# Marketing del Orgullo: Perspectivas de estudiantes LGBTQ+ en Costa Rica

## Pride Marketing: LGBTQ+ Student Attitudes in Costa Rica

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## Resumen

Este estudio buscó identificar las opiniones de estudiantes LGBTQ+ en la Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) sobre las campañas de marketing del Orgullo lanzadas en junio. Participaron 28 estudiantes LGBTQ+ de esta universidad pública en Costa Rica mediante una encuesta en línea diseñada para conocer las actitudes hacia esta práctica y las percepciones sobre las motivaciones de las marcas y la contribución de las campañas a los derechos y la representación de esta comunidad. Los resultados muestran escepticismo y críticas hacia estas campañas y enfatizan la creencia de que las marcas deberían cumplir con criterios específicos para comercializar el Orgullo LGBTQ+. Además, los participantes reconocieron la dualidad de estas campañas, las cuales ocasionalmente buscan ayudar a la comunidad mientras obtienen atención y ganancias a cambio. Los estudiantes atribuyeron un mayor impacto al activismo social, como cambios internos en las empresas, anuncios inclusivos y donaciones. Se destaca la necesidad de que las marcas ofrezcan apoyo continuo y mantengan la responsabilidad social, así como la importancia de fomentar iniciativas genuinas y socialmente responsables dentro de la comunidad LGBTQ+. Para ello, se insta a acciones y cambios significativos en el mundo del marketing. Se discuten las implicaciones teóricas y/o prácticas.

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## Abstract

The present exploratory study sought to identify the views that LGBTQ+ students in Costa Rica have toward the marketing practice of Pride campaigns during June. A total of 28 LGBTQ+ students at a university level participated in this investigation. An online survey was administered to elicit the participants' attitudes toward Pride campaigns and the perceived brand motivations and campaign contribution to rights and representation. Main results show prevalent skepticism and criticism among students, emphasizing the belief that brands should meet specific criteria to market Pride. Also, participants' answers reveal that they acknowledge the dual nature of these campaigns, which from their point of view occasionally aim to help the community while receiving publicity and profit in return. In addition, students attributed the most impact to social activism, focusing on internal company changes, inclusive advertisements, and donations for enhancing their rights and representation. The study's findings stress the need for brands to adopt year-round support and maintain corporate responsibility, urging meaningful actions and changes within the marketing world. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of fostering genuine, socially responsible initiatives in the LGBTQ+ community. Theoretical and/or practical implications are discussed.

## Keywords

Advertising; communication impact; gender minorities; media diversity; pride campaign; social action.

# 1. Introduction

In an era marked by heightened media visibility of marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community, several studies have been conducted to comprehend the impact of these portrayals on both the community itself and society at large (e.g., Åkestam et al., 2017; Esper & Bowens, 2022). This body of work has found that representation, increasingly demanded by audiences, can positively impact the self-esteem of LGBTQ+ individuals and influence societal attitudes, including acceptance and empathy. With the rise of Pride Month as a platform for LGBTQ+ ad campaigns, corporate involvement increases every year during June.

However, scrutiny also grew as LGBTQ+ individuals started to condemn campaigns for their perceived insincerity, performative nature, and profit-driven motives. In fact, the term rainbow-washing emerged as a way to critique campaigns with deceptive intentions deemed exploitative of this vulnerable population. In response, Ciszek and Pounders (2020) and Esper and Bowens (2022) have established criteria, such as consonance, assonance, and year-round support, which aim at enhancing levels of approval among LGBTQ+ audiences.

Interestingly, perspectives and impacts of LGBTQ+ representations have been explored across different areas, from portrayals in movies and TV shows (e.g., Randev, 2022; The Trevor Project, 2022; Thomson, 2021) to the image of the community that may be broadcasted through Pride events (see Formby, 2023). Nevertheless, research on ad campaigns, specifically within the context of Pride, has been limited. To the researchers' knowledge, such studies focused on Pride marketing campaigns have largely remained at a surface level, exclusively assessing general feelings and opinions toward these campaigns (for an example, see The Trevor Project, 2020, 2022). In this regard, there is a need to explore LGBTQ+ individuals' perceptions toward specific actions in Pride campaigns and the way such views may vary due to unexplored factors such as brand efforts, motivations, and contributions.

Furthermore, given the importance of opposing the commodification of Pride for activist groups in a Central American context (i.e., the dissident movements organized during Pride 2022), studies in this area are called for. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the views that LGBTQ+ students at a public university in Costa Rica have toward the marketing practice of Pride campaigns during June.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. LGBTQ+ Pride and Marketing in Costa Rica

Every June, Pride Month celebrates and shines a light on the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community. This acronym refers to sexual and gender minorities: individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, among many others. According to Vyas (2021), the fight for the rights of this community began on June 28th, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn, an LGBTQ+ bar in New York, as the crowd resisted the targeted attacks police made on the community through bar raids by rioting for six nights. This historic event prompted the establishment of Pride Month, a combination of politics and celebration (Peterson et al., 2018). This mix of joy and outrage in social action has been attributed to the need for positivity to renew energy and prevent burnout during protests (Stocker, 2020:5). Interestingly, Costa Rica's situation closely mirrors that of LGBTQ+ bars in New York. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1990s, the police targeted bars known to be LGBTQ+ friendly, detaining individuals for sexual deviation (Robles, 2022; Stocker, 2020).

In 2003, Pride arrived in Costa Rica as a public and mass event, and just as established three decades prior, the demonstrations combined political action and celebration. According to Jiménez (2016), from 2003 to 2007, political activities included speeches, signature collections, and protest slogans, while culture was celebrated with concerts, poetry recitals, and plays. This duality is also reflected on the parade's slogan. Delgado, one of the organizers of the march, explains that the slogan, "Let's Paint San José (i.e., the capital) with Colors," was changed to "Celebrate, Fight, and Resist" as a way to uphold the political implication and deter reducing Pride to a month of symbolic rainbows (Vega, 2022: para. 12).

Due to the globalization of the demonstration and a growing number of attendees and organizers, it did not take long for enterprises to join this demonstration. This corporate participation is also representative of the third wave of marketing, which emphasizes social responsibility and brand ethics (Minchola et al., 2024). By 2004, there were around 20 companies present at Costa Rican Pride events, including a travel agency with LGBTQ+ target consumers that highlighted the importance of corporate support to a growing community (Jiménez, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic did not halt corporate participation. In 2020, the organizer Pride Costa Rica included a contest where viewers counted sponsor logos during a live stream for a chance to win giveaways (PRIDE Costa Rica, 2020). Another organizer, Pride Connection, launched pridevirtual.com, allowing individuals and organizations to create avatars, write human rights pledges, and march virtually (Cajina, 2021). These initiatives were crucial for maintaining sponsor engagement in online events. As Martín (2022) notes, most journalism students believe that proper use of technology can replicate the experience of in-person events. By adapting events with companies in mind, the organizers demonstrated the importance they place on corporate involvement.

