

E-commerce, design, and the LGBTQ+ community.

How should an e-commerce website be designed to create a more inclusive feeling for the LGBTQ+ community?

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Summary

We have written the paper to answer the main question: “How should an e-commerce website be designed to create a more inclusive feeling for the LGBTQ+ community?”.

To answer this, we research what “inclusivity” is based on two models. We came to understand that inclusivity is also build on different categories equality and diversity. And in most cases people will be able to feel inclusive if safety and psychological needs have been met.

Multiple e-commerce websites have been checked and the main problems we found were:

- The articles are mainly for male or female and sometimes unisex. So, the assortment is not compelling to the LGBTQ+ community.
- It is not possible to select product based on the criteria other than male/female/boy/girl.
- Images on the websites does not show any reference to gender diversity.
- In text there is no reference to gender diversity.
- For clothing or shoes, there is no product information that is useful for people in the community, like does if the fitting is suitable if one doesn't have a hourglass figure.
- As a customer you can only identify yourself as sir or madam.

Based on our field research, the participants came up with multiple solutions for these problems companies can implement to improve inclusivity:

- Use models that fall outside traditional gender roles, don't make it stereotypical
- Avoid gender-specific promotions
- Avoid hiding LGBTQ+ specific products
- Options for discrete packaging
- Size ranges and a specific fit

Based on these points we created a list of steps companies can use to improve inclusivity. (see chapter 6)

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1 Introduction

In this day and age a lot of negativity exists. Discrimination, racism, and how people generally act towards each other. Vulnerable and underrepresented groups are also marked as a target by these people.

This research paper cannot change the actions and opinions of the people that discriminate, but we do want to create a better experience for the LGBTQ+ online.

We both work at a company that creates websites and other online products. We know how, for example, a website gets designed, developed, and promoted. With this research paper our goal is to create guidelines / rules which can be used in the design process of an e-commerce website to better include the LGBTQ+ community.

We will get to this goal by answering the following main question:

“How should an e-commerce website be designed to create a more inclusive feeling for the LGBTQ+ community?”.

The main question is divided into multiple sub-questions:

- What is known in literature that contributes to the feeling of inclusiveness?
 - What factor stimulates the feeling of inclusiveness?
- What is the problem the LGBTQ+ community is facing?
 - What aspects of an e-commerce website causes the feeling of the target group not being included?
- What are the characteristics of an e-commerce website that does make the target group feel included?
- What changes are needed in the design process of a regular e-commerce website to include the LGBTQ+ community?

Answering these questions will give us the knowledge about “inclusivity”, “the problems the LGBTQ+ community is facing”, and “what changes need to be taken in the design process of an e-commerce website”.

These questions will be answered by the use of desk research and a survey with an LGBTQ+ community. In the first chapter we will research inclusivity, the second and third chapter will contain the survey with additional desk research for fact checking. And lastly, chapter four will use the content from the other chapters with additional desk research to know what should be changed in the design process.

The paper is aimed at e-commerce website makers, as they have the influence to implement these changes. The checklist should help them in creating more inclusive e-commerce websites.

Glossary

In this document we use a variety of terms that might not be clear to everyone, we have listed them here to make sure that the meaning is clear.

- **LGBTQ+** This stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer the plus stands for any identity not covered under the previous letter. Alternatives for this acronym are LGBT, LGBTQIA+ and LGBTQI+ these include more or less people but in this research paper we consider these as one.

- **Cis/Cis gender** Someone who is comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Non binary** An umbrella term for anyone who doesn't feel like they fit inside of the binary gender. When used as a gender identity directly it generally means that someone doesn't feel like they are male or female
- **Agender** A term for someone who doesn't identify with any gender (identity)
- **Genderfluid** Someone whose gender might change over time, they identify with 2 or more genders. The way some experience gender fluidity is different for everyone.
- **Discord** An application that provides a place to talk and voice chat with other people, similar to Microsoft Teams and Slack.

2 Method

Detailed evaluation of sources, research instruments and detailed research results are included in the appendices below in this paper.

2.1 Disclaimer

The main question and topic we have chosen is quite sensitive for communities dealing with the problems we discuss in this paper. This makes it challenging to convince the target group to speak out.

We first want to state that the survey is anonymous.

Secondly, because of the time constraints and word limit, a situation can occur where people will disagree with our findings. This paper will not be able to encompass all problems and solutions for the discussed communities, but we have tried our utmost best to create a high-quality paper.

2.2 Desk Research

Sources have been found using search terms in google scholar, like “inclusivity” with keywords like “LGBTQ” and “E-commerce”, with the exclusion of “Management”, because we got a lot of results talking about how management could improve inclusivity in their company. This might be interesting, but it falls out of scope for our paper.

To be able to use valid sources from the internet for our desk research part, sources from Google Scholar have been used for this paper.

They have been checked on:

- Citation score.
- Validity of the author/company.
- The date the paper has been written.
- The viewpoint of the paper itself.

If one (or more) of the described points does not meet our (and The InHolland University their) standards, additional research on other sources will be performed to check the “low” validity of the paper. If a viewpoint of a paper has biased content, other papers will be used that have the opposite opinion to check validity and truthfulness of the content.

2.3 Field Research

For the field research part, a survey has been used to gather information.

We have access and approval from a Discord community, that is mainly used by the LGBTQ+ community, to perform a survey about our topic. The recipients of the survey are mainly from the following countries United States and the Netherlands.

We chose a survey because of the sensitivity of the subject. The target group is often confronted with negativity and a survey gives them the opportunity to respond anonymously. Furthermore, the opinion on what makes a person feel included, is very personal. A survey gives us the opportunity to research a broader group.

We created a Google Survey the participants can fill in. This data is later used in our research paper to gain a better understanding about the troubles of the participants.

3 What is inclusivity? (Desk Research)

Based on the Oxford Languages inclusivity is “the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.” (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

“Inclusivity” is a broad term and is also not limited to the LGBTQ+ community. We decided to research inclusivity in a more general term and validate our desk research findings through the survey.

ESN, defines inclusivity as “The act of making all groups of people within a society feel valued and important” (ESN, 2020).

3.1 What is known in literature that contributes to the feeling of inclusiveness?

In literature different models (or frameworks) have been made to describe “inclusiveness”. In this chapter we will describe two of these models, conclude what contributes to the feeling of inclusiveness, and look for similarities in these models.

3.1.1 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion framework (DE&I)

The “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” framework is divided into three categories. The Independent Sector describes it like:

Equality: “is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.”

Diversity: “includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another.”

Inclusion: “is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate.”

(Independent sector, 2016)

Even though these categories fall under one framework, they all need separate resources and tools to measure the results of implementing the framework.

