
Leveraging Inclusive Marketing Strategies to Address Structural Inequalities for Early Career Researchers in Academia

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Abstract

In recent years, inclusive marketing has emerged as a critical trend shaping brands' communication strategies, emphasizing representation, intersectionality, and social impact. Despite the growing importance of inclusivity in broader sectors, higher education institutions have been slow to adopt these principles within their institutional marketing and communications strategies, particularly regarding Early Career Researchers (ECRs). This paper aims to explore how inclusive marketing techniques can be effectively employed by universities and research organizations to address and mitigate structural inequalities faced by ECRs, with a particular focus on gender disparities and intersectional identities. Drawing from intersectional feminist theory and contemporary marketing trends-including brand activism, authenticity, and representation-the paper critically analyzes current university marketing practices and identifies gaps and opportunities. Through qualitative content analysis of institutional communications from select European universities, complemented by expert interviews with university marketing professionals and ECR representatives, this research examines the extent to which institutional branding aligns with principles of inclusivity and equity. Preliminary findings suggest that inclusive marketing strategies not only enhance institutional reputation but also actively contribute to creating supportive, equitable academic environments. However, barriers such as institutional resistance, superficial engagement, and limited resources pose significant challenges. The paper argues that a strategic shift toward authentic, intersectionality-informed communication can play a substantial role in attracting diverse talent, reducing precarity, and promoting long-term institutional change. This study contributes both theoretically and practically by integrating marketing trends into discussions of structural inequalities in academia, offering actionable insights for university policy-makers and marketing practitioners committed to fostering inclusive research environments.

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