Since Jiménez's study, to the researchers' knowledge, no other material has thoroughly analyzed nor gathered quantitative data on corporate participation at Costa Rican Pride events. Nonetheless, a review of Pride Costa Rica's Facebook page reveals the involvement of several international brands during the 2022 march, including American Airlines, DHL, Absolut, Walmart, Uber, and HP Inc. (PRIDE Costa Rica, n.d.). Among the national brands, Quinqui, Adán&Eva, Infinity Arme, and BAC Credomatic marched with banners or in floats.

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With the expansion of digital media, corporate participation shifted towards television and social networks, which prompted brands to invest in media marketing to appeal to engage with the LGBTQ+ community. Pride marketing campaigns encompass a range of approaches, such as selling LGBTQ+ merchandise, advocating for workplace policy changes, incorporating rainbow symbolism into logos, airing inclusive advertisements, and issuing supportive statements. Despite limited participation from Costa Rican brands in Pride campaigns over the years, examples like Pozuelo, Four Seasons Resort, and AMPM highlight the diverse types of involvement seen in the country in recent times.

In 2015, Pozuelo, a cookie company, aired a commercial during Pride Month titled "When there is love, there is family", accompanied by the slogan "For family, in any of its forms" (Galletas Pozuelo, 2015). The one-minute ad showcases non-traditional family structures, including a single dad and son as narrators. It concludes with two men, subtly implying their romantic relationship through several pictures on their fridge, while the child narrator mentions that they live together (see Figure 1). Correa highlights that the commercial enables the brand to establish deeper connections with consumers and project empathy in society (as cited in Herrera, 2015). Emotional advertisements can distinguish the brand from numerous others because they can provide purposeful cultural values that allow brands to potentially make a lasting impact on society (González et al., 2018; Suarez et al., 2018).

Figure 1. Frame of Pozuelo's "When there is love, there is family" commercial



From: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR3Xe4oiL9Q
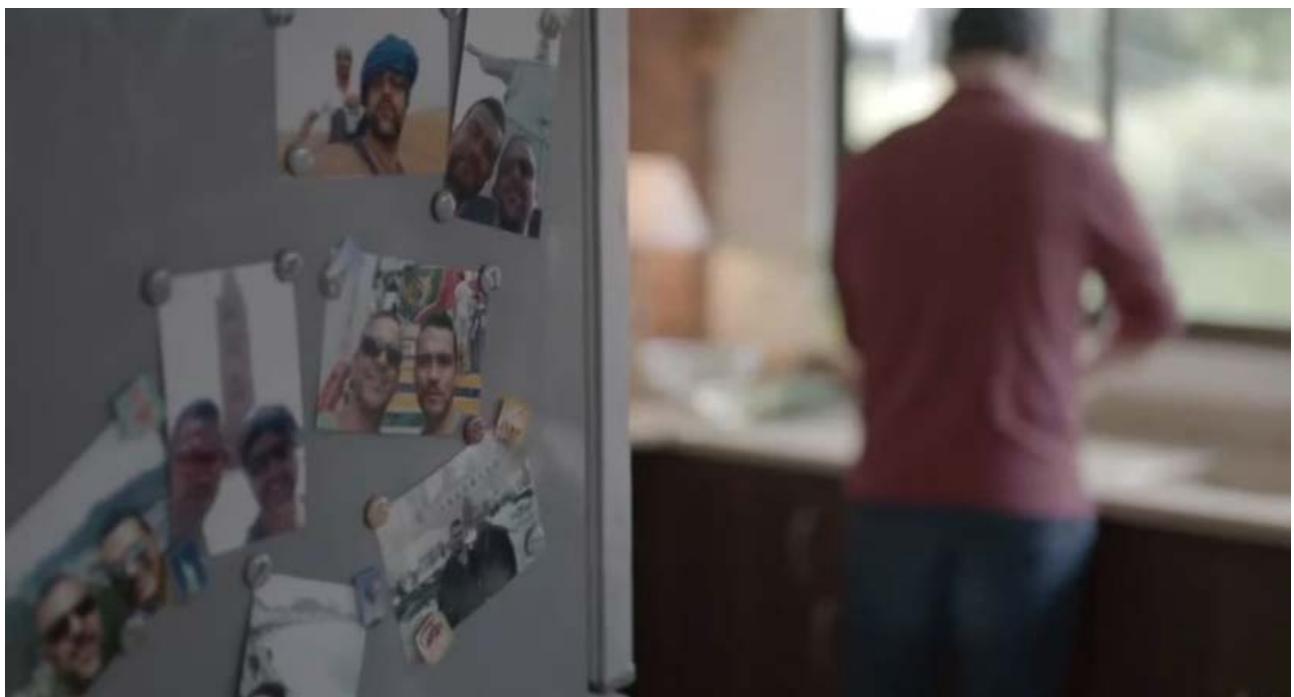
Four years later, Pozuelo launched a campaign with the value of family at its core to commemorate its centenary. This campaign featured a video on Facebook, with the first image portraying two men alongside the text "I want to believe in a great family" (see Figure 2). Both Pozuelo campaigns received mixed reviews. While some comments showed supportive, proud, and heartwarming reactions, others expressed anger and invalidated the non-traditional couple depicted.

Figure 2. Screenshot from Pozuelo's centenary campaign



Source: Galletas Pozuelo (2019).

In 2021 and 2022, Chiky, a Pozuelo brand, engaged in Pride marketing on Instagram. Their posts included the slogan "Love is Love" (see Figure 3) and other quotes with Pride rainbow, bisexual, transgender, and pansexual flags (see Figure 4). In 2022, they shared a video promoting diversity with the caption "Respect comes in many colors and Chiky many flavors. Happy Pride Day!" (Galletas Chiky, 2022). While the video predominantly highlights physical differences, it also includes diverse representations, such as two boys embracing and mentioning they "are not friends," which hints at their romantic relationship.

Figure 3. Galleta Chiky's "Love is Love" Instagram post



Source: Galletas Chiky (2021a).

