

Toys with a purpose: values of inclusion and diversity in brands targeting children. Analysis of the impact and social projection

Juguetes con propósito: valores de inclusión y diversidad en las marcas dirigidas al público infantil. Análisis de su impacto y proyección social

Brinquedos com propósito: valores de inclusão e diversidade na marcas voltadas ao público infantil. Análise do seu impacto e projeção social

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ABSTRACT | This article analyzes how toy brands targeting children integrate the values of inclusion and diversity into their production and communication strategy. It also evaluates the journalistic coverage of these initiatives and examines shoppers' perception. We applied an empirical-analytical methodology through case studies of six brands and through a survey of 316 participants. Key findings show that these brands have increased their focus on the representation of people with disabilities and on racial and gender inclusion. It is concluded that toy brands are responding to the demand for inclusion and diversity in the children's market, the social relevance of which is reflected in their extensive media coverage.

KEYWORDS: brand; communication; purpose; diversity; inclusion; toys.

HOW TO CITE

García-Estévez, N. (2024) Juguetes con propósito: valores de inclusión y diversidad en las marcas dirigidas al público infantil. Análisis de su impacto y proyección social. *Cuadernos.info*, (60), 257-279. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.60.80134>

RESUMEN | Este artículo analiza cómo las marcas de juguetes dirigidas al público infantil integran los valores de inclusión y diversidad en su estrategia de producción y comunicación. Se evalúa además la cobertura periodística de estas iniciativas y se investiga la percepción de los compradores. Adoptamos una metodología empírico-analítica mediante el estudio de casos de seis marcas y una encuesta realizada a 316 participantes. Los principales resultados muestran que estas marcas han aumentado su enfoque en la representación de personas con discapacidad y en la inclusión racial y de género. Se concluye que las marcas de juguetes están respondiendo a la demanda de inclusión y diversidad en el mercado infantil, cuya relevancia social se plasma en su amplia cobertura mediática.

PALABRAS CLAVE: marca; comunicación; propósito; diversidad; inclusión; juguetes.

RESUMO | Este artigo analisa a forma como as marcas de brinquedos orientadas ao público infantil integram os valores da inclusão e da diversidade na sua estratégia de produção e comunicação. Além disso, é avaliada a cobertura jornalística dessas iniciativas e pesquisada a percepção dos compradores. Foi adotada uma metodologia empírico-analítica através de estudos de caso de seis marcas e de um inquérito a 316 participantes. Os principais resultados mostram que estas marcas têm aumentado o seu foco na representação de pessoas com deficiência e na inclusão racial e de gênero. Conclui-se que as marcas de brinquedos estão respondendo à demanda por inclusão e diversidade no mercado infantil, cuja relevância social se reflete na sua ampla cobertura mediática.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: marca; comunicação; propósito; diversidade; inclusão; brinquedos.

INTRODUCTION

Brands, which are far more than mere product manufacturers, develop in our society as multi-layered and complex entities with a defined personality. They are understood as human beings with a set of principles, values and goals (Pol, 2017; Rivas Gonzales & Tello Giusti, 2020) that make up their own personality, understood as “the set of specific human characteristics that can be attributed to a particular brand” (Kotler & Keller, 2009) and that contribute decisively to consumer decision-making.

The construction of this personality derives from the product, its design and characteristics, the packaging used, commercial communication –in the form of advertisements or promotions– and social communication through the creation of content and branded content (García, 2005; Moliné 2014; Pol, 2017).

In light of this, brands need to develop a personality that connects with their audience, either through identification or projection. Today’s audiences demand that brands have a purpose as well as ethical, social, environmental and economic values, as a kind of explanation and justification for the brand’s existence in the world, giving meaning to the company and everything it does (Corporate Excellence, 2021; Marcas con Valores, 2020; Rodríguez Ardura, 2020). Numerous studies show that consumers, especially younger ones, value companies that promote diversity and inclusion, which influences their purchasing decisions and brand loyalty (Deloitte, 2019; IAS, 2023; Kantar, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2021)

An approach to the concepts of inclusion and diversity

In 2015, world leaders signed the 2030 Agenda, an agreement aimed at ending poverty, caring for our planet and ensuring prosperity for all. This agenda contains seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that promote inclusion regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic status (“Objetivos de...”, 2024).