For example, a company might rather hire a person from an underrepresented group for “diversity”, but this does not mean the company is “inclusive”, because the person might be excluded in the company culture, and not be given the same opportunities (“equality”).

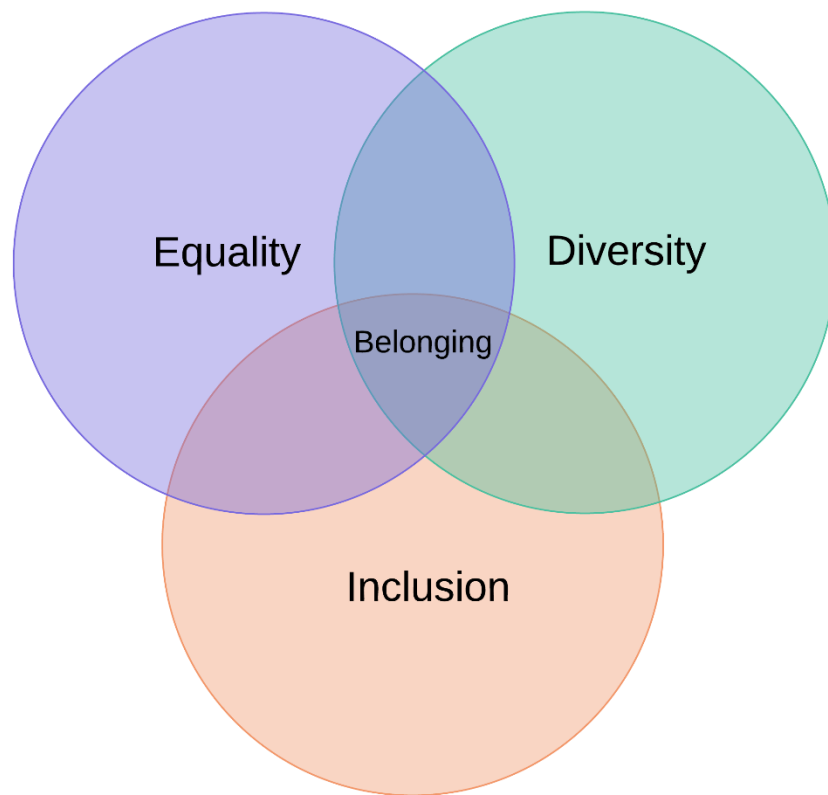


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs pyramid (Independent sector, 2016)

In this diagram you also see that “inclusion” is overlapped by “Equality” and “Diversity”, meaning that for a full inclusive feeling multiple parts need to be met. If all categories are met the result will be cultural-diversity.

3.1.2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a system of needs people need to acquire to achieve emotional wellbeing and basic needs. (Gorman, 2010)

There are six levels to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. All previous levels must be achieved to move onto the level in the hierarchy. (Gorman, 2010).

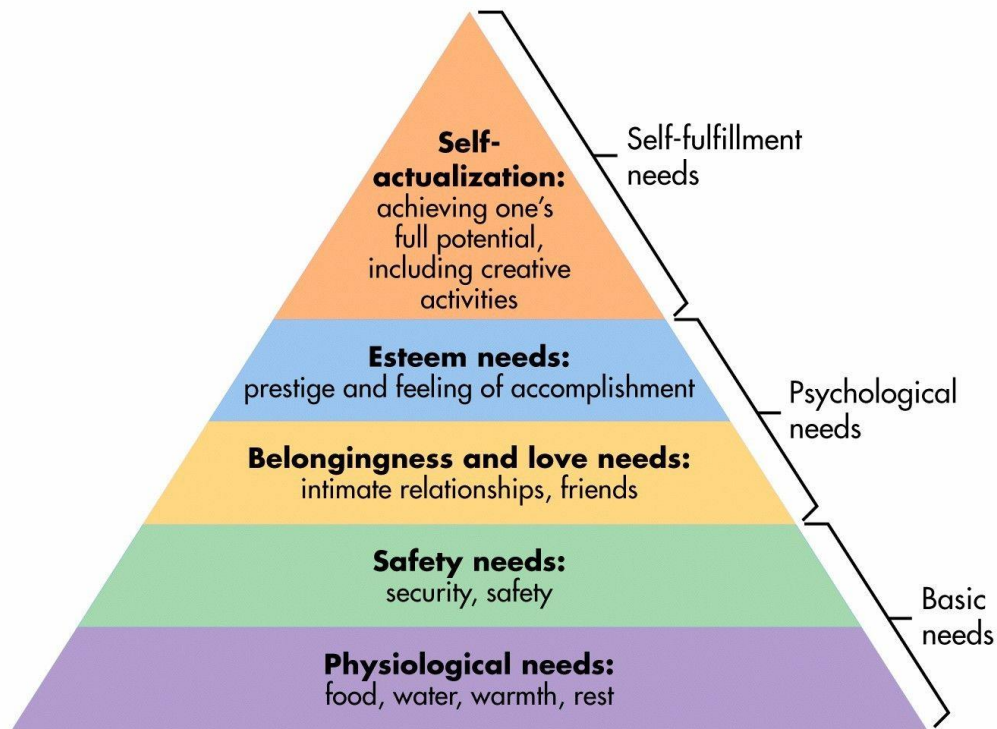


Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs pyramid (Gorman, 2010)

Inclusivity resides in the "Belongingness and love needs" of the hierarchy. When the "Physiological-" and "Safety needs" have been obtained, and after that the "Belongingness and love needs" people will experience inclusiveness.

3.2 What factor stimulates the feeling of inclusiveness?

Inclusivity, based on these models, is more than just a single category and cannot be easily achieved. Other needs need to be achieved, like safety, before an inclusive feeling can be reached. Inclusivity consists out of more categories.

For a person to feel truly inclusive they should get the same opportunities as others, should belong in a diverse culture, perspective, and values (independent sector, 2016).

If these points are met, a person has a high chance of feeling inclusive, or even a step further, the feeling of belonging.

4 What is the problem the LGBTQ+ community is facing? (Desk / Field Research)

Desk Research

For Desk Research we have used Google to find relevant input for our research. We've used the search term 'guidelines inclusive communication', because we expected to find information about what NOT to do as well. And this assumption was correct. Because the subject is so sensitive, guidelines are filled with information about the impact of not inclusive communication. We assume to encourage the reader to adopt the desired way of communicating.

Furthermore, we have studied the websites of large, established e-commerce companies to see how the target group is represented and if and how their needs are met.

