

Cross-Cutting Social Dynamics in Marketing: Unveiling the Experiences of Overlooked Consumer Segments

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KEYWORDS <i>Intersectionality, Identity, Intersections, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Consumer Behaviour, and Marketing Paradigm</i>	ABSTRACT In market research, intersectionality has been generally overlooked. Through a discussion of the body of literature and offering valuable resources for the integration of intersectionality in marketing research, this article bridges this knowledge gap. It offers an agenda for future research, a comprehensive structure of an intersectional marketing paradigm, a systematic research design process, and pragmatic advice for stakeholders. Three basic elements constitute the foundation of the intersectionality concept: (1) recognizing and seeing overlapping, not separate, social categories (e.g., gender, race, and class); (2) understanding how the intersections combine and interact to create experiences in the marketplace; and (3) exploring how power influences these experiences. The research design map proposed supplies marketing scholars with precise methodological and theoretical approaches, including the formulation of intersectional hypotheses and theories, exploratory analyses of subsamples, inclusive literature analysis, complete demographic reporting, sampling the underserved populations, and strategic contextualization of results. Key questions at the societal, consumer, and organizational levels are emphasized in the accompanying research agenda. Marketing will be better placed to sustain social salience, promote multiple and inclusive theory building, and better capture the lived experiences of hitherto under-researched communities if it adopts intersectionality.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Intersectionality is an important perspective that can profoundly change our perception of marketing and consumption as it addresses several disruptive elements such as political polarization, increasing technology, and data replicability issues. Intersectionality describes how historically specific social categories are intersecting consumer experiences and thereby sheds light on systems of oppression and privilege (such as racism, sexism, and classism). Marketing scholarship is at risk of neglecting customers who are less influential in the marketplace if it fails to take this viewpoint. There remains a remarkable lack of research that includes intersectional lenses, even though current marketing scholarship has highlighted the importance of working with previously marginalized and under researched consumer segments (Arsel, Crockett, and Scott 2022; Chandy et al. 2021; Poole et al. 2021; Shavitt 2019). Though there is some foundational literature on intersectionality (Cole 2009; Gopaldas 2013; McCall 2005), real data indicates that its adoption into marketing has progressed much more gradually than other disciplines. For example, in a Web of Science study, the most-cited ten intersectionality pieces in marketing have only received 92 citations, but management has received more than 900. Also, only three of six marketing journals carry at least one piece citing intersectionality, and these are limited to qualitative consumer culture theory methods, based on a Google Scholar analysis of the Financial Times Top 50 (FT50) journals, which



are considered mainstream. This suggests that intersectionality must be applied beyond cultural theory contexts and still notably absent from the leading marketing publications.

Intersectionality might not be utilized as much due to ambiguous definitions within marketing, a shortage of understanding about its benefits to academia and society, and a lack of familiarity with its real-world application. In addition, marketing research also often gives high value to developing ideas that can be used across broad categories of consumers, which may discourage individuals from exploring intersecting experiences that seem to be very specific. However, such experiences may offer theory- and practice-driven knowledge that challenges conventional wisdom and is more generalizable across subsegments. This paper invites marketing stakeholders to embrace intersectionality in solving problems in an attempt to bridge such disparities.

To achieve this, we (1) introduce an intersectional marketing approach, (2) identify its unique benefits for marketing theory and practice, (3) provide evidence-based strategies through the guise of a research design road map for embedding intersectionality into research agendas, and (4) outline the practical implications for scholars, industry practitioners, and other stakeholders. Marketing can generate more precise understanding of under-researched customer segments, encourage equitable marketing efforts, and further endeavors that benefit businesses and society as a whole by embracing intersectional strategies.