Diversity refers to the existence and acceptance of individual and collective differences in terms of personal characteristics, experiences, cultural background, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities and disabilities, and other aspects.

Inclusion refers to the creation of environments, practices and policies that ensure the participation, access and equal recognition of all people regardless of their differences. In a general sense, social inclusion means diversity by ensuring that every individual is visible and plays an active role in society (Cloquet et al., 2018; Licsandru & Cui, 2018; Masiello et al., 2024).

Although there is extensive research on inclusive design (Fisk et al., 201, Patrick & Hollenbeck, 202), it is still unclear what factors should underlie the definition

of this concept (Makris et al., 2021). Pereira (2009) assumes that inclusive design creates products, services and environments that are accessible to as many people as possible, regardless of their limitations and without the need for specific adaptations. In this case, the concept of inclusion refers specifically to people with disabilities, as the main challenge is to create products that can be used equally by people with and without disabilities (Medola & Paschoarelli, 2014).

Diversity refers broadly to real or perceived physical or socio-cultural differences attributed to people and the representation of these differences in research, market spaces, and organizations. Equity refers to fairness in the treatment of people in terms of both opportunity and outcome. Inclusion refers to creating a culture that fosters belonging and incorporation of diverse groups and is usually operationalized as opposition to exclusion or marginalization (Arsel et al., 2022, p. 920).

Based on the literature (Amnesty International, 2021; Arsel et al., 2022; Cloquet et al., 2018; Erazo Pauta, 2020; Loyola Arenas, 2020; Naciones Unidas, 2015; Pichardo et al, 2020; Puyana Mejía, 2023; “La clave...”, 2023), a typology of different forms of diversity and inclusion is proposed with a flexible structure that can be adapted to specific needs and contexts: 1) racial and ethnic inclusion and diversity, 2) gender inclusion and equality, 3) inclusion of people with disabilities or illnesses, 4) generational inclusion, 5) diversity of sexual orientations, 6) inclusion of gender identities and gender diversity (transgender, non-binary and gender-divergent persons), 7) physical diversity, 8) family diversity, 9) religious diversity, 10) social and economic inclusion, and 11) other inclusion and diversity.

Regarding people with disabilities, we must recognize that it is a heterogeneous category (Wong, 2020) and that disabilities can be both visible and invisible (Beudaert et al., 2016). Category 3 should not be interpreted as equating people with disabilities with people with illnesses, even if they are grouped together to make the classification more practical.

Inclusive marketing: brands committed to diversity and inclusion

Companies must act responsibly, transparently and ethically (Klionsky et al., 2012) and show solidarity with the planet and people (Echazarreta Soler & Costa Marcé, 2018). In this context, corporate social responsibility and responsible marketing are fundamental (Márquez et al., 2010).

Inclusive marketing is a strategy that promotes diversity and inclusion in companies' marketing practices and elevates marketing to a “higher level of service to society” (Gopaldas, 2015, p. 2446). According to Kotler and colleagues (2017), inclusion has become a new corporate goal, where it does not mean homogeneity but

harmony in diversity. Inclusive marketing “strives to create a more representative visual culture” (Fish, 2016) so that brands reflect diverse groups and consumers value this engagement (Chiagouris, 2018).

Brands such as Nike have excelled in this commitment, launching campaigns that celebrate racial diversity (Díaz-Bajo Rodríguez & Martínez-Borda, 2021), gender (Sánchez-Labela Martín, 2021) and sexual orientation (Treviño Pérez et al., 2021), as well as offering inclusive products for people with disabilities. Ben & Jerry’s and Procter & Gamble are at the forefront of these issues and have addressed the inclusion of ethnicity, gender and LGBTQ+ rights (Soo Lim & Young, 2021; “P&G lanza...”, 2021; Rivas Gonzales & Tello Giusti, 2020; Sánchez Serrano et al., 2022). In the toy sector, brands such as Barbie (Ahmed et al., 2020; Hersinta & Ellis, 2023; Vervier, 2022) and Lego (Bowersox, 2022; Hains & Shewmaker 2019; Lindsay et al., 2017) have integrated these values into their outreach and products.

Objectives and research questions

In this article, different toy brands are examined to analyze the goals and values they convey in relation to the concepts of inclusion and diversity. We understand that three fundamental actors are involved in this phenomenon, which form the pillars of this research: 1) toy brands and the toy industry, 2) the public, both consumers and decision makers and buyers, and 3) the media as social actors that can project and reinforce these initiatives to society as a whole.