Google Desk Research

The term 'guidelines inclusive communication' led us to several interesting papers:

- Inclusive Communication Guidelines – European Parliament
- Inclusive Communication Manual - ESN
- European Commission Guidelines for Inclusive Communication
- Bridging the Gap – Inclusive and accessible communication

Not all papers were related to the LGBTQ+ community and the problems they are facing. But we found out that all underrepresented groups are all considered having the same challenges. Persons with a certain condition or impairment have the same challenges as persons in the LGBTQ+ community. Only the solution to the challenge differs. So the problem is that people want to feel included and want to feel belongingness. If a person is invisible, because they cannot recognise themselves in text or in pictures, they don't feel included. This is being increased when help is missing. For persons with a certain condition or impairment. This shows in, for example, in a website not facilitating accessibility. For people in the LGBTQ+ community this shows in the obligation to choose if you are a male or a female and no option to choose otherwise or not provide the information. Related to the EDI-framework (equality, diversity, inclusion), they experience the same restrictions.

Study of communication by large e-commerce companies

We have studied the websites of:

- Wehkamp
- Zalando
- Otrium
- Bonprix
- Bol.com

Inclusiveness for the LGBTQ+ community is especially relevant for companies that sell clothing and shoes, because for these products it expresses the difference between the LGBTQ+ community and the rest of the customers. Unfortunately, none of these websites offer anything to make the LGBTQ+ community feel included:

- The articles are mainly for male or female and sometimes unisex. So the assortment is not compelling to the LGBTQ+ community.
- It is not possible to select product based on the criteria other than male/female/boy/girl.
- Images on the websites does not show any reference to gender diversity.
- In text there is no reference to gender diversity.
- For clothing or shoes, there is no product information that is useful for people in the community, like does if the fitting is suitable if one doesn't have a hourglass figure.

To have a better overview, we also studied the website of bol.com, at which you can buy all sorts of products. For Bol.com, there is some level of representation. This is due to the fact that Bol.com allows individual sellers to sell on their platform. This has caused sellers to also sell LGBTQ+ items, such as books, pride flags, etc.

Field Research

The field research was performed by an anonymous survey. We chose a survey with open answers. Reason for this is that we wanted to make sure that our desk research covers the full scope of the problems the LGBTQ+ community is facing. We also asked them to answer if a more inclusive e-commerce website would lead to extra loyalty and purchases, because this might be useful to convince e-commerce websites to follow up on suggestions to improve their inclusiveness for the community.

The insights we obtained, confirmed what we found out in our desk research:

1. Inclusivity means belonging (like presented in the EDI-framework).
2. Being represented in e-commerce websites would make the group feel better.
3. They think it is important to be represented, because that makes them feel included.
4. Overall, they think they're not represented at all.
5. They think that in case they are represented, it is not in a way that is representative for the community (over sexualized or just the rainbow flag referring to gay people) or sometimes in a way that is not respectful.
6. They cannot come up with the name of an e-commerce website that could lead as an example and can only refer to small business at Etsy or local retailers that are specialized in the target group.
7. Measures that would improve inclusion vary:
 - Use models that fall outside traditional gender roles, don't make it stereotypical
 - Avoid gender-specific promotions
 - Avoid hiding LGBTQ+ specific products
 - Options for discrete packaging
 - Size ranges and a specific fit
8. An inclusive e-commerce website would create loyalty and visitors will be more likely to purchase.
9. It would help if e-commerce websites have a statement somewhere that they support the community and/or share that on social media.

Because the field research is hypothesizing, the outcome might not be representative for the complete target group. To have a representative insight, further research is required.

5 What are the characteristics of an e-commerce website that does make the target group feel included? (Desk / Field Research)

In this chapter we will describe the characteristics of an e-commerce website that does not make the target group feel included, based on the outcome as described in chapter 4. Based on this we will determine how the target group will feel included.

5.1 What aspects of an e-commerce website causes the feeling of the target group not being included?

Referring to the Desk and Field Research as described in chapter 4, the main characteristics that make the target group not being included are:

- Being neglected in text and pictures. E.g., only traditional male/female pictures and being referred to in text as he or she or being presented in an oversexualized manner.
- Not stating in any way that the company supports inclusiveness.
- Not being able to find or select products that are suitable for the target group.
- Not having the opportunity to registrate yourself other than male or female.
- Not having the opportunity for discrete packaging.

5.2 Community Design

As a result, as stated in paragraph 5.1, the community design should respect the following aspects:

- The target group should recognize themselves in text and in pictures.
- A statement that the company supports the target group would be a bonus.
- The assortment should be fitting the target group.
- There should be options to select products according to the demands of the target group (size, fitting, gender diversity).
- Personal data should give the option to registrate the gender identity you prefer or none at all.
- There should be an option to choose for discrete packaging.

The Inclusive Communication Manual of the ESN gives a list of words and expressions that could or should not be used in communication with the target group:

Instead of	Ladies/Gentlemen Girls/Boys	Use	people	folks	people of the world	everyone
Instead of	wife/husband, girlfriend/boyfriend	Use	partner	spouse		
Instead of	Latino/Latina	Use	Latinx			
Instead of	him/her	Use	they			

Figure 3. List of words not to use, and what to use instead (ESN, 2020)

6 What changes are needed in the design process of a regular e-commerce website to include the LGBTQ+ community?

In this chapter we present the insights as described in chapter 5 in a way that it can be used as an action plan for companies that want to transform their e-commerce website into an inclusive one for the LGBTQ+ community.

Step 1: Add a persona that represents the LGBTQ+ community. The persona is part of your research.

Step 2: Make sure the assortment the company offers meets the requirements of the target group in shapes, sizes, style diversity.

Step 3: Provide the opportunity to select products specifically for the target group.

Step 4: Make sure that the registration of personal data and the set up of forms offer gender neutral options different from just female or male. Give the opportunity to change the chosen gender and name, because gender identity might change over time.

Step 5: Create a library for expressions that can be used to prevent stereotype expressions in text.

Step 6: Create a set of stock photo's that represent the target group that should be used to ensure that the target group is represented in images on the website. Be aware that these are not oversexualized or stereo-typing.

Step 7: Ensure gender neutral communication in e-mails.

Step 8: Avoid gender specific marketing actions.

Step 9: Provide the option for discrete packaging.

Step 10: Add an 'inclusivity' statement to the 'about us' section on your website.

Step 11: Include the LGBTQ+ community in your design process, interview members of the LGBTQ+ community. Listen to their struggles, and work with them to find solutions. It's incredibly easy to have the right intention but execute it the wrong way.

7 Conclusion

Our main question was:

“How should an e-commerce website be designed to create a more inclusive feeling for the LGBTQ+ community?”.

We have formulated sub-questions to make sure we would cover the complete scope.

First, we started with Desk Research to have an overview of information that was already available. We found out what is meant with inclusivity and why and how LGBTQ+ community feel not included. This was captured in a framework to structure the insights.

We questioned the target group to gain insight in their thoughts, experiences and expectations to sharpen out insight in how e-commerce websites are versus should be designed to create a more inclusive feeling for the LGBTQ+ community.