Figure 4. Galleta Chiky's post with LGBTQ+ flags



Source: Galletas Chiky (2021b).

In 2023, the Four Seasons Resort at Peninsula Papagayo introduced June-exclusive cocktails, like the "Stonewall Cosmos," promoted with images of same-sex couples (see Figure 5). The hotel also sponsored the local Pride parade and donated a portion of the proceeds from these cocktails to a foundation that facilitates access to education for transgender individuals (Four Seasons Press Room, 2023).

Figure 5. Four Seasons Resort's advertisements for Pride cocktails



Source: Four Seasons Press Room (2023).

Finally, some brands have engaged in the widely popular but also controversial practice of altering their logos with rainbows. In 2017, AMPM, a grocery store, changed its profile picture to incorporate a rainbow gradient and expressed in the caption their commitment to combating intolerance and inequality (see Figure 6). Additionally, the Costa Rican account of Coca-Cola FEMSA has consistently set a rainbow logo during June from 2021 to 2024 (Coca-Cola FEMSA Costa Rica, n.d.).

Figure 6. AMPM's rainbow logo used in 2017



Source: AMPM (2017). Reprinted with permission.

Although corporate participation in Pride parades remains consistent annually, only a few brands extend their support to social media, advertisements, or donations. Consequently, corporate support often remains confined within the LGBTQ+ community's sphere during Pride Month, failing to reach broader audiences through mainstream media channels where its impact could be far-reaching.

## 2.2. The Impact of Pride Campaigns

Beyond attending these events and due to a currently heavily media-centered society, brands have started to launch campaigns during Pride Month. Actions done in these campaigns include the following: launching merchandise and initiatives for internal change, adding rainbows to logos, airing inclusive advertisements, releasing statements of support, and partnering with LGBTQ+ celebrities.

For many years, the media invisibilized the community, resulting in feelings of loneliness and defectiveness. Previous studies have not dealt with Pride campaigns' impact, yet media impact has been analyzed. For example, Esper and Bowens (2022: 24) found that queer media is sought out by 90% of LGBTQ+ people, and they state that media representation "plays a key role in making [LGBTQ+ individuals] feel comfortable with their own identities and those of others." In other words, when sexual

and gender minorities see themselves on screens, posters, or social media, they understand that rather than being alone, they are part of a community.

Being exposed to representation can signify "a major personal discovery to realize that there were others they could identify with." (Taavetti, 2016: 82). These depictions can then aid LGBTQ+ individuals in understanding their identities, developing coping strategies, strengthening community bonds, fostering a sense of belonging, and even accessing educational information facilitated by testimonials and the possibility to ask questions in comment sections (Olivares-García, 2022; Randev, 2022). As a result, representation emerges as an empowering tool for this minority group.

Furthermore, The Trevor Project conducted surveys with LGBTQ+ youth in the years 2020 and 2022. Firstly, they found that the majority of participants stated that brands that support the community "positively impact how they feel about being LGBTQ" (2020: 10). Two years later, they found that 89% of LGBTQ+ youth reported that "seeing LGBTQ representation in TV/movies made them feel good about being LGBTQ" (2022: 22).

These studies have noted the general impact of all media representation on LGBTQ+ individuals, yet the specific impact of Pride campaigns and advertisements remains largely underexplored. In this respect, the present study will shed some light on the distinct perceived effects of Pride campaigns on the community. Nonetheless, the previous sources highlighted the importance of overall representation for self-acceptance.

Societal acceptance, on the other hand, has been covered by the literature to a greater extent (e.g., Åkestam et al., 2017; GLAAD[1], 2023). An increased exposure to positive portrayals of sexual and gender minorities can also impact those outside the community. GLAAD (2023: 6) found that for non-LGBTQ individuals, seeing LGBTQ people in advertising "makes them more comfortable with people who are different from them." In the same way, Åkestam et al. (2017) discovered that advertisements featuring these minorities can evoke higher levels of empathy and social connectedness.

While the increased visibility of groups historically marginalized can aid in their reappropriation of public spaces and assertion of legitimacy (see Di Feliciantonio, 2014; Robles, 2022; Stocker, 2020), it is crucial to recognize that not all visibility is inherently positive or beneficial for the community. As Pérez (2016: 21) explains, there is a misguided assumption that "whatever is made visible is transparent and knowable, and that the process of making it visible expresses a movement of progress toward greater freedom and authenticity." This is because tokenistic portrayals can stereotype and result in rejection. Tokenism refers to the "practice of making only a symbolic effort" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.: para. 1). Essentially, this means that representation must be loyal and respectful, as well as rise above characters with minor roles and short screen time, to boost acceptance.

Tokenistic representations tend to perpetuate stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the community, ultimately hindering the progress of acceptance and potentially leading to regression (Randev, 2022; Suárez et al., 2018; Thomson, 2021). As illustrated by a participant in Formby's (2023: 134) analysis of Pride performances, "whilst visibility in public can normalize things," it can also promote perceptions of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community as flaunty and flamboyant. This concern was also shared by GLAAD when they recorded that "out of 400 ads on national linear TV from the top ten

advertisers in the world, not one had LGBTQ inclusion that was impactful and recognizable"(2023: 4). As emphasized by Mishra (2022: 13), the power of the media—a builder of culture—is to be carefully considered, as it can shape norms regarding acceptable behavior, "the expected qualities of each member of a society," and may foment prejudice through the utilization of stereotypes.

Thus, despite the advancement in the quantity of LGBTQ+ representations, quality is still lacking, which can diminish the impact on societal acceptance and influence the feelings LGBTQ+ individuals may have toward their identity. This deficiency in quality and ability to relate to portrayals is highlighted in Taavetti's study (2016: 96), which reported that individuals may struggle "to understand one's own queerness when the only public gay figures did not seem identifiable." In other words, companies must not trivialize representation, as superficial depictions can negatively impact societal acceptance and attitudes toward and within the community. Notably, existing literature has predominantly examined the external impacts of LGBTQ+ advertisements on North American (GLAAD, 2023) and European consumers (Åkestam et al., 2017) leaving a significant research gap in understanding these impacts within Latin American audiences.

## 2.3.  The Perception of Pride Campaigns

Due to a considerable variation in the approaches to Pride campaigns (for an example, see Foret, 2023; Jaquez, 2021; Williams, 2021), it is imperative to analyze the perceptions of various actions individually. Applying this method, a Morning Consult (2021) survey revealed that while 59% of LGBTQ+ participants felt more favorably toward companies that released statements supporting Pride Month and donated to LGBTQ+ organizations, the percentage dropped to 47% when assessing favorability toward brands that produced Pride-themed merchandise. One of the most common Pride campaign actions is adding rainbows to logos. Compared to social actions such as donating and launching initiatives for internal change, rainbow logos or merch might not be regarded as highly.