We have therefore set ourselves the following specific objectives:

SO1. Analyze the inclusion of diversity and inclusive values in toy brands for children.

SO2. Evaluate media coverage of inclusion and diversity initiatives in the toy industry and examine their social projection.

SO3. Examine buyers’ and decision-makers’ perceptions of inclusive toys, their preferences and the factors that influence their purchasing decisions.

In relation to objective no.1, we analyze the inclusive marketing of brands targeting minors from a broad perspective. We consider the company's brand strategies, advertising campaigns that comply with the self-regulatory codes of the Spanish Association of Toy Manufacturers (Asociación Española de Fabricante de Juguetes, 2022) and the International Chamber of Commerce (2022), and the development of inclusive toys that are suitable for boys and girls with different abilities or that represent diversity (Mereghetti & Riccardi, 2018).

We start from the following research questions:

RQ1. RQ1. What are the key diversity and inclusion values that toy brands incorporate into their production and communication strategies?

RQ2. RQ2. Do these toy industry inclusion initiatives have a journalistic or media projection?

RQ3. RQ3. What factors determine consumer preference for toys that promote inclusion and diversity in the current context?

METHODOLOGY

This study refers to the theoretical premises outlined above and analyzes inclusion and diversity as goals of brands targeting children. It is an exploratory study that deals with a still young and insufficiently investigated subject. We use an empirical-analytical methodology with triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods. In order to achieve the objectives and answer the research questions, a case study strategy is applied, in which observation, documentation and content analysis as well as a survey are used.

The case method allows us to study contemporary phenomena in their context (Feagin et al., 1991; Walker, 1983; Yin, 1989) and to understand the reality of the object of study (Pérez Serrano, 1994; Stake, 2005). The collective case study was applied (Álvarez & San Fabián Maroto, 2012) by selecting several representative cases.

In order to determine the sample of case studies, the characteristics of the selected units were crucial. The strategy of sample selection by judgment (Marshall 1996) was applied, taking into account the logic of replication of theoretical samples (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1991) and the criteria of analogy and comparison between the sample and the population (Kazez, 2009). Based on these premises, the winning companies of the 2020, 2021 and 2022 editions of the Play For Change Awards, an initiative of the Toy Industries of Europe (TIE), were selected in the diversity, empowerment and inclusion category: Micki Leksaker, Miniland, Fundación Juegaterapia, Mattel, Lego and Twin Science (table 1).

For data collection, we used an analysis sheet that includes qualitative and quantitative information through the observation and analysis of primary and secondary sources (figure 1). The qualitative coding process begins with the identification of the analyzed entity, the study of its identity and the analysis of diversity and inclusive values in its production and communication.

Year	Brand/company	Award-winning toy model/initiative
2022	Micki Leksaker	Lundby Dolls (representing families of all backgrounds).
	Miniland	Miniland Dolls with hearing implant.
	Fundación Juegaterapia	Bebés pelones.
2021	Miniland	Miniland Dolls with Down syndrome.
	Mattel	Barbie’s message against racism on YouTube (@Barbie).
	The Lego Group	Lego Braille Bricks.
2020	Mattel	Barbie Empowerment (Barbie Fashionistas, Role Mode and Dream Gap Project).
	Twin Science	Twin Science kit for the visually impaired.
	Mattel	Creatable World (gender neutral doll).

Table 1. Toy companies that won at the Play For Change Awards (2020, 2021 and 2022)

Source: Own elaboration.

We also conducted quantitative coding, which allowed us to examine the media projection and social impact of these brands. For the analysis of media coverage, we searched for all news and media reports published about the studied brands in newspapers, magazines and other types of physical and digital publications. The digital press clipping software MyNews was used, applying the following parameters: a period of three years, from September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2022, and that the publication is outside the national scope (which includes 654 Spanish media). We received 19,496 mentions with a very uneven distribution: Lego leads the way with 15,233, followed by Mattel with 4,128. Far behind are Fundación Juegaterapia with 91, Miniland with 37 and Twin Science with seven mentions, while Micki Leksaker did not register a single mention.

