LGBTIQ-friendliness in Tourism: The Role of Organizational and Corporate Identity Alignment

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Abstract

While literature emphasizes the importance of aligning corporate identity (i.e., market positioning and employees' attitudes in service) with its organizational identity (i.e., internal values, policies and practices) to ensure authenticity (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Foroudi et al., 2024; Tuten, 2006), a gap remains in understanding how these dimensions interact, particularly in the context of an LGBTIQ-friendly identity in tourism. This study explores the relationship between organizational and corporate LGBTIQ-friendly identity from an organizational-level perspective. The findings support key aspects of the proposed model, showing that a supportive work climate of diversity and inclusion (D&I) directly influences inclusive service attitudes. However, while market positioning on D&I reinforces the adoption of inclusive attitudes in service provision, it does not influence the internal D&I-supportive climate. The model was tested using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CE-SEM). It relied on survey data from 579 tourist firms in Portugal and Spain. The study highlights the vital role of employees in shaping a corporate LGBTIQ-friendly identity and the importance of cultivating an inclusive and equitable workplace to enhance employee well-being and commitment to D&I principles.

Keywords: LGBTIQ-friendly; corporate identity; organizational identity; tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate identity is a fundamental concept in management and marketing. It delineates the strategic image of an organization designed to attract and engage with key stakeholders (Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Traditionally, corporate identity management has prioritized strategies such as targeted communications, advertising and external social responsibility (Berezan et al., 2015; Champlin & Li, 2020). However, rising social expectations for ethical and authenticity highlights the need to align discourse with internal practices (Fukukawa et al., 2007; Ro & Kang, 2024, 2025). This alignment is particularly pertinent in industries that rely on human interactions to boost consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Berezan et al., 2015; Foroudi et al., 2024; Jarvis et al., 2022; Ro et al., 2013).

In tourism industry, "LGBTIQ-friendliness" emerges as a differentiating component of a corporate identity (Berezan et al., 2015; Herjanto et al., 2023; Ro et al., 2013; Ro & Khan, 2022). For many consumers, particularly those who identify as LGBTIQ, perceptions of inclusion significantly impact purchasing decisions (Hattingh & Spencer, 2017; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Monterrubio et al., 2023). This makes the authenticity of these practices a critical concern (Bogicevic et al., 2023; Madera et al., 2013; Ro & Kang, 2024; Ro & Olson, 2020; World Tourism Organization (WTO), 2017). Scholars have increasingly warned of the risks of performative activism. This form of activism is motivated by reputational or egotistic concerns rather than genuine commitment (Bogicevic et al., 2023; Hadjisolomou et al., 2023; Oakenfull, 2015; Ro & Kang, 2024; Tressoldi et al., 2024).

According to literature, corporate authenticity is shaped by the alignment of the organizational identity (i.e., culture, practices, climate) (Gioia, 1988; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) with its corporate identity (i.e., communications, social support and service behaviors) (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Foroudi et al., 2024; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Kimpakorn et al., 2010; Melewar et al., 2017). Tourism studies have investigated LGBTIQ-friendly corporate identity from consumers` perspective, identifying its key attributes (Berezan et al., 2015; Herjanto et al. 2023; Ro & Khan, 2023) and examining its impact on consumers loyalty (Ro & Khan, 2022). More recently, the focus has shifted toward assessing the authenticity of such identities, both from the consumer's viewpoint (Ro & Kang, 2024, 2025), and through the integration of internal practices that support this authenticity (Sousa-Silva et al., 2024). For instance, Ro and Kang (2025), from a brand legitimacy perspective, examined how LGBTIQ customers assess a hotel's LGBTIQ-friendly brand. Their findings indicate that brand legitimacy improves when internal policies and employee behaviors in service align with the hotels branding. However, the study revealed no direct relationship between internal policies and employee behaviors in service delivery. From an organizational perspective, Sousa-Silva et al. (2024) identified the key attributes for a genuine LGBTIQ-friendly tourism business. These include internal policies and practices (equal opportunities and benefits; anti-discrimination policies; and inclusive awareness and training) alongside external ones (inclusive attitudes in service provision; and D&I-market positioning – communications, advertising and public support). Nevertheless, critical questions remain unanswered, particularly regarding the mechanisms linking internal policies to employee behavior, as well as the broader interplay between internal and external practices.