Based on the output of the Desk and Field Research, we made an overview of 10 concrete measures that e-commerce website should take to create a more inclusive feeling for the LGBTQ+ community.

The Field Research was a questionnaire with open answers. This limits the representativity. Our recommendation is to validate the outcome of the Field Research with quantitative research in which the effect of the 10 steps that we proposed can be confirmed.

The main question is, are e-commerce companies prepared to invest in the community? What's in it for them?

Our catchy ending is that 80% of 13-20-years-olds – members of Generation Z – believe that gender should not define a person as much as it used to (J Walter Thompson Innovation Group, 2016). To retain the loyalty of their future customers, e-commerce companies should be aware that they include the community.

8 Source List

- Bridging the Gap. (2018, October 31). *Inclusive and accessible communication guidelines*. Retrieved from https://bridgingthegap-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/BtG_Inclusive-and-accessible-Communication-Guidelines.pdf
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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 Evaluation of sources

In this appendix, we will evaluate each source, discuss why it was chosen and evaluate it according to the CARS criteria

9.1.1 Inclusive and accessible communication guidelines – Bridging the Gap

This source was found using google with the search term: “Inclusive Communication”. This source was chosen because while it doesn’t directly go about the LGBTQ+ community, it does go into depth on inclusive communication and why it’s important.

The source allowed us to compare the problems other underrepresented groups are facing and the kind of problems they have and how that compares to the problems the LGBTQ+ community are facing.

We found the report on the Bridging the Gap project website, this project focusses on inclusive policies and services for equal rights of persons with disabilities. The project is funded by the European Union.

It’s not clearly stated if this paper is peer reviewed, so we are unable to confirm this. We have considered this while using the information we found in this paper.

9.1.1.1 Credibility

The author of the paper is written by the Bridging the Gap project. This project is funded by the European Union, and is partners with the United Nations Human rights office, Ministry for foreign affairs of Finland, European disability forum and the IDDC. They are an expert group within the field. It also states the version of this document.

9.1.1.2 Accuracy

The source is relatively up to date, it was written in October of 2018, which is now 3.5 years ago at the date of writing. The statements in the report are still accurate to the situation in present day. It specifies it’s intention, and the target audience of the paper.

9.1.1.3 Reasonableness

The information presented in this paper is objective, and aims to suggest how to implement accessibility and inclusive language according to known guidelines. It doesn’t go in to different point of views, we took this into account while using this source.

9.1.1.4 Support

The paper clearly states the sources used for the research. You can easily contact the organisation that wrote this paper. The guidelines itself don’t contain contact information, however the website that it was published on does include a contact form and email address you can reach them on. The information that is published inside this paper are similar to what other research papers suggest doing. Giving validity to the claims made in this paper.

9.1.2 Inclusive Communication Manual – ESN

This source was found using google with the search term: “Inclusive Communication”. This source was chosen because it focusses on a wide range of inclusive communication guidelines. Both related to the LGBTQ+ community and inclusivity in general.

We found this source on the website of ESN, where they published this paper. This paper has been peer-reviewed and the authors are clearly stated.

9.1.2.1 Credibility

The paper is written by a group of people, and reviewed by multiple people. It has been published by the Erasmus Student Network AISBL. Which is a widely respected source. The language of the report is of excellent quality.

The paper is also made in collaboration with SIEM and is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.+

9.1.2.2 Accuracy

The paper was published in 2020 on Issuu, and published on March 18 2021 on the ESN website. It's clearly stated what the purpose of this paper is, and who it is intended for. The paper goes into great detail on the different parts of inclusion. And the data is factual based on sources and field research.

9.1.2.3 Reasonableness

The arguments made in this paper are backed up by reason and data. The paper acknowledges the limitations of their research and states that it "does not intend to override the individual preferences of the reader. Everybody expresses themselves in whatever way they prefer, and everybody has different ways in which they would like to be spoken to, or about." (ESN, 2020).

9.1.2.4 Support

This paper clearly states all their sources, and uses proper citations in the report. It also states information about the authors of the paper and the organisation that it was published by. It doesn't provide a way to contact the authors, but the ESN website does provide information on how to contact ESN.

The information presented in this paper is very similar to information presented in other research papers. Which further supports the statements made by the paper.

9.1.3 *European Commission Guidelines for Inclusive Communication*

This source was found using google with the search term: "Inclusive Communication". It was chosen for two reasons, the first being that it directly discusses inclusive communication in relation to the LGBTQ+ community and gender. The second being that it's a report by the European Commission which is a very reputable source.

9.1.3.1 Credibility

The report is made by the European Commission which is a very credible source, the European Commission however generally speaking doesn't state who the individual authors of a paper are. This is also true for this paper, which makes it hard to find who wrote this paper.

9.1.3.2 Accuracy

This report was published in 2021, it was however pulled in November 2021 (See 9.1.3.3 Reasonableness). The paper goes in depth and provides reasoning and suggestions. It also clearly states who it's intended for and what the purpose of the paper is.

9.1.3.3 Reasonableness

This report was pulled because it caused a heated debate, on the road to improvement there are bound to be obstacles. This paper was rather one sided because it aimed to be a guideline for the European Commission for inclusive communication. We kept this in mind when using this source and were critical of the information presented in this source. We decided to still use it for the primary reason that it shows that this is a topic that has a lot of strong opinions about it. And there are bound to be mistakes in the process of doing it right.

The main critique of the paper was based on the fact that it suggested using "holidays" instead of "Christmas". And suggesting to not use gender specific roles.

9.1.3.4 Support

The report clearly states the sources used, and uses proper citations when applicable. It also clearly states contact information on how to contact the publisher in relation to this paper. There are multiple papers that make similar suggestions as this paper does, it doesn't introduce suggestions that are completely new and unfounded. It does present statements that are controversial in the conservative community.

9.1.4 *Inclusive Communication Guidelines – European Parliament*

This source was found using google with the search term: "Inclusive Communication". We found it on google, where we found a link to the pdf file on the website of the European Parliament.

It's not stated in the guidelines if they are peer reviewed.

9.1.4.1 Credibility

It's not directly stated who the author of the document is, this is very common for reports published by the European Parliament. It also doesn't contain the contact information for reaching the authors of the guidelines.

That the guidelines are published by the European Parliament does give it extra credibility. Because this is a very reputable source for information.

9.1.4.2 Accuracy

The guidelines specify who it is meant for, what the purpose of the guidelines are and what the limitations are. As the guidelines are created in the presentation as a checklist. It doesn't go in far depth for every statement. But it does provide detailed guidelines on inclusive communications. It doesn't provide the exact date the report was published, but it does state that it was made in 2019.

9.1.4.3 Reasonableness

The statements made in the guidelines are backed up by reason, as this paper are guidelines they are one-sided from the view that it aims to create inclusive communication. The guidelines use a neutral tone.