Given the uneven distribution of these results, a new search criterion was introduced by filtering the following terms: inclusion or inclusive, purpose or values and/or diversity or equality, along with the name of the toy company as well as the Play For Change Awards winning product (Lundby Dolls, Barbie, Creatable World and Bebés pelones). After eliminating duplicates, we obtained 156 publications that formed the sample for the content analysis. The brand(s) included in the news, the chronology of the publications, the type of medium (general or specialized), the type of distribution (free or paid), the relevance of the topic (main or secondary) and a list of the most repeated words in the headlines and body text were taken into account. Finally, an analysis of the awareness of these brands among decision-makers and consumers and their perception of inclusion and diversity initiatives was conducted. This information was supplemented by a survey that complements and expands on all of the above, the design of which is explained below.

In order to learn about the social perception of the public and to fulfill the third objective of this research, a survey was conducted using a telematic questionnaire targeting society in general, focusing on adult decision makers and buyers rather than girls and boys as consumers. The sample was selected using non-probabilistic sampling (Albert, 2006; Gil et al., 2008) and the snowball technique (Goodman, 1961), which allowed the first participants to invite their acquaintances to participate and thus expand the sample.

A confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5.5% were considered, so that 316 participants were sufficient for this first quantitative approach. We found a slight preponderance of the female gender, which accounts for 68.7%, compared to the male gender, the remaining 31.3%. The average age of the respondents was 37.3 years.

A questionnaire was drawn up based on those used by Aldi (2019), Paolicchi and Serantes (2017), Torres (2011) and "Encuesta sobre..." (1998). It consists of closed questions, with the exception of two open questions, divided into three dimensions, which in turn are divided into 24 items: dimension 0, sociodemographic data (items 1 to 7); dimension 1, perception and degree of attachment to toys in general (from 8 to 11), dimension 2, criteria for toy selection and purchase decisions (from 12 to 14) and dimension 3, assessment and commitment to toys that promote inclusion and diversity (from 15 to 24).

To validate the theoretical and content construction of the survey, a review of the items was conducted by Richter (Cronbach, 1971; Gable & Wofl, 1993; McCoach et al., 2013) with seven experts in education and psychology. They rated each question individually and the questionnaire as a whole, considering aspects of coherence, clarity and relevance on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. This allowed certain sections and terms of the questionnaire to be adapted and simplified. The survey was conducted online between December 2022 and January 2023 using Google Forms. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was then calculated for the questions on the Likert scale, achieving a result of 0.928, i.e., high internal reliability.