Given that organizations and their employees act as "identity agents", understanding how internal and external practices interact from an organizational perspective is essential (Cornelissen et al., 2007). Authenticity should be understood as a dynamic and relational construct, lived internally and shaped through interactions among companies' representatives - managers, shareholders, owners, employees, and consumers (Baker et al., 2014; Beverland et al., 2010; Kandampully et al., 2018; Kimpakorn et al., 2010; Madera et al., 2023; Newman, 2016). Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an organizational perspective to examine the interrelationship between an LGBTIQ-friendly organizational and corporate identity in tourism businesses (TBs). It is grounded on the premise that internal D&I policies and practices shape a supportive climate of D&I, which in turn fosters inclusive attitudes in service provision. Furthermore, a company's market positioning on D&I is proposed as a reinforcing mechanism, feeding back into both climate and employee attitudes in service.

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This research contributes to both theory and practices in three key ways. First, it explores the interrelationship between LGBTIQ-friendly organizational identity and corporate identity. This expands our understanding of LGBTIQ-friendliness in TBs beyond previous research, which focuses primarily on consumer perspective and attributes identification. Second, it demonstrates the path to authenticity, positioning internal climate and employees as essential elements in building an authentic and consistent LGBTIQ-friendly identity. Third, it demonstrates how internal D&I practices influence employee behavior in service, revealing the underlying mechanisms that mediate this relationship.

The following sections are organized as follows: first, an overview of organizational identity, corporate identity, and authenticity. Next, the theoretical background for the hypotheses is presented, followed by methodology and results. Finally, the main conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. LGBTIQ-FRIENDLINESS IN TBS: ORGANIZATIONAL AND CORPORATE IDENTITY ALIGNMENT
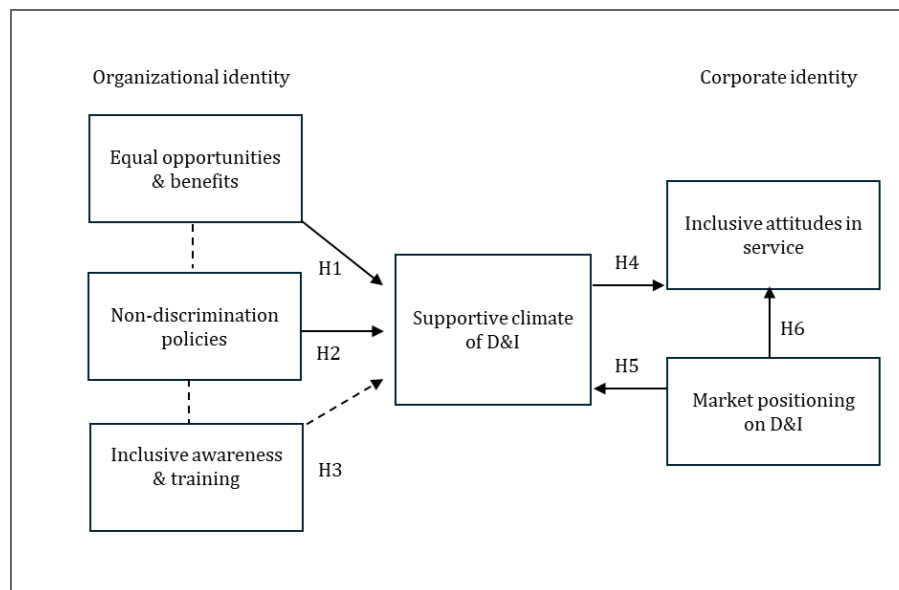
Organizational identity represents the company's internal values, policies, and practices (Gioia, 1988; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Schneider et al., 2011, 2013). Corporate identity, on the other hand, shows how an organization presents itself to the market, through campaigns, sponsorships, social initiatives and service interactions (Balmer, 2001; Cornelissen et al., 2007). Corporate authenticity emerges when there is an alignment between these two dimensions – when what the company practices internally is consistent with what it projects externally (Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Foroudi et al., 2024; Fukukawa et al., 2007).

Authenticity, which encompasses values such as truthfulness, responsibility, and transparency is sustained by genuine organizational practices (Södergren, 2021) and materialized through the lived experiences of both employees and customers (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015b; Madera et al., 2023). In this context, how employees engage with consumers is essential for fostering authenticity. Rather than being constructed solely through symbolic attributes, corporate authenticity is also experienced relationally among internal stakeholders (shareholders, managers and employees), and subsequently through employee-consumer interactions (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015a; Fritz et al., 2017; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kandampully et al., 2018).