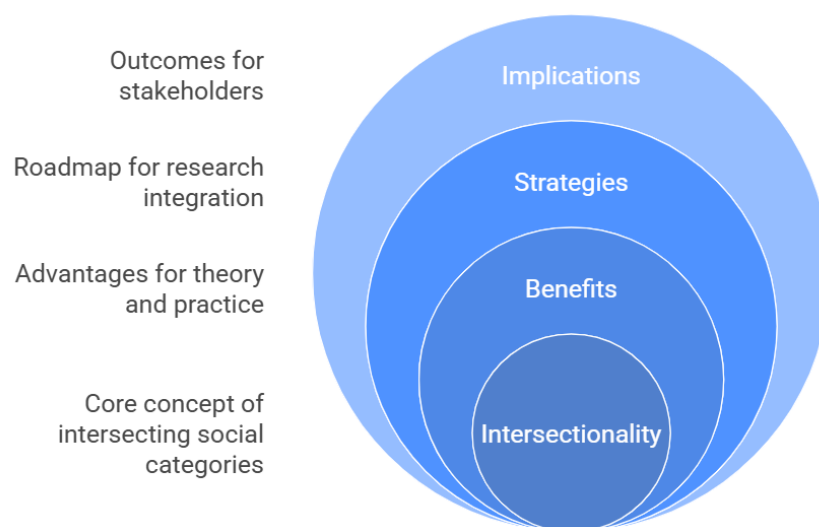


Figure 1: Embracing Intersectionality in Marketing

Political Divides as an Illustrative Example

Take the highly researched marketing theme of American political polarization (e.g., Briley, Jung, and Danziger 2019; Weber et al. 2021) to demonstrate the need for an intersectional approach. This theme suggests that American consumers are increasingly polarized along demographic categories such as age (Kuta 2020; Potts and Thomson-Deveaux 2022) and education (Cohn 2021; Sosnik 2023). Political ideology has been shown to have an impact on a number of consumer behaviors, such as taking financial risks (Han et al. 2019), enrolling in supplemental education programs (Jung and Mittal 2021), navigating customer journeys (Jung and Mittal 2020), and being satisfied overall (Fernandes et al. 2022). Though these findings make clear the importance of political affiliation to marketing, it would be simplistic to conclude that all segments of customers are reflected in these trends (Kreiss and McGregor 2024). These correlations have significant nuances that can be observed through an intersectional perspective.

According to longitudinal American Trends Panel data (Pew Research Center 2023a, 2023b) (Web Appendix D), White respondents are most influenced by the widely-debated educational rift in political identity (i.e., higher education levels are linked with increased Democratic identification). Democratic orientations among White non-Hispanic individuals increased by 28.1% among those having a college degree or higher compared to those with a high school diploma alone (32.7% vs. 60.8%). Hispanic respondents actually indicated a slight decline of 1.1%, while Black non-Hispanic respondents only experienced a 3.2% increase. Similarly, younger respondents prefer to be Democratic, but this pattern is most evident among Asian respondents, and it reverses entirely for Black respondents, who become more Democratic with age. The analysis illustrates why intersectionality matters for marketing research and reveals the limitations of sweeping narratives about political polarization.

Dominant explanations may shortchange the lived realities of historically marginal populations if they do not consider intersecting social identities such as age, race, and education. For example, the specificities of Black consumers would be



omitted from consideration if political polarization were assumed to follow patterns created mainly from White respondents. We clarify intersectionality and explore its revolutionary role in marketing in the next section.

Defining Intersectionality for Marketing

In accordance with earlier scholarship, we conceptualize intersectionality within the marketing context to have three primary features: (1) acknowledging and valuing intersectionality of social categories instead of isolating them from each other, (2) understanding how variations in experiences of living at these intersection points shape marketplace conduct, and (3) examining how power arrangements shape these experiences (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013; Collins 2015; Gopaldas 2013; Steinfield and Holt 2020; Steinfield et al. 2019). Power here is defined as the degree to which consumers are exposed to forms of capital in the market place, such as financial, cultural, and social capital (Collins 2015). In order to denote comparatively greater or lesser degrees of such power, we use the language of "privilege" and "oppression" (Cole 2009). While only one of these elements can be utilized in order to conduct an intersectional approach in market research, the most complete utilization is the combination of all three, which is still a fairly uncommon practice.