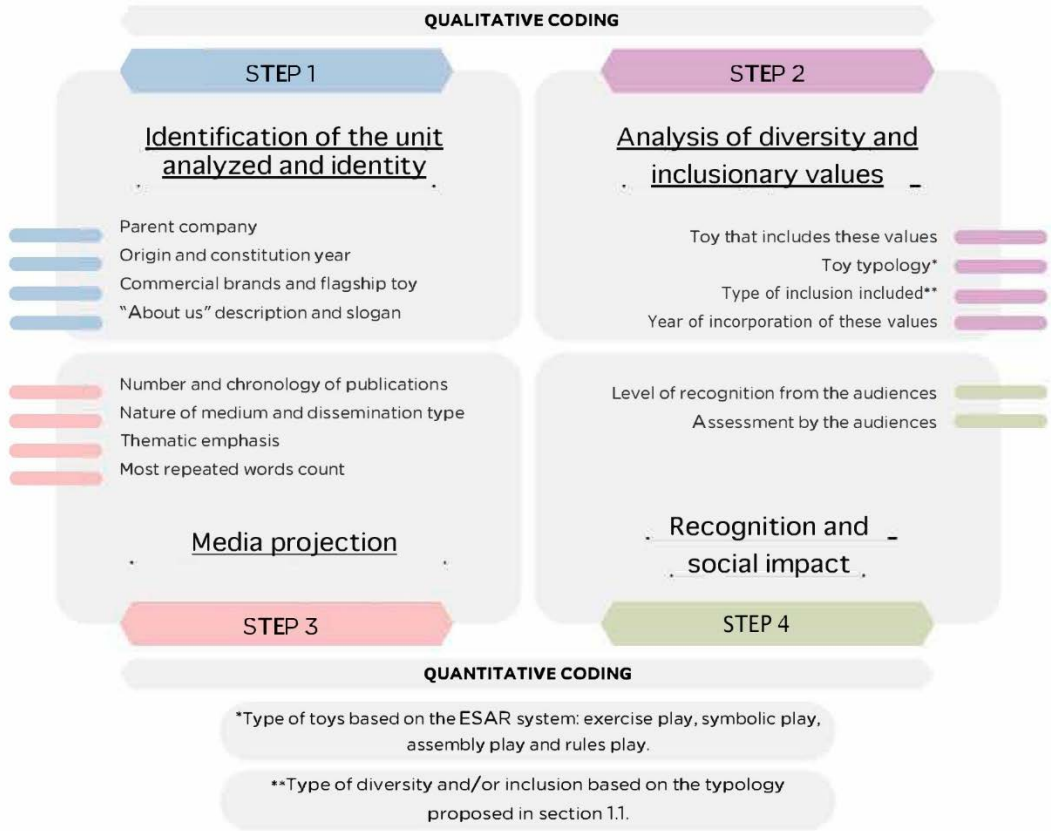


Figure 1. Case study analysis process

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

Analysis of case study identity and inclusive values

The qualitative study of the cases shows that most organizations have extensive experience in the sector, with the exception of Fundación Juegaterapia and Twin Science, which were founded in 2010 and 2017 respectively. Some of the leading companies in the toy industry are included, such as Lego or Mattel, which have focused their efforts on inclusion and diversity initiatives on their most emblematic products, reflecting the strategic importance of these decisions.

Most of these toys are symbolic, simulating imaginary events and interpreting scenes through fictional or real roles and characters. In terms of inclusion, the category for people with disabilities or illnesses is the most prevalent (n3=5), followed by racial and ethnic inclusion and diversity (n1=3), gender equality (n2=2) and to a lesser extent gender identity and diversity (n6=1), physical diversity (n7=1) and generational diversity (n4=1). No specific initiatives on sexual (n5), family (n8) and religious diversity (n9) or social and economic inclusion (n10) were recorded, although this could be inferred from previous aspects.



Figure 2. Lego Brand Commitments

Source: Lego.com.

Since its foundation, the non-profit Fundación Juegaterapia has been promoting inclusion and diversity to improve the quality of life of children in hospital. This Spanish project, which was launched in 2010, involves the sale of solidarity dolls, known as *Bebé pelones*, which represent children with disabilities or undergoing chemotherapy. This is reflected in their motto “Chemo will fly by while playing”, which emphasizes the importance of inclusive symbolic play for these children.

Lego, a Danish toy company founded in 1932, is known for its building blocks and kits. Its mission is “to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow” (Lego, n.d. para. 2) and is based on three beliefs (figure 2): 1) that all children should have the opportunity to learn through play and fulfill their potential, 2) the importance of caring for the environment, and 3) the creation of inclusive and safe workplaces. In 2019, the company launched *Lego Braille Bricks*, an inclusion project for people with disabilities or illnesses that aims to help girls and boys with vision problems learn to read with the help of the block game.

Mattel is a renowned American toy company, founded in 1945 by Harold Matson and Elliot Handler, present in more than 150 countries. Its main goal, according to its website, is to “empower generations to explore the wonder of childhood and reach their full potential” (Mattel, n.d. para. 1). The brand has taken significant inclusion and diversity initiatives through its famous iconic toy product, *Barbie*.

Among these initiatives, the *Creatable World Collection*, launched in 2019, stands out, the first line of gender-neutral dolls that encourages “being open to the way boys and girls like to play with dolls” (Kim Culmone, Vice President of Mattel Fashion Doll Design, quoted in “Llegan los muñecos...”, 2019). Another initiative is the *Barbie Empowerment Project*, which includes the *Fashionistas* line, the *Role Model* line and the *Dream Gap* campaign launched in 2018, which aims to provide girls with resources to continue to believe in themselves under the slogan “You can be whatever you want to be”.



Figure 3. Examples of Lundby dolls that promote inclusion

Source: Mickiofsweden.com.

The Fashionistas line is the most diverse yet, with a variety of skin tones, body types and disabilities. Mattel also implemented a branded content strategy: on October 7, 2020, the company released a clip on its YouTube channel featuring Barbie and her friend Nikki talking about racism and the fight against racial prejudice.