9.1.4.4 Support

The guidelines properly state the sources and cite the sources where applicable. It doesn't provide a method to contact the authors of these guidelines. The information presented in this document are similar to what other documents say. Supporting the statements made in these guidelines.

9.1.5 *Maslow's hierarchy and social and emotional wellbeing - Gorman, D*

This paper has been found via Google Scholar on ResearchGate, while searching for "what is inclusivity" excluding keywords "Management" and "Business". The paper and referenced papers have both been peer reviewed.

9.1.5.1 Credibility

The paper has a decent amount of citations, currently at 24. It is written by a professor who works in medical care, has written 63 other papers with a combined citation score of 935. Meaning on average every paper gets above 10 citations.

9.1.5.2 Accuracy

The paper uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs even though it is a theory and depends on the person it provides a framework and a starting point for our research.

This is also the reason we used another framework in our paper and check for similarities between them, to get a more accurate guideline.

9.1.5.3 Reasonableness

Because Maslow's hierarchy is more to the theoretical side we used another framework in our paper and check for similarities between them, to get a more accurate guideline.

9.1.5.4 Support

This paper was published in 2010 and states all the references used. It comes from a person already working in the medical field and people can contact him if they need to.

Other papers that use this as a reference come from around 2020, so the content is not outdated.

9.1.6 *inclusivity meaning - Oxford Languages , Google.*

This definition has been found on google while searching for "inclusivity meaning". The result came from the Oxford Language Dictionary which gets updated four times a year and has strict quality control on their definitions.

9.1.6.1 Credibility

The Oxford Dictionary exists for more than 200 years. They have helped other researchers and scholars to "ask ever more expansive and in-depth questions about the English language".

9.1.6.2 Accuracy

The Oxford Dictionary gets updated four times a year, so the content will not be outdated.

9.1.6.3 Reasonableness

This reference has been used to create a starting point to figure out the meaning of "Inclusivity" other research has been performed to proof this meaning.

9.1.6.4 Support

Sources are checked and the content of the words have been reviewed before it is published.

9.1.7 Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter - Independent Sector.

This article has been found while searching for “The meaning of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”. The article uses multiple dictionaries to define the meaning of these three terms and other content has references being used to validate the claims. Shamefully enough there is nowhere stated that the article itself is not peer-reviewed. But the references used are.

9.1.7.1 Credibility

The Independent Sector is a collective of multiple non-profit organisations.

The have added the references used in the website.

9.1.7.2 Accuracy

The content is taken from multiple coalitions and glossaries to create better definitions.

9.1.7.3 Reasonableness

We have used content that has references and is also on the same line as our other sources used.

9.1.7.4 Support

Sources have been used to validate the content written.

9.2 Appendix 2 Research instrument

For our field research we have performed a survey, this survey was shared in one Discord server that includes a lot of people that are part of the LGBTQ+ community. It was also shared directly with connection within the LGBTQ+ community. The people that took the survey are primarily from the United States and the Netherlands.

While the survey is anonymous, we can't link the answers to a direct person we are aware of who most of the respondents are because they contacted us to inform us that they filled in the survey. While around 25% of the respondents play games, we saw no significant difference between the answers provided by them versus the answers provided by the other 75% of the respondents.

Inside of the Discord server, 3 random participants have been rewarded with Discord Nitro for filling in the survey. The survey itself was anonymous but included a code at the end that allowed us to validate that they had actually participated in the survey.

The survey has been taken using Google Forms, and provided the following introduction:

- First of all, thank you so much for filling in this survey. It's completely anonymous, if you have any questions feel free to reach out to me. (If I didn't directly send you this form, you can reach me on Discord: REDACTED or Phone: REDACTED).

For school we are performing research into "how can an E-commerce website be created in a way to be more inclusive towards the LGBTQI+ community" with as goal to create a design specification for the industry.

For this we want to get insights from the LGBTQI+ community (For clarity I'm Genderfluid and REDACTED myself). This survey will most likely take you 10-20 minutes to fill in. Again thank you so much for answering the survey. It means a lot to us and we hope to use the results to make a meaningful impact inside of the industry.

The survey consists of a total of 15 questions (The 15th being a optional very short question)

The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. What does the term "inclusivity" mean to you?
2. What challenges do you think the LGBTQ+ community faces when shopping online?
3. How do you feel when you see the LGBTQ+ community being represented in e-commerce websites?
4. How important is it to you that the LGBTQ+ community are represented in e-commerce websites?
5. Do you feel that the LGBTQ+ community are accurately represented in e-commerce websites?
6. Do you feel that the LGBTQ+ community are given enough visibility in e-commerce websites?
7. Do you feel that the way that the LGBTQ+ community are represented in e-commerce websites is respectful?
8. Are there any e-commerce websites that you feel do a particularly good job of representing the LGBTQ+ community?

9. Are there any e-commerce websites that you feel do a particularly poor job of representing the LGBTQ+ community?
10. What could an e-commerce website do to improve the way they represent the LGBTQ+ community?
11. Are you more likely to purchase from an e-commerce website if they represent the LGBTQ+ community? Why or why not?
12. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community in terms of inclusion?
13. How do you think an e-commerce website could be made to make it easier for the LGBTQ+ community to find and purchase products and services?
14. Are there any other ways that e-commerce websites could be made to make the LGBTQ+ community feel more welcome?
15. What is your gender identity?

Question 15 had the following introduction with it, this was to make sure the people felt safe to answer this question. (Which appears to have been effective because everyone answered this question)

- The following question is totally optional to answer, we understand that this is a sensitive question so we want to make sure you know that you are under no obligation to fill this in.

The reason we ask is as follows: the way cis people look at representation might be different than trans people look at representation. With this question we aim to see if there are big differences in the representation people want based on gender identity.

9.3 Appendix 3 Research results

Here you include the detailed results of your field research. For example an interview report, the detailed results of your survey, filled in observations forms etc. By including this you increase the transparency and traceability of your research.

9.3.1 What does the term "inclusivity" mean to you?

Our take from this is: Including everyone, so that everyone has the same rights and opportunities.