Concerning perceived motivations behind statements of support and merchandise, the predominant belief among respondents was that these motivations encompassed both doing good and seeking publicity (Morning Consult, 2021). Generally, brands might be initially received with skepticism, resulting in activists researching the brands' history of social responsibility. For instance, in 2020, Google was banned from attending a San Francisco Pride event after members condemned the platform's allowance of hate speech and harassment toward the LGBTQ+ community (Ghaffary, 2020). This incident clearly shows that if inconsistencies or immoral motives are found, boycotts are a common course of action. Morning Consult's study provides the most precise collection of data to date, yet it exclusively analyzed opinions surrounding statements and merchandise. To expand this knowledge, further comprehensive research is needed on other actions found in Pride campaigns.

In response to cases such as Google's, meeting certain criteria can ensure this marketing practice is not an exploitation of an already vulnerable community. For this, it is imperative to establish the difference between two different kinds of activism. Performative activism is "used to increase one's social capital or personal gain rather than genuine support toward a movement," whereas authentic activism "does not direct attention to the activist, but rather seeks to support and uplift all social justice movements" (Ira, 2020: paras. 1, 5). In the Pride marketing world, performative activism has come to be

known as rainbow-washing. As observed in Morning Consult's survey reports, LGBTQ+ individuals do not expect campaigns to be altruistic because marketing implies the expectation of a profit.

Nonetheless, authenticity can still be achieved. In their study, Ciszek and Pounders (2020) propose proficiency and consonance as elements in authentic communication. Social proficiency requires companies to be educated on the historical struggles to be able to shine a light respectfully and effectively on the LGBTQ+ community. In short, proficiency refers to the awareness and commitment of a company. Consonance, then, demands companies to have consistency in their message and actions. A lack of consonance, for example, can be found in companies that add rainbows to their logos but have discriminative policies in the workplace.

When incorporating these elements, approval increases. Along with maintaining loyalty, the LGBTQ+ community is "more likely to respond positively to campaigns that are associated with an organization that has demonstrated internal and external equity" (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020: 108). This demand for a long-term commitment is consistent with more research. Esper and Bowens (2022: 12) found that while rainbow logos are approved by the majority, "3 out of 4 LGBTQ+ people desire year-round support." Conclusively, there is a perceived fault in Pride campaign's temporariness. The awareness and agreement of LGBTQ+ individuals regarding these criteria have remained unexplored; the current study seeks to address these gaps and delve into a comprehensive understanding of how the brief duration of Pride campaigns may diminish levels of approval among audiences.

As previously mentioned, the initial corporate involvement in Costa Rican Pride marches dates back to 2004. In 2022, an increase in this involvement resulted in an alternative Pride march, which was organized to voice the disagreement toward this participation. According to Muñoz (2022), there were at least four dissident movements from the official march, and among them was the Students' Federation of the University of Costa Rica. Muñoz explains that these groups criticized the commodification of Pride, the participation of powerful companies that do not contribute to the fight, and the high cost of events.

Taking a different route, the dissident groups focused on a more political approach with a protest outside the Legislative Assembly. Meanwhile, the official march followed the celebratory approach with concerts and floats featuring brands and organizations. Given the limited coverage of these dissident movements and their specific concerns and opinions, it is imperative to conduct extensive research on the perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals in Costa Rica.

# 3. The Current Study

Two aspects are worth noting as far as perspectives are concerned: that most actions in campaigns are viewed favorably, even when non-altruistic motives are perceived (e.g., Morning Consult, 2021) and that support levels seem to be higher when brands consistently show support, but criticism intensifies if brands appear to be commodifying the cause (e.g., Muñoz, 2022).

Nonetheless, research to date has primarily centered on general media representation and broad effects on the life of LGBTQ+ individuals (e.g., The Trevor Project, 2020, 2022). That is why little is known about the views on and the perceived impact of specific actions found on Pride campaigns. Specifically, more research efforts may reveal which actions in Pride campaigns have the most positive impact on

the community and what exactly are the views of a group of students from a Costa Rican university, where the last dissident movements of Pride 2022 took place. To address this void, the following research questions (RQ) and hypotheses (H) guided this study:

— RQ1. What are the views of a group of LGBTQ+ students at the University of Costa Rica (hereinafter, UCR) on brands launching Pride campaigns during June?
Considering UCR's recent role in dissident movements against Pride campaigns (i.e., Pride 2022), the first hypothesis (H1) is that most students will likely be skeptical of these practices and even respond with criticism.
— RQ2. What motivations do the participants believe are behind brands launching Pride campaigns during June?
In this respect, the second hypothesis (H2) states that most students will indicate that brands primarily launch Pride campaigns to get more publicity and money from the community and its allies during June.
— RQ3. To what extent do LGBTQ+ students believe that brands' Pride campaigns contribute to genuine support for their rights and representation?
The final hypothesis (H3) suggests that the consensus among students will be that contributions are significant only if companies actively donate to LGBTQ+ charities, start a dialogue, and change their culture and policies internally.

# 4. Methodology

## 4.1. Participants and Setting

This study took place at UCR, a public university located in Costa Rica. All respondents had to identify as LGBTQ+ and be active students at UCR. This selection was made due to UCR student's previous participation in LGBTQ+ Pride, such as the organization of activities and recent efforts to address concerns related to the commodification of Pride Month. In total, 28 students participated (12 female, 9 male, and 7 non-binary). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 20 (n = 7), 21 to 24 (n = 18), and 25 to 29 (n = 3). The sexual orientations reported included gay (n = 9), bisexual (n = 8), lesbian (n = 3), asexual (n = 3), pansexual (n = 2), queer (n = 1), and aroace (n = 2).

In terms of exposure to brands launching Pride campaigns during June, all participants (N = 28) reported significant awareness about the topic. Regarding participation at Pride events, respondents indicated no attendance (n = 15), occasional attendance (n = 10), and yearly attendance (n = 3). Finally, 4 students stated they had some involvement in LGBTQ+ organizations or groups at UCR, while 24 had no affiliation with such collectives. This study employed snowball sampling, streamlining the participant selection process.

