gen Z. However, the study's geographic coverage is limited to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. It will not generalise to the broader population's attitudes to LGBTQ-themed advertising, including those in rural areas, where traditional attitudes may still be more prominent. Traditional, conservative attitudes are commonly held by rural populations,

contrasting with urban areas, where populations usually have more diverse education levels and cultural exposure, allowing for more openness toward LGBTQ issues. Furthermore, the study's exclusive focus on Gen Z may not be fully representative of the general population in Vietnam. It may reproduce the tendencies of progressive ideas about LGBTQ issues lacking the representation of older generations, such as Gen X or Baby Boomers, who may hold more conservative or nuanced attitudes shaped by different cultural contexts. A single cross-sectional study cannot represent the time evolution of attitudes as it represents views at a distinct time point and ignores how public opinion of LGBTQ or advertising may change with broader social changes, representations of LGBTQ in the media, or legal changes whereby the public attitude shifts with either legal recognition of LGBTQ rights or subject to global influences. Future studies should include various regions, age/generational differences, or longitudinal designs to allow for more representative, richer, and evolving understandings.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

LNTT: Conceptualisation, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation. HHG: Project Administration, Writing – Review & Editing, Proofread.

Ethics Statement

This research did not require IRB or ethical committee approval, as it involved an anonymous online survey with no collection of personally identifiable personal data.

Data Access Statement

Research data supporting this publication are available upon request to the corresponding author.

Author Biography

Luong Ngoc Thanh Tham is a graduate student at Foreign Trade University, specializing in International Business. Tham's research interests include consumer behavior, marketing research and business strategies. In this research, Tham was responsible for conducting the literature review, developing the research model, data analysis and analyzing policy implications.

Ho Hoang Giang is an undergraduate student at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City – International School of Business (UEH-ISB), majoring in Applied Finance. Giang's academic interests include econometrics scale, finance sector and ESG strategic research. Giang contributed to this research through theoretical framework development, literature review, discussion and final manuscript preparation.

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Appendix A

Part 1. Basic Information

Question 1	What is your gender?	Male Female
Question 2	Which age group do you belong to?	Under 20 20 – 22 22 – 25 25 – 27 27 – 30
Question 3	Your current place of residence?	Ha Noi Ho Chi Minh City
Question 4	Your educational background?	High school Undergraduate Graduate Currently employed

Part 2. Attitudes Toward Advertisements Featuring Homosexuality
1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

1. *Please indicate your level of tolerance toward homosexuality:*

	1	2	3	4	5
I believe homosexuality should never be a reason for discrimination in the workplace under any circumstances.					
I do not mind having homosexual friends.					
I support the legalisation of same-sex marriage.					
I do not consider homosexuality to be a disease.					
I view the LGBTQ+ movement as something positive.					

2. *Please indicate your attitude toward homosexual-themed advertisements on mass media:*

	1	2	3	4	5
Homosexual advertisements make me feel joyful.					
Homosexual advertisements make me feel satisfied.					
I feel excited when watching homosexual advertisements.					
Homosexual advertisements make me feel offended.					
Homosexual advertisements make me feel disgusted.					

3. *Please indicate your attitude toward brands that use homosexual imagery in their advertising campaigns:*

	1	2	3	4	5
I think brands using homosexual imagery in advertisements are good brands.					
I like brands that include homosexual advertisements.					
I find brands using homosexual-themed advertisements to be adorable.					
I dislike brands that use homosexual imagery.					
I feel uncomfortable with brands that use homosexual imagery.					
I would never purchase from a brand that uses homosexual-themed advertisements.					