- Including everyone with equal rights.
- Everyone and everyone is treated the same and allowed to do the things everyone else does.
- That everyone is treated equally and included, that people aren't being discriminated based on who they love or who they are.
- Being aware of the struggles that come with being gay, coming out etc. and being nice enough to treat it as something normal yet still ask if a person needs help going through all of that. Otherwise, it's just ignoring that "being gay" makes you "different" and treating it AS NORMAL.
- It means that everyone is welcome and feels safe.
- Including people who might not be the same as you in multiple ways. treating everyone the same no matter their sexuality gender race sex heritage etc.
- a policy of providing resources and opportunities for people who are excluded
- to not 'gatekeep' anyone from an average aspect of life for something they cannot control and are discriminated against for, and to help bring attention to that aspect of their life in a positive light.
- That you include everyone.
- Equal representation and/or participation
- It means everyone is an equal, no one has to experience discrimination and no one is judged for what they look like, the things they are into, or any of that type of stuff. you accept everyone without even thinking about what makes them different from you or society.
- That no matter what my gender identity is, I am treated equally.
- Inclusivity for me means not excluding any race, sexuality, class, gender, disability etc.
- That there is equal representation for each group in society.
- Importance of not excluding, respect, understanding

9.3.2 What challenges do you think the LGBTQ+ community faces when shopping online?

Our take from this is: It can be hard to find clothing when you fall outside of the binary gender norms. Representation seems to be also be an issue.

- Not really any
- The measurements could be off/made for "cis gender" people, lots of transgender people struggle with the fact that their body proportions aren't the same as cisgender's, and the clothing is sized off of cis people.
- Probably representation, most companies don't represent the LGBTQ+ community. It can also be hard to find clothing when you fall outside of the binary gender norms.

- Discrimination, prejudice, all the while, but also, the lack of understanding brand names have sometimes. Perhaps even finding a slightly more obscure flag than the rainbow one is a challenge.
- I think sometimes certain styles can be hard to find especially in certain sizes, a lot of clothing made for LGBT people sometimes only comes in certain sizes or styles that don't always include people. Binders also can be really hard to find for larger chest sizes which sucks. Discrete packaging can also be an issue for people who aren't out or don't feel safe.
- Lots of bullying and called slurs, hated on, fear of not being accepted, trying to figure out if someone is homophobic, and it makes it challenging for influencers to come out cause of their fear.
- Having to select a gender, clothing we like.
- overly sexualized or gendered items.
- A lot like for example I'm non binary and there are no non binary clothes lines.
- Generic pride items only during pride month or it being overcharged (pride items)
- People who are not strictly male or female seeing the male/female section of clothing and not having any gender neutral things. or when they do see LGBTQIA+ supportive clothes during June, it's all kind of cringy and probably created by straight people
- It is ignored most of the time.
- A lack of proper representation, and as such a lack of acceptance within society
- Finding fitting clothes if you identify with a gender that is different than the gender given to you at birth. For instance if you're born as a 'male' (male chromosomes) you might have bigger shoulders so finding a dress that fits you might be hard if you're trans. Inclusivity would mean that you cater to all genders and identifications.
- Taste, sizes, marketing, search engines, feeling unsafe with data capture

9.3.3 *How do you feel when you see the LGBTQ+ community being represented in e-commerce websites?*

Our take from this is: the LGBTQ+ community wants to be represented more, it creates a good feeling and they are more likely to recommend the store to others. But it needs to be done right, as doing it wrong does more harm than good.

- Happy, It needs to be represented more.
- It makes me glad to see that we have representation and are seen.
- It makes me feel good, because I can relate with it. Representation matters a lot, especially to young LGBTQ youth.
- Ecstatic, until I can't find flags I want, or it's all plain rainbow. If it's done well, I'd 100% recommend it to friends.
- It makes me happy cause it's like "Yay, someone like me" it also makes it feel like a safer and better place to shop or be involved with.
- I feel happy and included but I also know a lot of them is just for money.
- I feel proud, every time I see LGBTQ+ being represented in websites I would want to shop there more in support.
- I feel uncomfortable, people overly fetishize it even within the community or just make it out to be all happy go lucky
- I feel like they could do a better job representing us.
- It makes me happy when done well, I feel like it's nice to know.

- I love that people do include certain things, like the other day I was on a website and it said "gifts for him" "gifts for her" and "gifts for them" and I was really happy to see that they added the gender neutral term of they/them/theirs type pronouns to help people feel more comfortable. but sometimes I see things and I'm like "oh jeez that is so cringey and was probably made by a straight dude".
- It makes me happy and most likely I will buy there more often.
- I think focus should be on products instead of for example gender based.
- It makes me happy.
- Feel comfortable, enthusiastic

9.3.4 *How important is it to you that the LGBTQ+ community are represented in e-commerce websites?*

Our take from this is: The LGBTQ+ community finds it very important that the community is represented.

- Pretty important
- Very important
- I think it's very important, I think representation contributes to acceptance, which is key to saving the lives of LGBTQ and especially the LGBTQ youth.
- It's not matter of how important it is to me, but a matter of stopping prejudice against something that is inherent. The more common something is, the more treat it as normal, and perhaps someone shopping online meeting an LGBTQ+ person would voluntarily give a link to the shop over ignoring and forgetting someone's identity.
- I think it's pretty important. People deserve to have spaces that represent them regardless of their sexual orientation, gender, or anything else. Having shops that sell pride items can also be really validating and help people express themselves.
- it's pretty important because there's not a lot of LGBTQ+ influencers with a big platform to raise awareness and acceptance.
- It's very important to me since I don't see the community being represented a lot in commerce websites.
- its important to me because I am gay
- I mean it is really important to me that the LGBTQ+ community is represented all the time.
- Very. It should be normalized and shown an equal amount as heterosexuals representation.
- It's very important because its a step forwards in having equality in all spaces. so many people are on the internet now that sometimes that's where they get all their information, so if they see bigger LGBTQ+ representation they're going to accept that more.
- For me it is very important.
- I think there should be a place for everyone in the e-commerce world.
- It depends on the site I feel like it would be easier for people to tolerate LGBTQ+ people if it's more normalised. E-commerce could help with this.
- Important, not only LGBTQ, but total representation of all groups in society.

9.3.5 *Do you feel that the LGBTQ+ community are accurately represented in e-commerce websites?*

Our take from this is: That the way the LGBTQ+ community is represented isn't an accurate representation of the community. And when it is, it is most often a LGBTQ+ owned store.

- No.
- Partially.
- On some, yes, but some don't even acknowledge the LGBTQ+ community as people.
- Sometimes, but more often than not they are either not represented or over sexualized.
- It depends on the website, most brand-names as mention only focus on the gay rainbow flag, which is both great and horrible. It'd be nice to see the occasional lesbian flag or something you know? There's also the occasional log-in requirement that asks for pronouns/gender and well.
- Sometimes. I think in a lot of larger scale websites, like amazon, there's not a lot of representation but for small business or individual sellers, like you might find on Redbubble or Esty, there's a lot of representation and products that are made to show love and acceptance of LGBT people.
- Somewhat yes but also somewhat no.
- From what I saw only a couple of them have.
- Sometimes. Sometimes they are there just to bait the audience.
- In some yes, but its usually when you find websites that are completely for LGBTQ+ merch (not sure what else to call it besides merch) and when its in other websites I don't see accurate things as much.
- No, in case it is represented, it is with gay couples. There is more than that.
- No I don't think so.
- No.
- No.