## 4.2. Materials

To gather data, an online survey was conducted using Google Forms, a widely used platform within the university community, ensuring familiarity among most students due to prior exposure. The survey consisted of five parts; the items included rating scales, matrix tables, and open-ended questions. In the first section, participants had to provide their background information: age, gender identity, sexual

orientation, level of exposure to the topic, attendance to Pride events, and involvement with LGBTQ+ groups at UCR.

In the second section, which aimed at determining views on brands launching Pride campaigns, students were given a scale of agreement ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This segment elicited students' opinions on the need for criteria, year-round support, transparency, boycotts, and active roles.

In the third segment, which delved into participants' perceptions of brands' motivations, respondents were asked to select which motivation they believed prompted actions of Pride campaigns using a matrix table. The incentives provided—to benefit the community, to benefit the community and get publicity, and to get publicity—were based on a poll conducted by Morning Consult (2021). Moreover, the campaign initiatives were adapted from questions in Morning Consult's poll: supportive social media statements, pride-themed merchandise, partnerships with LGBTQ+ celebrities, display of LGBTQ+ people in ads, initiatives for internal change, and donations.

The fourth section, designed to elicit the perceived level of contribution of Pride campaigns, required students to rate the degree of contribution of specific statements that exemplify genuine support for their rights and representation, such as representation's contribution to reinforcing self-image, fostering empathy, and promoting social acceptance. Participants were presented with three options: contributes a lot, contributes a little, and does not contribute.

Lastly, the fifth section contained two open-ended questions. Respondents had to categorize their initial reactions to Pride campaigns as skeptical or optimistic and explain their choice. Furthermore, they were encouraged to provide examples of instances when these campaigns made them feel supported or represented and to explain their impact.

## 4.3.  Procedures and Design

The present study had a duration of four months, developing from August to November 2023. The data collection process was administered online; it commenced on September 29th and concluded on October 11th. Through social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, the survey was distributed to eligible participants. In addition, it was shared in official student chat groups across diverse schools and majors at UCR, encompassing disciplines like English, communications, and actuarial sciences. Participation criteria were explicitly outlined in the publications' descriptions and messages. Participants meeting the criteria were encouraged to complete the survey and share it, while those who did not qualify were requested to forward it to eligible contacts. Respondents needed to consent to the anonymous use of their answers before answering the questionnaire, which was designed to be completed within 10 to 15 minutes.

## 4.4.  Data Analysis

To systematize and analyze the data collected, the initial step consisted of transferring the data in Google Forms to Google Sheets and downloading the file in .xlsx format. Afterward, a screening process was

applied, which discarded responses from participants who did not fit the criteria. The answers were then categorized based on the research question they were designed to address. The three categories were attitudes toward Pride campaigns, perceived motivations behind Pride campaigns, and level of contribution of Pride campaigns. In each quantitative section, the statements respondents based their answers on were collapsed from sentences to noun phrases for concise presentation in tables and figures. Responses were then quantified by counting the number of participants choosing each option.

As for the qualitative component of this study, verbatim comments answering the first open-ended question (i.e., are you more likely to be optimistic or skeptical when you see a Pride campaign emerge during June? Why?) were transferred to a separate document and assigned a participant number. The four themes extracted were the following: skeptical (i.e., negative responses to campaigns), optimistic (i.e., positive responses to campaigns), indifferent (i.e., apathetic responses), and dependent on the campaign or brand (i.e., responses based on prior brand knowledge). These themes were converted into numeric data by determining their frequencies. Finally, to process the qualitative data, all verbatim answers were assigned a participant number, the identity within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and the age range. After that, key comments were translated from Spanish to English for display and discussion purposes.

# 5. Results

The research questions of this study delved into the views of LGBTQ+ students at UCR on Pride campaigns (RQ1) and perceived motivations of brands launching campaigns (RQ2). They also examined the perceived extent of contribution that Pride campaigns have on the rights and representation of the LGBTQ+ community (RQ3). In this section, the results of the three research questions will be reported successively.

## 5.1. Attitudes Toward Pride Campaign Factors

Table 1. LGBTQ+ Students' Attitudes Toward Pride Campaign Factors

|  | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unrestrained use of Pride as platform | 0 | 3 | 8 | 14 | 3 |
| Specific criteria to use Pride as platform | 16 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Year-round support | 23 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Transparent support | 9 | 13 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Boycotts to hold brands accountable | 9 | 11 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Participation in boycotts | 2 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| Encounters with dishonest campaigns | 17 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Active roles in LGBTQ+ causes | 20 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Note. N = 28 |  |  |  |  |  |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 1 shows the attitudes of LGBTQ+ students toward several factors of Pride campaigns. As can be seen, all participants agreed, with varying degrees of intensity, that brands must adhere to specific criteria to use Pride as a platform. It can also be noted that participants strongly agreed the most about brands with Pride campaigns extending their support to year-round duration (n = 23) and taking more active roles in LGBTQ+ causes (n = 20). Lastly, further examination of the findings reveals that while most respondents agreed that boycotts effectively hold brands accountable (n = 20), only a small number reported personally participating (n = 5).

Table 2. LGBTQ+ Students' Reaction When Encountering Pride Campaigns

| Reaction | Example quote | n |
|---|---|---|
| Optimistic | "Optimistic. Yes, some (many) brands do it for publicity and money, but the fact that they think it is a good idea to launch these campaigns says a lot about their attitudes toward the community. I prefer they think it is profitable to launch a Pride campaign because social acceptance is good than do nothing because society is turning against the community." | 4 |
| Skeptical | "I am usually skeptical about pride campaigns because I do not see other posts from the brands in other months. Their attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community only matter when it is June, and they can monetize it someway." | 16 |
| Indifferent | "I am not phased, because I know that one of the reasons brands launch Pride campaigns is for publicity." | 6 |
| Dependent on the campaign or brand | "It depends on the tone and way the campaign is done, as well as the previous knowledge about the company/organization that launches the campaign." | 2 |
| Note. N = 28 | | |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 displays the quantified qualitative findings, detailing the responses of LGBTQ+ students when encountering Pride campaigns. The open-ended answers were categorized into four responses: optimistic, skeptical, indifferent, and dependent on the campaign or brand. As can be seen, the response with the highest frequency was skepticism (n = 16), whereas the rest had significantly fewer occurrences.