Authenticity is perceived and influential not only by consumers but also by employees. To ensure authentic behaviors from employees to consumers, employees must first perceive and internalize authenticity within their organization (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015b; Kandampully et al., 2018; Thirumalesh et al., 2023). As Newman (2016) argued, authenticity should be interpreted through the lens of psychological essentialism, whereby individuals perceive an underlying "essence" that makes an identity feel genuine. This perception arises when there is consistency between the values an organization promotes and those experienced and believed by its stakeholders. For instance, when an organization genuinely prioritizes D&I and consistently demonstrates these principles through internal practices and external behaviors, the perceived "essence" of authenticity is reinforced, strengthening trust and legitimacy among both employees and consumers (Kyaw et al., 2021; Madera et al., 2023; Patel & Feng, 2021; Ro & Khan, 2025; Wang & Schwarz, 2010).

2.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The conceptual model proposed in this study (see Figure 1) outlines the mechanisms underlying the formation of LGBTIQ-friendly authenticity in TBs, linking the internal organizational practices to the external market strategies.

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Figure 1 – LGBTIQ-friendly identity: hypothesized model

2.2.1. D&I PRACTICES FOR A SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE OF D&I

A diversity climate refers to the organizational policies and practices that are designed to ensure justice and the representation of underrepresented groups (Hofhuis et al., 2012; McKay et al., 2009; Nishii, 2013). An inclusive climate is characterized by actions that promote appreciation and integration of different viewpoints, thereby fostering an environment of respect, openness, and collaboration (Nishii, 2013; Vongvisitsin & Wong, 2021). Together, these two climates form the D&I-supportive climate, reflecting the company's commitment and support to diversity, equity and inclusion (Huffman et al., 2008; Im et al., 2023; Park et al., 2022; Sousa-Silva et al., 2024).

Building such a climate necessitates a commitment to equal opportunity, benefits, and non-discrimination policies, which form the foundation for fairness and equity throughout the organization (Im et al., 2023; Madera et al., 2013; Mor Barak et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2018). Inclusive awareness and training complement these principles by equipping employees to recognize and address diversity challenges (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Devine & Ash, 2022; Kuknor & Kumar, 2024).

Equal opportunities and benefits are instrumental in ensuring equitable career advancement, such as in recruitment, compensation, promotions, while non-discrimination policies play a crucial role in protecting employees from unfair treatment (Im et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021; Lewis & Emidy, 2022). When employees perceive a fair distribution of opportunities and benefits, coupled with strict accountability for discriminatory behaviors, they are more likely to view the organization as committed to D&I. This perception, when reinforced by inclusive awareness and training, contributes to a positive organizational climate where all employees, including those from underrepresented groups such as LGBTIQ, feel valued and protected. Therefore, it is expected that:

H1: Equal opportunity and benefits positively influence a supportive climate of D&I.

H2: Non-discrimination policies positively influence a supportive climate of D&I.

H3: The positive effect of inclusive awareness and training on a supportive climate of D&I is strengthened when aligned with equal opportunity, benefits, and non-discrimination policies.

2.2.2. THE D&I-SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE PROMOTES INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES IN SERVICE PROVISION

Service climate is the practical manifestation of corporate identity, playing a pivotal role in shaping consumers' perceptions of the company's identity (Balmer, 2001). The company's culture and values are

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expressed through interactions between employees and consumers, with behaviors and attitudes serving as the primary channels for this communication (Foroudi et al., 2024; Powell, 2011; Sirianni et al., 2013).

A supportive climate, particularly one that includes policies supporting the LGBTIQ community, has been linked with both improved work attitudes, stronger interpersonal relationships and greater organizational commitment (Di Marco et al., 2021; Kyaw et al., 2021; Ozeren, 2014; Wang & Schwarz, 2010; Webster et al., 2018). In addition, it positively influences firm performance, including customer satisfaction (Fatmy et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2020; Patel & Feng, 2021; Pichler et al., 2018; Rahman et al, 2023). These findings suggest that a supportive climate for D&I is both a moral imperative and a strategic asset, especially in service-oriented sectors like tourism (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Manning et al., 2012; van Dijk et al., 2012).

When employees feel valued and supported, their trust in the company increases, leading to higher engagement and positive behaviors (DeConinck, 2010; Khan & Jabeen, 2019; Powell, 2011; Saks, 2006; Wang, 2009). Research has shown that internal practices and workplace climate significantly influence the service climate and its delivery (Chuang & Liao, 2010; He et al., 2011; Kimpakorn et al., 2010; Lages & Piercy, 2012; Manning et al., 2012). Consumers particularly value inclusive and welcoming attitudes from service employees, which are essential for positive experiences, especially for LGBTIQ individuals seeking businesses that embrace diversity (Berezan et al., 2015; Jarvis et al., 2022; Kandampully et al., 2018; Pritchard et al., 2000; Ro et al., 2013). Inclusive attitude in service provision is characterized by employees` understanding and respect for the authentic identities and needs of their consumers (Ro & Olson, 2020; Silva & Vareiro, 2020, Sousa-Silva et al., 2024; Vongvisitsin & Wong, 2021). Therefore, such attitudes are more likely to emerge and be sustained in a climate that actively supports D&I. To explore this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The D&I-supportive climate positively influences inclusive attitudes in service provision.