Conceptual Framework

Implications for building predictive models for the future, we present a conceptual framework to distinguish between an intersectional marketing paradigm and the dominant paradigm guiding marketing scholarship presently. Importantly, intersectionality is a way of thinking and doing rather than a construct. All consumers operate within marketplaces that are shaped by intersecting social identities, as observed by Poole et al. (2021). An intersectional perspective recognizes that experiences are shaped by the interaction of power and oppression in ways that cannot be reduced to the additive effects of multiple categories, compared to prevailing models that treat these identities as separate (Crenshaw 1991). The dominant marketing paradigm, tracing its origin to rational choice theory, is different (Rodriguez-Sickert 2009; Scott 2000). Marketing research often relies on its underlying assumptions, like segregated customer experiences, use of easily available populations, and a focus on aggregate patterns in behavioural events, even if it takes a stab at challenging this foundation. Due to this, much marketing research assumes customer experiences are autonomous, leaving identity and power in significant areas such as price, retailing, expertise in persuasion, and brand personality relatively under investigated (Gopaldas 2013; Poole et al. 2021).

In minimizing their experiences to border conditions instead of seeing them as necessary for the development of theories, this approach often marginalizes neglected groups. Scarcity promotions, such as "40% off for a limited time," are commonly tested as main effects in physical vs. virtual contexts (Hmurovic, Lamberton, and Goldsmith 2023). Further studies have tested gender or race as moderators, e.g., the information that Black or women consumers are less price-sensitive (Wang and Griskevicius 2014; Nonnemaker and Farrelly 2011). By representing variations of the norms as exceptions, this approach quietly centres dominant group behaviours as norm. As a result, marketing is often blind to underrepresented customers, which contributes to systemic biases and does not take into account the ways power influences experiences in the marketplace (Grier et al. 2024; Grier, Thomas, and Johnson 2019). By highlighting the ways that identities are interrelated and how they align with oppressive and privileged systems, an intersectional marketing approach transcends such limitations.

It recognizes that a consumer's lived experience is a fluid, socially constructed concatenation affected by relational, environmental, and commercial factors and not a static backdrop (Ger 2018; Schmitt, Brakus, and Biraglia 2022). Both theoretical models and marketing outcomes are affected by these experiences' encounters with power and injustice cycles (Salisbury et al., 2023). An intersectional strategy, for example, would explore how temporary price discounts would affect them within the context of power dynamics that are embedded in consumer identities like the stigma of women's perceived economic weakness (Jacob et al. 2022) or the combination of race and class-based issues (Crockett 2017; Gopaldas 2013; Monk, Esposito, and Lee 2021). These findings become valid contributions that speak to the lived reality of the customers under study, and not being relegated to the status of incidentals in a core effect. Thus, the intersectional paradigm assumes that marketing impacts, theoretical structures, and consumer lived realities are all cognate and instructively mutual. In contrast with existing paradigms, which primarily search for mutuality between constructs and consequences, this is a significant departure.

Future research employing this lens should explore the role of privilege and oppressive institutions in shaping consumer experiences and how these experiences, in turn, shape theoretical development and marketing practice. We walk through how the three building blocks of intersectionality apply to marketing and describe their role within the paradigm of intersectional marketing in the following section.