9.3.6 *Do you feel that the LGBTQ+ community are given enough visibility in e-commerce websites?*

Our take from this is: The LGBTQ+ community doesn't think that the community is given enough visibility.

- Not really.
- On some yes. On others, no.
- No, I think there could be a lot more visibility to the LGBTQ community. Especially outside of pride month.
- Not sure, I don't shop online much, if at all.
- It really depends. I honestly think it wouldn't kill to see rainbows and pride flags being displayed online as pride or LGBT instead of "kids tutu" or "rainbow thingy for CHILDREN" because it does feel a bit invalidating at times. Also you have to really look for LGBT sellers or products instead of them just sort of being presented to you on front pages of things which again, makes it feel like companies want to hide it because it's some 'sinful thing' and god forbid a child sees it!
- Not at all!
- I don't see it a lot, so I guess not enough or that much really.
- No, not in the right ways.

- No.
- No.
- No, its only around June when all the companies feel like they "have to" do this because its pride month.
- No, I think it is being ignored.
- It depends on type of e-commerce platform.
- No.
- No.

9.3.7 *Do you feel that the way that the LGBTQ+ community are represented in e-commerce websites is respectful?*

Our take from this is: Sometimes websites, and sometimes it isn't. But some (accidentally) do it in the wrong way.

- Sometimes
- Some of them represent us amazingly, others just kind of throw something rainbow together and count it as representation.
- Sometimes, but that really depends on the store.
- Vaguely.
- In certain places yes, but seeing LGBT products often hidden from sight or marketed as either "hi my entire personality is being gay and nothing else" or overly sexualized or every single rainbow product being labelled as "for girls" or "for children" is kind of sucky.
- Somewhat yeah.
- In some ways yes, they really only represent us during pride month and that month only so yes and no in a way.
- No.
- Yes.
- With the ones I see, yes.
- I think they are trying to be respectful, but I think some of them just don't do that well.
- In the examples I have seen, yes.
- Sometimes
- No usually it's the extremes.
- No real opinion, because don't actually see them represented

9.3.8 *Are there any e-commerce websites that you feel do a particularly good job of representing the LGBTQ+ community?*

Our take from this is: People don't remember a website that does a particular good job at representing the community, but in generally believe LGBTQ+ owned shops do a good job.

- Not really
- Not off the top of my mind, but I liked what skittles did with removing the rainbow and also the pride converse.
- LGBTQ+ Owned companies generally do a good job representing the LGBTQ+ community. But no particular one comes to mind.
- I don't shop online much, but I can only say most small businesses and those with LGBT+ owners are pretty inclusive but that may be a matter of wanting more business.

- I think sellers on Esty and Redbubble are often pretty good about that stuff. I think Redbubble does do a really good job promoting more than just the basic things being sold there. I really do think it's small businesses and individual sellers that have the best and most respectful representation for the LGBT community.
- I cant think of any right now.
- Not any I can think of that aren't made by LGBTQ+ people for LGBTQ+ people.
- I haven't come across an e-commerce that did anything with LGBTQ+.
- Not of the top of my head.
- I'm not very sure because I haven't visited too many but the ones I have, not really.
- I can only remember HEMA gay pride. But it was a gay couple. Bol.com offers products but represented in a bit weird manner.
- Not that I can think of.
- I can't think of any.
- No.

9.3.9 *Are there any e-commerce websites that you feel do a particularly poor job of representing the LGBTQ+ community?*

Our take from this is: Big companies seem to do a poor job at representing the community.

- No
- Yes, but I can't name the brand off the top of my head.
- I think a lot of fashion websites do a very poor job with representing the LGBTQ+ community, or diversity in general. Most stores uses primarily straight/cis gender white females or males.
- Not sure.
- Pretty much every big company when it's anytime other than pride month (Amazon).
- Can't think of any right now
- Most websites sadly.
- GAP, Target, etc.
- A lot of clothing lines
- N/a
- Amazon does a very bad job.
- Most of them by ignoring the community.
- A lot of fashion platforms do a poor job.
- Can't think of a particular one right now, but a lot of them.
- Most of them.

9.3.10 *What could an e-commerce website do to improve the way they represent the LGBTQ+ community?*

Our take from this is: The LGBTQ+ community would like to see more LGBTQ+ models for products. It also seems to be important to include members of the LGBTQ+ community while making the website/adding products.

- I don't know.
- Have LGBTQ people model their products, especially trans members.
- For fashion websites, use models that fall outside of the binary gender roles. It doesn't need to be every modal, but it should be a lot more common.
- Idk don't limit gay celebration to pride month only? Avoid gender-specific promotions?

- Stop hiding LGBT products from the front pages and make them more accessible to everyone with options for discrete packaging or different size ranges. It can be really discouraging to finally find something you love and that represents who you are and then you can't buy it or you close the page and can't ever find it again.
- Actually show support instead of wanting to make money or profit. include and interview a lot of LGBTQ+ people, not just influencers.
- Things that would help support us mainly.
- have an LGBTQ+ person create advertisements and ratify designs, and research on which organizations are good to support and sponsor.
- Include the LGBTQ+ people.
- Not make it seemed so stereotypical.
- Collaborate with LGBTQ+ creators to get some help with knowing what the LGBTQ+ community wants.
- Represent them as a normal part of society.
- Include the community, without creating a focus on them.
- Include sizes for all genders in both categories so if I want to look at the for her section there should be sizes for people with male chromosomes.
- Hire people from the community, for expertise.

9.3.11 Are you more likely to purchase from an e-commerce website if they represent the LGBTQ+ community? Why or why not?

Our take from this is: From the respondents the overwhelming majority is more likely to purchase from an e-commerce website if they represent the LGBTQ+ community.

- No, I don't really shop online.
- Yes, because it makes me feel that the brand isn't homophobic and is respectful to people.
- Yes, I feel more connected with the brand. I would rather spend my money at a company that actually cares about basic human rights for everyone.
- Yes, probably, because it's nice to support doing it right. It's simply a matter of how much LGBTQ+ merch there is.
- Yes, absolutely. Being LGBT myself, seeing products being made for or by people like me make me want to support that business as well as making me feel like there's something out there that can provide some validation and representation, even if it's something as small as a pin or charm.
- Yes, I want to support good brands.
- I would shop there more because I would want to support them more and boost their company and website.
- Yes, because I am less worried I will eventually find out about some horrifically bigoted thing the company did or supports.
- YES! Because that means they include everyone.
- Yes. I want to support those who support human rights.
- I think they will because gay people want gay things lol (I'm gay i should know this well).
- Yes, because I believe it is the right thing to do. It will help to increase acceptance.
- Sometimes, I'm primarily focussed on the product. But in case the website is openly against the LGBTQ+ community I would be less likely to purchase from them.
- Yes, because I think it's important.