Micki Leksaker, a Swedish company founded in 1944, is strongly committed to the environment and social sustainability. It sells brands such as Micki and Lundby, which are among the most popular. The Lundby Dollhouse Dolls brand includes dolls that represent families from different backgrounds. Here, too, we find a symbolic range of toys that encompasses race, origin, generation and gender, emphasizing the different and equal roles of family members (figure 3).

Miniland, a Spanish company founded in 1986, aims to “empower parents, educators and children to develop their full potential together” (Miniland, n.d., para. 4), focusing on the family and educational environment. Its puppet series (symbolic and imitation play) is characterized by the promotion of diversity and empathy, representing all origins and ethnicities, as well as a collection of dolls with cochlear implants that foster the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Finally, Twin Science, a Turkish company founded in 2017, is committed to STEM+A (science, technology, engineering, math and art) education and believes that children also need to learn social awareness (Twin Science, n.d.). Its innovative Twin Science Kit for the Visually Impaired adapts the original kit and allows children to play with modules and blocks by engraving the pieces in Braille, facilitating inclusive play for people with visual impairments.

Analysis of media coverage and projection of case studies

The companies that were most present in the media examined were Mattel and Lego with 56 (35.90%) and 44 appearances (28.21%) respectively. Very similar results were found for Miniland, the protagonist of 29 informative pieces (18.59%), and the Fundación Juegaterapia, which was present in 27 publications (17.31%). In contrast, we found no information about Twin Science or Micki Leksaker.

Regarding the chronological evolution of these publications, in the first and second year (01/09/2019 – 31/08/2020 and 01/09/2020 – 31/08/2021) we find the same number of informative pieces, namely 45 in each year, a number that increases to 66 in the third period (01/09/2021 – 31/08/2022), which could indicate a slight increase in media projection and attention to these types of topics. As has been shown, we find the most publications on this topic in the pre- and post-Christmas period, while July and August are the months with the least information.

An interesting fact is that 53.85% (n=84) of the journalistic publications appeared in specialized media (figure 4). We found that journalistic attention to the topic of inclusion and diversity in children's toys shows a certain degree of specialization: only 72 pieces of information were published in general media.

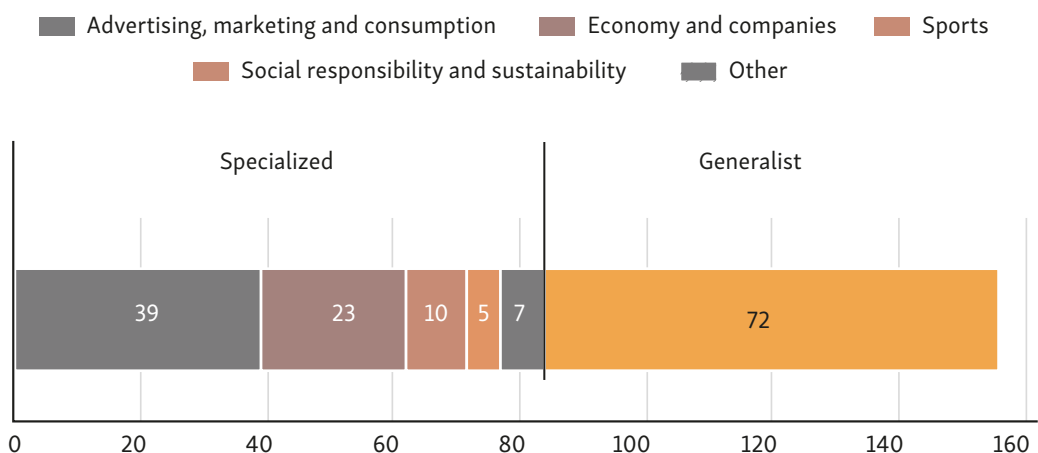


Figure 4. Number of publications in specialized media of case studies (1/09/2019-31/08/2022)

Source: Own elaboration.