## 5.2. Perceived Motivations Behind Pride Campaigns

The motivations participants believed are behind specific Pride campaign actions are provided in Figure 7. As can be observed, the only action a majority of participants believed was primarily aimed at benefiting the community was initiatives for internal change, such as internal workspace changes for LGBTQ+ employees (n = 16). Conversely, most respondents believed Pride-themed merchandise (n = 17) and partnerships with LGBTQ+ celebrities (n = 18) to be motivated by the brands' desire to gain publicity. A crucial aspect to highlight is the significant acknowledgment of brands' dual motivations (both benefiting the community and seeking publicity) by participants, which was the dominant response in supportive social media statements (n = 18), display of LGBTQ+ people in ads (n = 17), and donations (n = 17).

Figure 7. LGBTQ+ Students' Perceived Motivations Behind Pride Campaigns
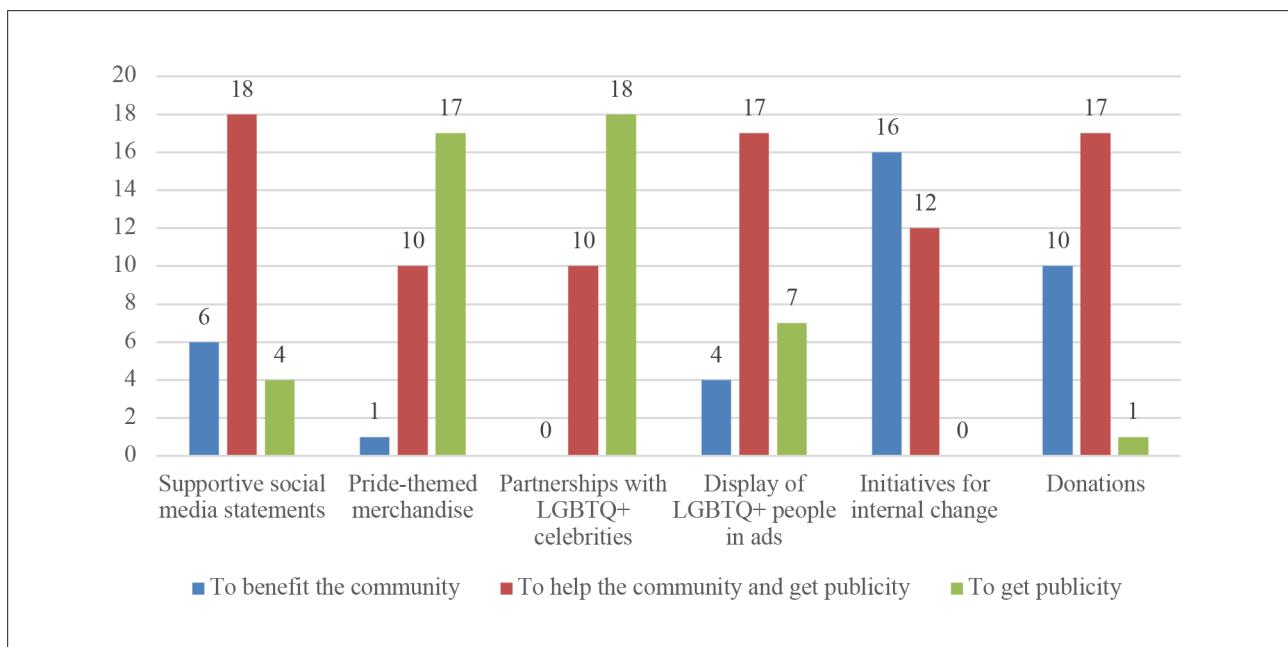


Note. N = 28. Source: Own elaboration.

## 5.3. Perceived Degree of Contribution of Pride Campaigns

Table 3. LGBTQ+ Students' Perceived Degree of Contribution of Pride Campaigns

| Campaign Action | Contributes a lot | Contributes a little | Does not contribute |
|---|---|---|---|
| Representation in ads to feeling at ease with identity | 16 | 8 | 4 |
| Representation in ads to improvement of mental health | 9 | 4 | 15 |
| Representation in ads to reinforcing a positive self-image | 10 | 12 | 6 |
| Representation in ads to sense of belonging and empowerment | 12 | 9 | 7 |
| Inclusive advertisements to recognition and visibility | 22 | 4 | 2 |
| Representation in ads to social acceptance | 19 | 7 | 2 |
| Pride campaigns to understanding and empathy | 18 | 8 | 2 |
| Internal changes to diverse and accepting workplaces | 23 | 3 | 2 |
| Donations to improvement of rights and protection | 22 | 5 | 1 |
| Anti-LGBTQ+ donations to improvement of representation and rights | 5 | 2 | 21 |
| Note. N = 28 | | | |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3 presents the perceived degrees of contribution of Pride campaigns. As can be noted, the majority of participants attributed substantial contribution to internal changes, inclusive advertisements, and donations. Respectively, their contribution to diverse and accepting workplaces (n = 23), recognition and visibility (n = 22), and the improvement of rights and protection of the LGBTQ+ community (n = 22) were acknowledged the most. On the other hand, mostly no contribution was attributed to anti-LGBTQ+ donations for the improvement of representation and rights (n = 21) and representation in advertisements for the improvement of mental health (n = 15).

# 6.  Discussion

The contribution of this study lies in the evidence that ascertains the opinions that LGBTQ+ students have toward Pride campaigns, as well as the motivations and impact they perceive in this marketing practice. In the following section, the results concerning skepticism and criticism toward Pride campaigns, brands' monetary intentions, and the contribution of social activism in Pride campaigns will be discussed.

## 6.1.  Skepticism and Criticism Toward Pride Campaigns

On participants' views on brands launching Pride campaigns during June (RQ1), the findings confirm the hypothesis that skepticism and criticism frequently characterize these perceptions (H1). The current study reveals a consensus among students regarding the need for defined criteria that would limit the unrestricted use of Pride as a marketing platform. One respondent stated that their attitudes "depend on the brand's record and background" (Survey respondent 25, non-binary, 18-20 years old), and another commented that their response is based on "previous knowledge about the brand" (Survey respondent 9, gay, 21-24 years old).

This is related to the concept of consonance proposed by Ciszek and Pounders (2020), which states that a brand's advertised message and actions must be consistent with the same values. González et al. (2018: 100) support this criterion and assert that this consistency is the crucial element that "allows [a brand] to have credentials– or consent– to take that position." Hence, showcasing consonance might improve the opinions of LGBTQ+ audiences, as prohibiting brands lacking alignment from participating in Pride campaigns could lead to a decrease in encounters with dishonest campaigns (see Table 1). This finding is consistent with that of Ciszek and Pounders, who discovered that campaigns that demonstrate consistency within their internal actions and external interactions are regarded favorably.

