

Unlocking Growth Through Inclusive Advertising: Key Insights from the Inclusive Advertising Summit

Industry leaders, researchers, and marketing professionals gathered at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, for a thought-provoking summit on **Unlocking Growth Through Inclusive Advertising on Friday 17th January**. The event featured groundbreaking research, brand case studies, and expert panel discussions exploring the undeniable link between diversity in advertising and business success.

Key Insights from the Event

The Business Case for Inclusive Advertising

The day opened with a compelling session led by Professor Andrew Stephen AM and Dr Felipe Thomaz, in collaboration with the Unstereotype Alliance. The discussion focused on research findings from *The Business Case for Inclusive Advertising*, revealing how inclusive marketing leads to measurable improvements in brand perception and business outcomes.

Joined by Sara Morrell from Kantar, the panel shared data-driven insights emphasizing that inclusive marketing is no longer optional—it is essential for growth. Brands today risk paying a premium for ineffective messaging, underscoring the urgent need for more authentic, diverse representation in advertising.

Brand Perspectives: Driving Change Through Leadership

Moderated by Sara Denby, Former Head of the Unstereotype Alliance Secretariat, this panel featured industry leaders pioneering inclusivity in marketing. Through real-world case studies, speakers demonstrated how their brands have successfully challenged stereotypes while delivering commercial impact.

Discussions highlighted:

- The strategic importance of inclusivity in marketing and brand narratives
- The role of purpose-driven advertising in fostering cultural change
- The power of celebrating diversity, with some brands championing inclusivity for over 70 years

Progressive marketing is marketing, and now is the time for businesses to take a firm stance. Data insights have pushed leading companies to publicly commit to better representation—an approach that not only strengthens brand equity but also attracts top talent. Some companies have even adopted a “buy or die” commitment to drive industry-wide standards, while others have appointed progressive marketing champions to oversee training and campaign execution. The results? Increased sales uplift, greater creative innovation, and a stronger moral imperative for inclusive advertising.

Agency Perspectives: The Creative and Strategic Role of Agencies

In a session moderated by Dr Felipe Thomaz, agency leaders from top creative firms shared their experiences in shaping inclusive and impactful advertising.

Key takeaways included:

- **Authenticity is key** – Inclusive storytelling must be deeply rooted in real experiences
- **Listening is essential** – Big ideas come from engaging with real people and understanding their perspectives
- **Building allyship matters** – Change begins with one strong advocate who can bring others along on the journey

While making cultural shifts is challenging, once the door to inclusivity is open, it remains open. The industry must overcome its fear of backlash and stand firm in its commitment to representation. Brands have a duty of care to their people, partners, and communities, ensuring that inclusive advertising is a long-term investment rather than a passing trend.

People and Change Management: Overcoming Internal Barriers

For inclusive advertising to succeed, it must be embedded within corporate culture and leadership strategies.

In a thought-provoking session led by Professor Ivona Hideg and Dr Mahima Mitra, the discussion focused on overcoming internal barriers and driving organizational change.

Key insights included:

- Inclusion is active progress—it requires creating opportunities for underrepresented voices
- Cultural intelligence is essential organisations must enrich their practices by fostering innovation through inclusivity
- Self-awareness leads to stronger allyship—understanding our own biases helps us connect with diverse perspectives

A shared belief in inclusivity—without fear of negative consequences—is essential for long-term change. Organizations must take concrete steps to embed inclusivity within their structures, ensuring it is not an isolated effort but a collective commitment.

Best Practices for Embedding Inclusive Advertising

The final session with Professor Andrew Stephen AM and Professor Jonathan Trevor led a working discussion on embedding inclusivity into long-term marketing frameworks. Participants engaged in an interactive exchange of best practices, ensuring a lasting impact on industry standards.

The Takeaway: Inclusive Advertising is a Business Imperative

This event underscored the transformative power of inclusive advertising in reshaping industry standards, driving business growth, and fostering societal change.

With a shared commitment to challenging stereotypes and improving representation, Oxford Saïd continues to lead the global conversation on diversity, equity, and inclusion in advertising.