The vast majority of media in which this information appears are free (n=129), which favors the access and dissemination of this information. It is also important to recognize that in 62.82% of the cases (n=98) the thematic focus was on inclusion and diversity, as this is the axis of the information piece; however, there are also 37.18% of the news (n=58) in which, despite mentioning these values and objectives, the main theme was something else. It is not surprising that when counting the frequency and examining the words most frequently used in the headlines of the publications analyzed, the three most frequently occurring terms are precisely inclusion/inclusion (n=38), diversity (n=20) and childhood/childhood (n=15). Then we find terms that refer to different types of inclusion, such as gender (n=14), vitiligo (n=14), oncology/cancer/chemo/treatment (n=12), Braille (n=8), prosthesis (n=7), cochlear implant (n=6), blind (n=6) or Down syndrome (n=5). Concepts such as teaching/learning (n=10), respect/tolerance/empathy (n=9), SDGs (n=7), empowerment (n=5), sustainable/recycled (n=4), commitment (n=3) and equality (n=2) are also present, albeit to a lesser extent.

Analysis of social recognition and assessment of inclusion and diversity as goals for toy brands

The study is based on 316 surveys conducted with Spanish citizens. The sample shows that females (68.7%) outnumber males (31.3%). The average age is 37.3 years and 86.7% identify as heterosexual, 6.6% as bisexual, 4.4% as homosexual, 1.6% are questioning their identity, and 0.3% identify as queer. 0.3% preferred not to answer this question. In terms of family situation, 53.5% of respondents have children, the most common family had two (50.3%), followed by one (34.8%), three (11.6%) and more than three (3.3%).

73% of respondents are familiar with the topic. To analyze respondents' perception of brands that have implemented initiatives in this regard, we conducted a correlation analysis between the variables brand perception and familiarity with inclusion and diversity in toys. The result shows that there is a significant positive correlation between the two ($r=0.689$, $p<0.01$). This means that people who are more familiar with the topic have a more positive perception of the brands that have implemented these initiatives. The same applies to age ($\beta=0.332$, $p<0.01$): younger respondents tended to have a more positive opinion of these brands. However, no significant correlation was found between the perception of the brands and the gender or education level of the respondents.

Respondents who have children have a more positive perception of the importance of inclusion and diversity in toys than respondents who do not have children, because after a comparative analysis of the mean values using the Student t-test, taking into account the variable "having children", respondents who have children

have a significantly higher mean score on the question “Do you think inclusion and diversity in toys are important?” have a significantly higher mean score (4.15) compared to respondents who do not have children (3.77), $t(188.71)=2.88$, $p<0.01$.

With regard to the statement “Boys have their own toys and girls have their own”, there are different opinions depending on the age and gender of the respondents. Those under 40 years of age agree with this statement less and score a significantly lower average value (2.97) than those over 40 (3.51), $t(179.92)=-3.61$, $p<0.001$. Male respondents agree with this statement more, with a significantly higher average value (3.57) than women (3.16), $t(320.83)=3.34$, $p=0.001$.

Regarding the type of inclusive toys that respondents buy most often, it is dolls with different skin colors and unequal body physiognomy that favor racial/ethnic and physical diversity ($n=32$; 25.6%). Second, we find teaching and learning-oriented games ($n=29$; 23.2%), either because they specifically address inclusion or simply because many respondents see them as inclusive in that they are unisex, having no gender or racial bias. Respondents often believe that a toy that is traditionally considered a boy's toy is also suitable for a girl and vice versa, promoting gender equality ($n=26$; 20.8%), as can be seen from statements such as “dolls for boys and balls for girls”, “a blue kitchen for my nephew”, “a baby carriage for a boy” or “giving a girl a superhero”. Next, we find dolls with diseases, especially childhood cancer, or physical or mental disabilities such as Down syndrome, to promote diversity and inclusion ($n=25$; 20%) and other types of inclusive toys ($n=12$; 10.4%).

Both brand advertising and marketing are important factors influencing the decision to purchase toys, as indicated by 60% and 70% of respondents respectively. Many respondents ($n=165$; 52.22%) admitted to refusing to buy a toy because it seemed inappropriate. The main reason was the consideration that the toy would promote violence and warlike values. Many specifically mentioned toy guns and other weapons as examples of what they would not buy. Another common reason for refusing to buy a toy was the inappropriate recommended age for the child. Some respondents pointed out that they would not buy a toy that they thought was sexist or too sexualized. Respondents believe that toys should be more inclusive and not restrict girls and boys based on their gender. In fact, 75% said that toy advertising is sexist and 50% think it reinforces gender stereotypes.