Furthermore, this study confirms the perception that short duration (i.e., campaigns limited to June) is considered a shortcoming in Pride campaigns, which was reported in previous research (e.g., Esper & Bowens, 2022). In other words, skepticism is often attributed to the time limit of these campaigns. For example, one participant noted that "only if support is given in other months of the year or happens beyond June, I consider it a positive support" (Survey respondent 2, bisexual, 18-20 years old). These results reflect those of Turner (2022: 24), who also found that brands must align "with their consumers' core values, rooted in their corporate core values, and done beyond the month of June in order to be believable and meaningful to consumers."

Another important finding was a desire for brands to partake in more active roles if they participate in Pride, which highlights LGBTQ+ audiences' requests for higher degrees of engagement and commitment to the community's social fight. These results corroborate the ideas of Turner (2022: 10), who suggests that for brands with Pride campaigns, social activism should be prioritized, a term she defines as "the degree to which a corporation promotes social causes through their initiatives." Minchola et al. (2024) also found that consumers of social campaigns value compromise that extends beyond a message by actively engaging in concrete and political actions.

Concerning boycotts, the results highlight that although boycotts are perceived as an effective means to hold brands accountable, actual participation rates remain low (see Table 1). This finding is contrary to Klein et al. (2004) found that if consumers perceive boycotting as an appropriate and effective response that will make a difference, their participation levels tend to rise. This discrepancy could be attributed to the geographic distance between Pride campaigns, primarily launched by American brands, and the participants in this study. Latin American audiences might perceive their participation as having a reduced impact on holding a foreign brand accountable.

## 6.2. Brands' Monetary Intentions

Regarding the perceived motivations behind Pride campaigns (RQ2), the findings reject the initial hypothesis, which considered that most students would attribute monetary and publicity intentions to these campaigns (H2). Contrary to expectations, this study found a high level of recognition among responders of dual motives—both to benefit the community and get publicity—and that perceived motivations will considerably vary depending on the specific campaign action. For instance, initiatives for internal change were predominantly seen as motivated by a genuine desire to benefit the community; this aligns with participants' preference for brands assuming more active roles (see Table 1).

In addition, although donations were perceived as a significant contribution to the rights and protection of the LGBTQ+ community (see Table 3), the results of this study indicate that participants view donations as having dual motives. Refuting the notion of Pride campaigns being entirely altruistic, Baker asserts that "partnering with a charity is the return on investment because it offers the visibility [of a company taking social action]. It also allows companies to tell the stories of people they want to advocate for" (Farmer, 2022: para. 26). Additionally, companies promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity tend to experience increased profitability and stock market evaluations, a result attributed to their social responsibility and reputation (Fatmy et al., 2021).

Overall, findings reveal an awareness of a mutually beneficial relationship between brands and LGBTQ+ consumers. Analyzing this collaboration in Costa Rica, Stocker (2020; 94) describes it as "a tactical, ephemeral alliance" that, despite its temporary nature, contributes to the acceptance and inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. Commenting on the tolerance for this dynamic, one respondent noted, "some (many) [brands] do campaigns for publicity and money, but the fact that they think it is a good idea to launch these campaigns says a lot about their attitudes toward the community" (Survey respondent 3, bisexual, 21-24 years old). The attitudes expressed by students in this study resonate with previous research indicating that transparency about both firm-serving (i.e., beneficial for the company) and public-serving (i.e., beneficial for the public) motives enhances trust, acceptance, and recognition of companies among consumers (e.g., Ellen et al., 2006; Kim & Lee, 2012).

Moreover, this is in accordance with Formby (2023), who argues that commercial interests in Pride do not negate the political importance of the movement. Therefore, it can be inferred that fostering an open dialogue and honesty about their intention to help the community while also acknowledging their gains from the process could lead to an increase in favorable opinions toward Pride campaigns.

## 6.3. Contribution of Social Activism in Pride Campaigns

Concerning the perceived degree of contribution of Pride campaigns (RQ3), the findings confirm the hypothesis that the most significant contribution stems from active changes and donations (H3). These results align with the previously mentioned notion that audiences prefer brands assuming active roles (see Table 1). Thus, brands' active engagement is not only desirable and perceived to be motivated by a genuine desire to help the community but also the most impactful form of contribution.

Baker notes that one advantage of corporate donations is their unrestricted nature, unlike government and foundation donations, which allow LGBTQ+-led organizations the complete freedom to allocate funds according to their priorities (as cited in Farmer, 2022). Additionally, corporate partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can significantly aid the latter, which is currently struggling due to decreased public sector support and a lack of online marketing strategies (Galiano-Coronil, 2021). Therefore, these collaborations on Pride campaigns can enhance the visibility, profitability, and support for LGBTQ+ NGOs.

In Costa Rica, the San José Declaration was established to create a network of companies seeking to promote inclusive and safe workplaces for LGBTQ+ workers and donated approximately four million Costa Rican colones (approximately 7,700 USD) to organizations advocating for the community's rights (Hivos, 2020). According to the Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo (2021), this declaration also assesses company practices to identify strengths and areas for improvement, such as enhancing employment opportunities for transgender individuals. Consequently, the perceived significant contribution through donations and internal change may be attributed to initiatives such as the San José Declaration.

Nonetheless, the current study identified a noteworthy concern related to anti-LGBTQ+ donations (see Table 3). One respondent attributed their skepticism to brands "that support political figures that do not have the best intentions with the community" (Survey respondent 7, gay, 21-24 years old). This apprehension may derive from increasing media coverage of such discrepancies. For instance, Legum and Zekeria (2021) uncovered that 25 major corporations with Pride campaigns simultaneously donated to members of Congress and legislators with aggressive anti-LGBTQ+ stances and agendas. Moreover, this apprehension aligns with concerns raised by Goodman (2022: 116), whose study's participants voiced their discomfort with companies attempting "to gain 'gay dollars' while actively participating in the perceived oppression" of the community.

Furthermore, the results suggest considerable acknowledgment of representation influencing societal attitudes through recognition and visibility (see Table 3). For example, one participant expressed that Pride campaigns "reinforce the idea that we also do exist" (Survey respondent 10, gay, 21-24 years old). Increased visibility, as argued by Åkestam et al. (2017) and GLAAD (2023), fosters social acceptance and empathy toward the community.

Finally, the impact of representation on mental health and positive self-image seemed diminished compared to findings in prior studies (e.g., The Trevor Project, 2020, 2022). Several factors may account for this outcome.