- Yes, because I'm in favour of improvement of e-commerce and social development

9.3.12 *What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community in terms of inclusion?*

Our take from this is: Transphobia and homophobia seems to be the biggest challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community.

- Homophobia and transphobia.
- The fact that people don't see trans women/men as real women/men.
- I think the fact that a lot of people still believe it's a choice, or that it's woke culture to care about stuff like pronouns or gender. There are a lot of places where LGBTQ people face harsh discrimination. Even inside the US in 29 of the states people inside the LGBTQ+ community don't have basic human rights.
- People who are transphobic/homophobic and try to actively get companies to not support the community.
- I think being able to find unique products with accurate representation, finding things like clothes for specific sizes, and being able to buy things online without worrying about your safety in doing so can be really hard sometimes.
- There's so many people who say it goes against their religion and it's so stressful how much people don't support it.
- Accepting us as who we are and not denying on transitioning and our sexuality.
- Having the community stop seeming like a big joke or a punching bag for ciswhites, and how the community has trouble including more people of colour LGBTQ+ members, even though they're the backbone of the community.
- People don't think about including LGBTQ+ people except during pride month.
- Stereotypes and basic homophobia.
- People who hate gay people targeting us and targeting the websites that actually want to help, basically cyber bullying us.
- Because society is divided in acceptance, coming out for inclusivity may have consequences. It is safer to keep your mouth shut.
- I think the way people look at inclusion here is different than for example the way inclusion is now seen in Africa. I don't think there is a global solution right now.
- The ab-normalisation they're facing online if you online include extreme examples of LGBTQ+ people in e-commerce this will lead to a wrong image of LGBTQ+ people.
- Religion.

9.3.13 *How do you think an e-commerce website could be made to make it easier for the LGBTQ+ community to find and purchase products and services?*

Our take from this is: Include an inclusivity statement on your website, and including members of the LGBTQ+ community, so that you can understand the problems and needs of the community.

- Because nobody could judge them, They're in their own home when shopping online.
- Advertise it as trans/LGBTIQ friendly.
- By including the LGBTQ+ community and actually caring about the problems they are facing. Also by making a clear statement on what their stand is in relation to the

LGBTQ+ community. When items are specifically targeted at the LGBTQ+ making discreet packaging available is also important.

- Maybe in an 'About' page include LGBTQ+ Inclusive there? Word of mouth or social media works best.
- For websites that are heavy on LGBT themes having the option to change from a pride mode to a secret mode like how you can switch light and dark modes on twitch or twitter could be really helpful for some people. I think trying to advertise more LGBT products and businesses, making things inclusive for people of all sizes, and making sure there are products for everyone that aren't overly sexualized or only fit into a certain demographic could make things a lot easier for LGBT shoppers.
- On a website put a lot of support messages not just at the corner with a pride heart but other than that I'm not sure.
- Include more of the LGBTQ+ designers, ideas, and products.
- Keep the advertising more "cis-het friendly" but have ways for LGBTQ+ people to recognize what they really are so they are more easily purchased safely
- TikTok, Instagram just social medias in general.
- Some people aren't out and homophobic family so more subtle items would be nice.
- Some people get highly judged or sometimes even jumped if seen buying LGBTQ+ products in store so it makes it safer for them to buy it online.
- Optimize the search options.
- Not sure
- Only list sizes and not genders.
- For the community to create a platform where people can list LGBTQ+ friendly shops so that they can more easily find them.

9.3.14 Are there any other ways that e-commerce websites could be made to make the LGBTQ+ community feel more welcome?

Our take from this is: Giving pronouns options other than she/her and he/him. (Our research into website's also showed that e-commerce websites only give female or male as option for gender). It also seems to annoy the community that a lot of companies only care about the LGBTQ+ community during pride month.

- I don't know
- Not sure
- When buying clothes, it would be nice if there are also options for clothing that isn't specially gendered. When you fall outside of the binary gender norms it can be uncomfortable having to purchase female clothing when you don't feel aligned with your gender at birth.
- I have no idea.
- By making it clear that we have their support and that they aren't just going to make some crappy rainbow themed thing for June with overpriced items and then going back to giving us nothing.
- Being supporting and giving support and stuff.
- Adding more pronoun options, having LGBTQ+ representing products etc.
- They could stop only advertising for LGBTQ+ members during Pride Month, and stop being so conditional with support for the community.
- Make sure to use the right pronouns and to not exclude people.
- Not only pride only in pride month.

- Yes, advertising LGBTQ+ products on their front homepage of their website
- Support inclusion in text and images.
- Not sure
- Make a you matter section where you will list the fact that everyone is welcome in all sizes, shapes and background.
- By adding a statement that you support the community.

9.3.15 *Gender Identity*

- Transgender male
- Trans umbrella, not sure my exact identity yet
- Genderfluid
- I'm not sure what my Gender Identity is yet, but I would take my answers from the perspective of a cis hetero ally.
- I identify as trans masc nonbinary, I use They/He/It pronouns and I'm find with people using neopronouns for me as well.
- Cisgender female
- Genderfluid
- Agender (pronouns they/them)
- Non binary
- Non binary (pronouns he/they/it)
- Non binary
- Cisgender female
- Transgender male
- Male (gay)
- Trans

9.4 Appendix 4 Reflection

In this appendix we reflect upon the research process and the research results we achieved.

9.4.1 *Zoey Frisart*

I'm very satisfied with the results we achieved in this research paper. It is a topic I'm very interested in and a community I'm heavily involved in. This allowed us to also gain insights into the different opinions of people inside of the community. It was hard to find sources that are directly targeted at the LGBTQ+ community and E-commerce as such our research sources focussed on the Inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community in a general sense and related the information to E-commerce websites.

I'm confident in the research results that we achieved in this paper, as the topic is sensitive there are bound to be people who will disagree with the recommendations we have made in this paper. The people that I talked to who we conducted surveys with were also very happy with the research we are doing, because they truly believe change is needed. This gave me extra motivation to write this paper.

9.4.2 *Guido van Dijk*

I have learned a lot while making this paper. Not only about inclusivity, but also about the LGBTQI+ community itself. I did not know they had to deal with so much issues, just because other people do not like the community. The weirdest part what I had read, is that it could even happen in a professional environment like a company.

Speaking about findings, it was quite difficult for me to find sources for our research question. Most of the time, I would find a paper only to read it to figure out that it does not apply to our research question.

Even though this topic was quite hard to research, it was a fun process. Of course, anyone part of the community can have different problems, but I feel like we got really useful information from our survey which we used in our paper.

It was difficult, but fun, and I hope this paper will help someone in the future.