2.2.3. MARKET POSITIONING ON D&I REENFORCES THE D&I-SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE AND INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES IN SERVICE PROVISION

Market positioning is a key strategy in shaping an organization's corporate identity (Balmer, 2001; Saqib, 2023). To be authentic, this positioning must align with the organization´s values and be communicated clearly and consistently (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Saqib, 2023). When an organization builds public recognition as LGBTIQ-friendly - by participating in or sponsoring LGBTIQ events, gaining media coverage from specialized and general outlets (including inclusive communication and advertising), and supporting LGBTIQ causes and rights (Berezan et al., 2015; Gudelunas, 2011; Oakenfull, 2013; Ro & Khan, 2022, 2023; Tuten, 2006) - it directly strengthens its corporate identity, fostering trust and authenticity among employees and LGBTIQ consumers alike (Patel & Feng, 2021; Ro & Kang, 2024).

Tourism literature highlights the positive effects of this market positioning in business-to-consumer contexts, such as its ability to attract and engage LGBTIQ consumers, increase loyalty (Brunt & Brophy, 2006; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Monterrubio et al., 2023; Ro & Khan, 2022), and strengthen brand recognition, legitimacy and authentically (Coon, 2012; Ro & Kang, 2024, 2025). For instance, Ro and Khan (2022) demonstrated that when hotels are perceived as LGBTIQ-friendly, consumer evaluations and future intentions to stay increase, suggesting that clear market positioning fosters strong consumers relationship. Ro and Kang (2025) argue that brand legitimacy and authenticity is only perceived by consumers when there is alignment between the company's LGBTIQ-friendly positioning, employee attitudes in service, and internal policies.

This alignment does not only benefit LGBTIQ consumers - it also plays a vital role internally. A consistent and inclusive corporate identity reinforces employees' identification with the company and its values. Insights from corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature indicate that CSR initiatives can increase employees` organizational commitment and prosocial behaviors (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018; Farooq et al., 2017; Hur et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Ma & Latif, 2022; Thirumalesh et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020). When employees perceive a strong alignment between the companies internal and external practices, their sense of authenticity and trust increases. Conversely, inconsistencies may lead to cynicism, reducing engagement and positive work behaviors (Berezan, et al., 2015; Bogicevic et al., 2023; Gutierrez et al., 2022). Therefore, it is expected that a market positioning on D&I will reinforce the D&I-supportive climate and inclusive service attitudes. To explore this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

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H5: Market positioning on D&I reinforces the D&I-supportive climate.

H6: Market positioning on D&I reinforces inclusive attitudes in service provision.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design using an online self-administered survey via Google Forms. The target population consisted of TBs operating in Portugal and Spain, with this being the only inclusion criterion. To reach a diverse range of firms, the survey was distributed through targeted email lists publicity available on the official websites of the DMOs of both countries. The questionnaire was the LGBTIQ-FTB Scale, a validated instrument for this sector, translated into both Portuguese and Spanish to ensure linguistic equivalence. The use of Google Forms enabled easy access, data security, and anonymous responses. The data collection period lasted over two months.

Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured, in accordance with ethical guidelines for online research. The study employed convenience sampling with the aim of gathering a broad spectrum of perspectives from different types and sizes of businesses, as well as various roles within the sector. Participants were asked to evaluate the presence of LGBTIQ-friendly practices within their organizations, both internally and externally. The final sample consisted of 579 valid responses, the majority of which represented micro and small-sized accommodation providers. In addition, 75% of respondents identified as senior managers or department heads, ensuring that the responses reflected individuals with organizational decision-making authority. Demographic details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Company demographics

		Frequency
Geographic location	Spain	186
	Portugal	393
	Urban area	355
	Rural area	224
	Spain	186
Typology	Accommodation	519
	Animation	6
	Travel agency/Tour operator	54
Size	≤ 9 employees	352
	10-49 employees	147
	50-249 employees	53
	≥ 250 employees	27
	≤ 9 employees	352

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Respondents job positioning	Senior managers	373
	Department heads	64
	Other employees	141