The correlation analysis of the answers to the questions “There is a real commitment of these toy brands to a fairer society” and “It's really just about marketing because the only thing that matters for toy brands is sales” shows us a negative and moderate correlation (-0.25), i.e., people who believe that toy brands have a real commitment to a fairer society are less likely to think that it is just about marketing, even if it is not a very strong correlation.

DISCUSSION

Toy brands are aware of the importance of values such as diversity and inclusion in our society (Chiagouris, 2018; Fish, 2016), especially among the younger public (Deloitte, 2019), the generation of millennial mothers and fathers, who are considered more influential in the purchasing decisions for their daughters and sons and strive for smart and responsible consumption (Mooney & Fernandez, 2015). These values are increasingly integrated by toy manufacturers as part of their brand purpose and personality (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2023; Kotler & Keller, 2009; Pol, 2017; Rivas Gonzales & Tello Giusti, 2020) and are perceived by the public through: 1) the production, i.e. the offer and variety of toys that promote inclusion and diversity, 2) brand advertising and commercial communication, and 3) journalistic projection in the media in the form of news and reports that gather information related to the initiatives with values adopted by toy brands.

As previous studies have shown (Corporate Excellence, 2021; IAS, 2023), toy brands' inclusion and diversity initiatives are perceived positively by the public. The majority of respondents consider diversity and inclusion in toys to be important and believe that toys should be free from gender stereotypes. However, we have identified certain limitations in relation to the survey used, as the results could be influenced by factors such as education and culture. It would therefore be advisable to carry out a more detailed analysis in the future. Similarly, we know that shoppers have a positive attitude towards inclusive toys, but we do not know specific details about the preferences and factors that influence the purchase decision. In this future line of research, it would be interesting to investigate the dynamic and inclusive impact of toys on consumers and the psychological influence of the brand on inclusion.

Finally, different types of inclusion addressed by brands have been identified, such as inclusion of people with disabilities or diseases, racial and ethnic diversity or gender equality. This shows how important it is to consider different aspects of inclusion and diversity in the toy industry in line with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (Naciones Unidas, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

Brands such as Lego, Mattel and Miniland have placed a strategic focus on promoting inclusion and diversity in their flagship toys. This is also evident in the development of products that represent girls and boys of different abilities, ethnicities and genders. However, it should be noted that the inclusion of sexual orientation, family and religious diversity is still underrepresented, suggesting that brands still have room for improvement here. The inclusion of gender

diversity, physical diversity and physiognomy and generational diversity was less prevalent. No direct initiatives to include sexual orientation, family diversity, religious diversity or social and economic diversity were found. Although this form of inclusion can be inferred from the above categories, this suggests an area for improvement.

Journalistic coverage of inclusive initiatives in the toy industry was considerable, with 156 publications during the study period, contributing to their social impact. The media highlighted the efforts of brands, particularly Mattel and Lego, to promote inclusion and raised awareness of the importance of inclusive toys. As there is a greater number of publications on this topic in the pre- and post-Christmas period, the results reveal three findings: 1) that media attention to inclusive values and diversity in children's toys has a certain specialization, 2) that most media reporting on this topic is free, and 3) that in most cases inclusion and diversity are the focus of the news (62.82%).

There are interesting findings in terms of shopper perceptions: 1) The majority of respondents consider diversity and inclusion in toys to be important, indicating a positive shift in the mindset of shoppers. 2) The majority of respondents claim that toys should be free from gender stereotypes; however, there is a broad and ambiguous interpretation of what this means, as many believe that toys free from gender bias help to promote this inclusion; 3) there are significant differences in respondents' answers according to age and whether or not they have children, with the youngest and those who have children being more inclined to consider diversity and inclusion when buying toys; 4) there are differences in answers according to gender, with women being more likely to agree with the elimination of gender stereotypes in toys; and 5) brand and advertising are critical to the decision to buy inclusive toys.

The trend towards inclusive toys as an expression of brand purpose is growing steadily and is expected to continue to increase. Several factors have contributed to this growth, such as consumer demand, growing awareness of the importance of inclusion, brand initiatives and support from society in general. While brands' commitment to inclusion and diversity is perceived positively, there is also skepticism about whether these initiatives are genuine or a marketing strategy to increase sales. The question arises as to whether they are truly committed to inclusion or simply capitalizing on a popular trend. This dilemma highlights the need for critical analysis and constant vigilance regarding brands' actions and behavior in this area to promote more conscious and responsible consumption.

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