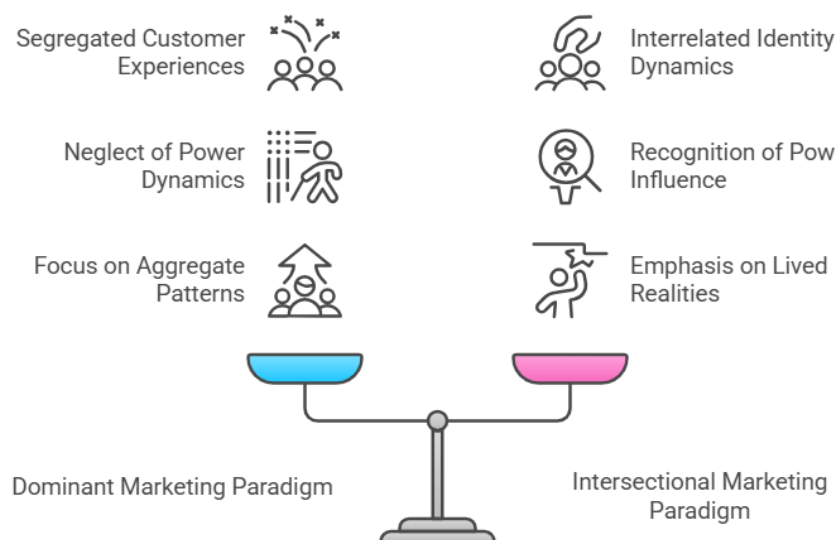


Figure 2: Shifting marketing Paradigms for Inclusive Strategies

Crossing Social Categories: Understanding and Recognizing Intersectionality

At any given moment, customers fit into a variety of social groups, such as age, gender, and occupation, each of which shifts in significance depending on the situation (Cole, 2009; Forehand, Reed, and Saint Clair, 2021). For example, Rydell, McConnell, and Beilock (2009) found that simply answering demographic questions such as a person's gender or career can engender their "woman" or "student" identities, respectively. Demographic segments, geography, jobs, interpersonal relationships, affinity groups, philosophies, consumption habits, and brand loyalty are just some of the self-descriptions that create these identities (Reed et al., 2012). Biology (e.g., age, body type), social norms (e.g., class, caste), and visibility (e.g., handicap, nationality) can affect their salience. The intersectionality concept points out that these identities are not separate; instead, individuals possess intersecting identities formed by crossing over more broad societal traits, such as being a female college student.

Since each sample of studies will be representative of some identity intersections more than others, then all marketing research is thus necessarily intersectional. However, these intersections are most often overlooked by the prevailing marketing paradigm, leading to inaccurate or oversimplified conclusions. By locating and describing overlapping social categories as distinctive starting points for more nuanced understandings of consumer behavior instead of monolithic customer groups, an intersectional marketing paradigm counters this.

Consider this example: It is common practice to have reviewers ask that authors present a study as one about women if 80% of the sample is women. Seldom, however, do studies demarcate the threshold at which 80% of the sample is heterosexual or pose the study as a study of heterosexual customers. This highlights the "default" assumptions that are present in research practices. Identity categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, and age ought to be studied in relation to each other instead of as separate realms in an effort to transcend these defaults (Collins, 2015). Understanding these intersections is important in the process of building information, although no particular study is able to tackle all junctions. Hutton (2015), for instance, documented variables such as marriage status, family type, and ethnicity and examined consumer stress in relation to poverty and gender. These details point to intersecting categories and open up the possibilities for further research, although they are not the primary concern of the study. An intersectional perspective in marketing poses questions such as:

- Q1. What are the impacts of oppressive systems and power on marginalized consumers' engagement with brands?
- Q2. Which intersecting social categories do my research and marketing processes apply?
- Q3. How do lived experiences of marginalized consumers consider theories, hypotheses, and conclusions?

Consumer Lived Experience: Influence in the Marketplace

Rather than merely presenting additive effects of different social identities, intersectional studies provide knowledge relevant to consumer consumers' lived realities. For instance, studying lesbian consumers necessarily means examining how sex and sexuality intersect, often together with other factors such as age or class (Tsai, 2011). The original purpose of intersectionality was to draw attention to the ways that sexism and racism combine to influence Black queer women's experiences (The Combahee River Collective, 2014). This perspective arose due to the 1960s Black Power and second-wave feminist



movements that centered the interests of Black men and White middle-class women, respectively, often paying little attention to Black women who experience a range of intersecting types of marginality (Crenshaw, 1991).