First, while The Trevor Project assessed the overall impact of brands supporting the LGBTQ+ community, the present study specifically focused on marketing campaigns. Nielsen (2021) reported that outside of Pride Month, only 1% of advertisements feature LGBTQ+ characters and topics. Thus, visibility being limited to a single month could contribute to reduced contribution levels.

Second, despite the growing societal acceptance of gay men, not all identities encompassed by the LGBTQ+ spectrum are acknowledged equally, as evidenced by a growing call for the inclusion of previously invisibilized identities like asexuality, non-binarism, as well as lesbian and transgender individuals (Community Marketing & Insights, 2019; Esteves & Pieri, 2023; Randev, 2022;). Aware of this lack of recognition of some identities, two respondents commented the following: "I don't remember any campaign or company that made me feel [supported or represented] through their advertisements (representing a Pan and non-binary person in advertising is not exactly very easy, to say the least)" (Survey respondent 28, pansexual, 18-20 years old) and "There really isn't visibility of the entire diversity within the community. Only the 'popular' [identities] are brought to light, and it stops there" (Survey respondent 21, aroace, 18-20 years old). To correct this, Randev argues that the media should "sensitize people towards major issues that affect the community, as well as focus on sub-sects within the community that have either been ignored due to ignorance or by intention" (2022: 5–6). Suárez et al. (2018) as well as Community Marketing & Insights (2022) agree with this position and recommend micro-segmentation marketing strategies that consider demographic, geographic, psychographic (i.e., values, desires, goals, and interests), and emotional variables. This strategy ensures the community is not oversimplified into a singular LGBTQ+ market by addressing intersectionality.

Third, the setting of this investigation differs significantly from previous ones, such as The Trevor Project's examination of American youth. Specifically, the number of Pride campaigns in the United States is likely much higher than in Costa Rica, resulting in diminished exposure to representation and, consequently, reduced impact. Local campaigns may also lack impactful representation, often relying on non-leading portrayals and inferred messages. Kantar (2021) analyzed 52 hours of TV content and 250 commercials viewed in Costa Rica and other Latin American countries, and they found that only 1% of these advertisements openly feature gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals. In other words, a mere fraction of the advertisements portrayed LGBTQ+ individuals in leading roles and were not implicit. Pozuelo's 2015 campaign is an example of implicit representation (see Figure 1), as the commercial subtly hints at a same-sex couple without explicitly labeling the two men as romantic partners. Instead, their relationship is inferred through the mention of their living together. A practical approach to tackling this issue could involve bottom-up decision-making, which Ahmad and Abu-Talib (2015) explain prioritizes marginalized voices and enables direct communication for feedback. Indeed, LGBTQ+ market experts assert that first-hand input is crucial to avoid superficial campaigns (Suarez et al., 2018). Therefore, involving LGBTQ+ employees in campaign creation may help ensure these initiatives genuinely resonate with the community.

Fourth, some advertisements aired in Costa Rica often originate from American brands. Even if translated, the ad's origin might lead to a disconnect with Costa Rican populations who perceive it as American values supporting American communities. According to Ahmad and Abu-Talib (2015), decentralization can address the lack of attention to local interests. Local teams that adapt campaigns to their region's unique cultural and social contexts can create more relevant messaging and improve engagement.

# 7. Conclusions

The present study determined the views that LGBTQ+ students at the University of Costa Rica have toward brands' launching Pride campaigns during June. Despite its limitations, this study expands existing knowledge on attitudes toward this modern marketing practice. While previous research has primarily examined general aspects of all media representation (see Åkestam et al., 2017; Esper & Bowens, 2022), the current study addresses a gap by delving into specific factors that influence opinions, brands' motivations, and the extent of contributions in the context of Pride campaigns. In doing so, it offers valuable insights into the nuanced elements that can determine the success or failure of a Pride campaign, as determined by audience responses.

Key findings indicate that LGBTQ+ audience favorability toward Pride campaigns can be enhanced by implementing specific criteria, including aligning brand messages with actions (i.e., consonance) and demonstrating consistent year-round support. The study also highlights an awareness of the mutually beneficial relationship between corporations and the LGBTQ+ community, evidenced by the recognition of dual motivations. Furthermore, although active participation (i.e., social activism) is identified as the most impactful contribution, representation in advertisements is noted to considerably influence social acceptance.

Finally, the findings of this research offer evidence of how brands' approaches and decisions during the launch of a Pride campaign can influence LGBTQ+ audience acceptance. Considering this, companies might want to engage in transparent dialogues about campaign motivations—ensuring a fair balance between community benefits and publicity goals—and establish consonance before launching (e.g., verifying that company policies advocate for the protection of LGBTQ+ employees). Achieving this balance and authentic alignment with LGBTQ+ values can contribute to building a trustworthy relationship between brands and audiences, likely enhancing credibility and support.

Moreover, it is crucial for brands participating in this celebration to extend their support beyond Pride Month and employ strategies that prioritize inclusivity. This includes micro-segmentation to address intersectionality, involving LGBTQ+ voices in campaign creation, and adapting content to resonate with local cultures. Essentially, long-term activism and nuanced representation in advertisements would not just enhance visibility and societal acceptance but also maximize the impact of portrayals on LGBTQ+ individuals' self-esteem and sense of belonging.

# 8. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Careful consideration of the study's limitations is crucial for a comprehensive interpretation of the findings. Firstly, the scope of this interpretation could have been broadened to encompass a more exhaustive exploration of criteria that might enhance the perception and impact of Pride campaigns. Consequently, additional studies will be needed to establish other elements contributing to approval beyond consonance and duration. Furthermore, in the examination of motivations, further research could not only delve into the factors influencing the perception of certain campaign actions as dual-motivated but also further explore how transparency regarding intentions could reduce skepticism among audiences. Lastly, the geographical setting of this study (i.e., Costa Rica), distanced from the epicenter of Pride campaigns in American and European settings, is likely to have resulted in such

campaigns having a diminished impact. Therefore, further research is essential to examine the variations between geographical regions. These studies could examine to what extent (if any) the origin of a campaign influences its impact on a population. In this respect, the present study constitutes a much-needed springboard as far as a Central American perspective is concerned.

# 9. Specific contribution of each signatory

— Conception and design of the work: M.M.C.; M.B.L.
— Documentary research: M.M.C.; M.B.L.
— Data collection: M.M.C.; M.B.L.
— Data analysis and critical interpretation: M.M.C.; M.B.L.
— Revision and approval of versions: M.M.C.; M.B.L.

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