Black women's lived reality is an intersectional identity worthy of study in itself; it is not merely the sum of being Black and female.

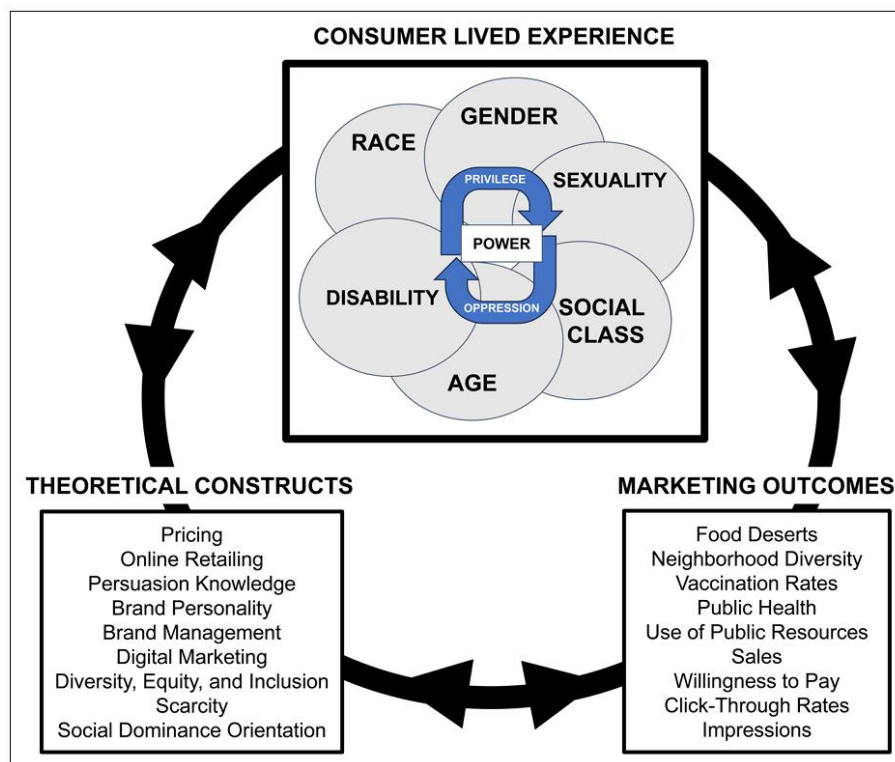


Figure 3: Marketing Paradigms

For example, considering their double marginalization, it could be presumed that Black women would receive the lowest pay in discrimination cases in comparison with White women as well as Black men. A more nuanced truth is brought to light by studies: Black women earn less than White women in gender discrimination cases but earn more than Black men in racial discrimination situations (Ponce de Leon & Rosette, 2022). These findings disprove additive assumptions and emphasize the importance of considering intersectional identities as unique phenomena instead of simply the product of the interaction between race and gender. Secondly, intersectionality uncovers variations within groups who are often stereotyped as homogenous. For example, research on Bangladeshi women's food consumption indicates that poverty experiences differ according to ethnicity (Ashik et al., 2022). Whereas ethnic minority Santal women perceive food consumption as a symbol of their ongoing marginalization, ethnic majority Muslim women may use it to enhance the family's prestige.

Essentially, an intersectional approach not only pinpoints differences but is also more likely to identify shared ground between groups, which yields new marketing insights (Cole, 2009).

Cherrier and Hill (2018), for instance, show that "fresh start" appeal advertising messages resonate equally with individuals who have recovered from substance use disorders and with those who have been incarcerated. Likewise, Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier (2000) find that since both groups feel unique minorities in the market, White gay and lesbian consumers might identify with ads directed at Black Americans more than feeling spoken for by ads promoting solely to their racial identity (Chaney, Sanchez, & Remedios, 2016). By revealing nuanced differences and unexpected commonalities between consumer groups, these illustrations demonstrate how intersectional analysis enriches marketing theory and practice.

Power: Investigation of How It Shapes Consumer Experience

Changes in customers' lived experiences go well beyond matters of taste or personal preference. In Crockett's (2017) research, for example, Black consumers avoided predominantly White establishments not out of taste, but because they expressed apprehension regarding potential mistreatment in their patronage as a consequence of perceived power imbalances. This underscores the necessity for an intersectional marketing model to examine the way experiences of consumers are influenced by power (Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin, 2013; Steinfeld & Holt, 2020). Power has been researched in marketing science, yet this has been rarely applied from an intersectional framework. Beliefs about power are often taken to be equally available to theoretical conceptions such as psychological power, power distance beliefs, system justification theory, and social



dominance orientation. But one of the core principles of intersectionality is that individuals' understandings and experiences of power depend on their social position and lived realities. When asked to allocate an unplanned windfall, for instance, someone who is financially strapped will answer differently than someone who is well off financially (Paulson, 2018). These differences are the result of categorical variations in closeness to power tied to real-world experiences and not experimental manipulations.

In addition, no one social identity, e.g., gender, color, ethnicity, or class, promises a consistent experience of oppression or privilege, as Ashik et al. (2022) indicate. For Cikara, Martinez, and Lewis (2022), these processes are highly context-dependent rather. The consumer experiences are closely connected to historical and cultural contexts in which intersecting oppressive systems create a multifaceted web of inequalities in the market. For example, racial differences at the same socioeconomic status were found in Jang and Kim (2018) research on food deserts: Black consumers were more likely than non-Black consumers to live in food deserts despite their similar poverty status. The interaction of structural forces—power relations that produce racial and class disparities converging—is observed in this trend. This third dimension of intersectionality therefore highlights the ways in which marketing can demonstrate structural injustices that affect access to and experience in the marketplace. (Examples of intersectional studies of power at the macro, meso, and micro levels are illustrated in Web Appendix E.) The advantages of applying an intersectional perspective to marketing theory and practice are discussed in the next section.

By centering on lived experiences at intersections of numerous identities, an intersectional marketing framework reorients how we approach consumer behaviour. In distinction from traditional unidimensional approaches, this perspective integrates interconnected identities—such as gender, race, class, and ability—into models like the Multiple-Identity Network, which predicts how power relations and identity salience influence behaviour. For example, intersectionality considers factors such as body stigma to account for nuanced reactions in marketing beyond gender. Moreover, by illuminating how convergent stigmas—such as age and gender—exacerbate exclusion, it improves diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) studies. In addition, intersectionality includes ideas such as loss aversion, where privilege affects what individuals understand as gains and losses, and nonverbal communication, which focuses on gendered and racialized dynamics in touch-based interactions. This perspective is particularly applicable to new challenges such as societal fragmentation, humanitarian catastrophes, and technological hyperconnectivity. For instance, men's do-it-yourself practices oppose additive theories by intersecting with class and masculinity norms. As with this, political campaign effects on voting illustrates how age, education, and ethnicity intersect to impact various behaviours. Thus, intersectionality offers inclusive, situation-sensitive research through giving marketing researchers a map for in-depth theoretical insight and methodological sophistication.

Theoretical Approaches

By comparing effect patterns between different identity-based subgroups, exploratory subsample studies enable researchers to incorporate intersectionality into existing projects. These analyses facilitate the assessment of whether theories have similar or different manifestations at different intersections, such as class, gender, and race. While statistical significance can be constrained by small sample sizes, directional trends may be noted to offer cumulative evidence for further research. Better to position these studies as exploratory rather than confirmatory to avoid oversimplification or unsubstantiated guesswork. These research efforts may ultimately evolve into theoretically driven intersectional hypotheses that identify the instances and origins of how co-occurring identities influence consumer behavior. In empirical models, intersectionality can be an independent, dependent, mediator, or moderator variable that helps explain intricate market dynamics involving privilege, power, and identity systems. Pricing gaps, text analysis, demographic information, and other firm- or society-level factors can all be leveraged by researchers to operationalize such intersections. Ultimately, this approach enhances understanding of diverse customer lived experiences and inclusive marketing research.

By conducting exploratory subsample analyses that examine trends among identity intersections such as race, gender, and class, researchers can incorporate intersectionality into current research initiatives. These analyses have the potential to inform theory-driven hypotheses over time and demonstrate how intersecting identities impact consumer behaviour, but they should be exploratory due to sample size limitations. To measure intricate dynamics of privilege and power in consumer research, intersectionality can be conceptualized as an independent, dependent, mediator, or moderator variable using market-level, demographic, and textual data.

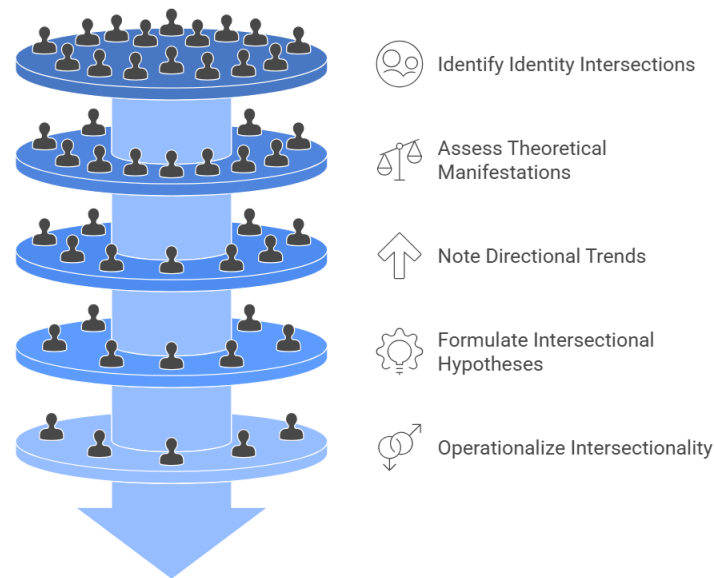


Figure 4: Developing Intersectional Hypothesis

Key Recommendations and Lessons for Stakeholders

This article provides ways to negotiate paradigm change and integrate intersectionality into marketing. It emphasizes three key steps: redefining marketing principles based on lived experiences impacted by power, shifting the current state to legitimize alternative perspectives, and establishing a research plan to track the integration of intersectionality. Key recommendations are inquiring whose voices and data are missing, applying the three-part definition of intersectionality in practice, using academic platforms to promote debate, and ensuring representation in policy and decision-making. Implementing inclusive demographic reporting, promoting diversity in reviewers, and funding studies on under-researched intersections are some of the suggested activities for editors and reviewers. In order to further strengthen the credibility and impact of intersectional marketing scholarship, the article offers scholars a research aim, blueprint, and thoughtfully curated selection of CORE publications to guide theory and method development.

Conclusion

To reflect the richness of consumers and marketplaces, intersectionality must become a core paradigm in marketing. Our paradigm illustrates that while consciously adopting intersectionality may not be painfully arduous, failing to do so risks perpetuating narrow research that dismisses an array of lived experiences and focuses on dominant identities. To reveal power relations, challenge tacit norms in measurements and research methods, and encourage innovative theories, this shift is necessary. As guidelines to assist researchers to broaden the scope, integrate alternative perspectives, and research new ideas across disciplines, we provide an intersectional paradigm and research agenda. If it is embraced as a dynamic dialogue and a frame through which to dismantle outdated categorizations, intersectionality has the potential to transform marketing, as it has already transformed other disciplines. Marketing needs to learn to forget old assumptions and redefine its strategy with intersectionality as its foundation, recognizing that customer experiences are dynamic and intersectional, if it is to be at the forefront of creating inclusive, meaningful solutions.

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