3.2. MEASURES

The proposed conceptual framework associated hypotheses were assessed using LGBTIQ-FTB Scale developed by Sousa-Silva et al. (2024), a well-established and validated instrument for assessing LGBTIQ-friendliness in TBs, both internally and externally. The scale comprises 32 items distributed across six dimensions, aligned with the core components of the model. Organizational identity was operationalized through four dimensions: Equal opportunities and benefits (EOB) with 5 items, Non-discrimination policies (NDP) with 4 items, Inclusive Awareness Raising and Training (IART) with 4 items, and Supportive Climate for Diversity and Inclusion (SCDI) with 3 items. Corporate identity was valued using two dimensions: Inclusive Attitudes in Service Provision (IASP) with 4 items, and Market Positioning in Diversity and Inclusion (MPDI) with 12 items. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The hypothesized model was tested using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) with SPSS AMOS. As noted by Hair et al. (2017), when the theorical framework is well established and the measurement model is effectively executed, CB-SEM is a highly appropriate and effective analysis approach.

Model fit. The model fit was evaluated using traditional CB-SEM criteria, including the chi-square statistics, CMIN/DF, RMSEA and CFI (Hair et al., 2010, 2017; Kline, 2016). The chi-square statistic was 1625.023 with 450 degrees of freedom (p = 0.000). Although significant, this outcome is expected due to the large sample size (N = 579) as noted by Kline (2014). The CMIN/DF ratio was 3.611, indicating an acceptable fit, as values between 2 and 5 are considered appropriate. The RMSEA was 0.067, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.064 to 0.071, suggesting a good fit, given the values below 0.08 are typically acceptable. The CFI was 0.904, reflecting a good fit model, as values closer to 1.0 indicate a stronger model fit. In addition to these traditional fit indices, the PCFI value of 0.820 demonstrates the model's efficiency in balancing complexity with goodness of fit. Finally, Hoelter's Critical N values were 179 at the 5% significance level and 186 at the 1% significance level, confirming that the sample size (N = 579) far exceeds the minimum required for a good model fit (Hoelter, 1983). Collectively, the results indicate that the model provides a robust and valid representation of the data.

Hypothesis testing. The results of the SEM supported all the proposed hypotheses, except hypothesis 5. The R^2 value of 0.724 for the SCDI component indicates that 72.4% of its variance is explained by the commitment to EOB and NDP, with IART strengthening this relationship when aligned with those policies. Similarly, the R^2 value of 0.573 for IASP suggests that 57.3% of its variance is explained by SCDI, and to a lesser extent by MPDI. As shown in Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 2, the commitment to EOB (β = 0.577, p < 0.001) and NDP (β = 0.115, p < 0.001) have significant and positive direct effects on SCDI, supporting H1 and H2, respectively. These findings confirm that the company's internal policies are positively associated with the development of a supportive climate for D&I. In relation to H3, which states that the positive effect of IART on SCDI is stronger when aligned with EOB and NDP, the results reveal significant covariances between IART and NDP (β = 1.429, p < 0.001) and between NDP and EOB (β = 0.956, p < 0.001). While IART does not have a significant direct effect on SCDI, these correlations support the hypothesis of a strengthened indirect effect when alignment occurs, thus supporting H3. H4, which posits that SCDI positively influences IASP, is also supported by a strong and significant direct effect (β = 0.855, p < 0.001). Furthermore, both EOB (β = 0.494, p < 0.001) and NDP (β = 0.098, p < 0.001) exert indirect effects on IASP, mediated by SCDI, reinforcing the mediating role of the D&I-supportive climate in this relationship. H5, which proposed that MPDI would positively influence SCDI, is not supported by the data (β = -0.023, p = 0.256). However, H6, which posited a direct positive effect of MPDI on IASP, is supported, as the model reveals a moderate but significant direct effect (β = 0.059, p = 0.011).

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Table 2 –Path estimates of the structural model

	Direct effect		Indirect effect	
	Unstandardized Estimate (S.E.) *C.R.* P	Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized
NDP → SCDI	0.115 (0.028) *4.08* ***	0.195		
EOB → SCDI	0.577 (0.045) *12.911* ***	0.736		
SCDI → IASP	0.855 (0.061) *14,041* ***	0.755		
MPDI → SCDI	-0.023 (0.020) *-1,135* 0.256	-0.044		
MPDI → IASP	0.059 (0.023) 2.*551* 0.011	0.101		
EOB → SCDI → IASP			0.494***	0.555
NDP→ SCDI → IASP			0.098***	0.147

Note: ***p-value < 0.001.

Table 3 –Covariances and correlations estimates

	Covariances	Correlations
	Estimate (S.E.) *C.R.* P	
IART ↔ NDP	1.429 (0.168) 8.498 ***	0.443
NDP ↔ EOB	0.956 (0.110) 8.727 ***	0.498

Note: ***p-value < 0.001.

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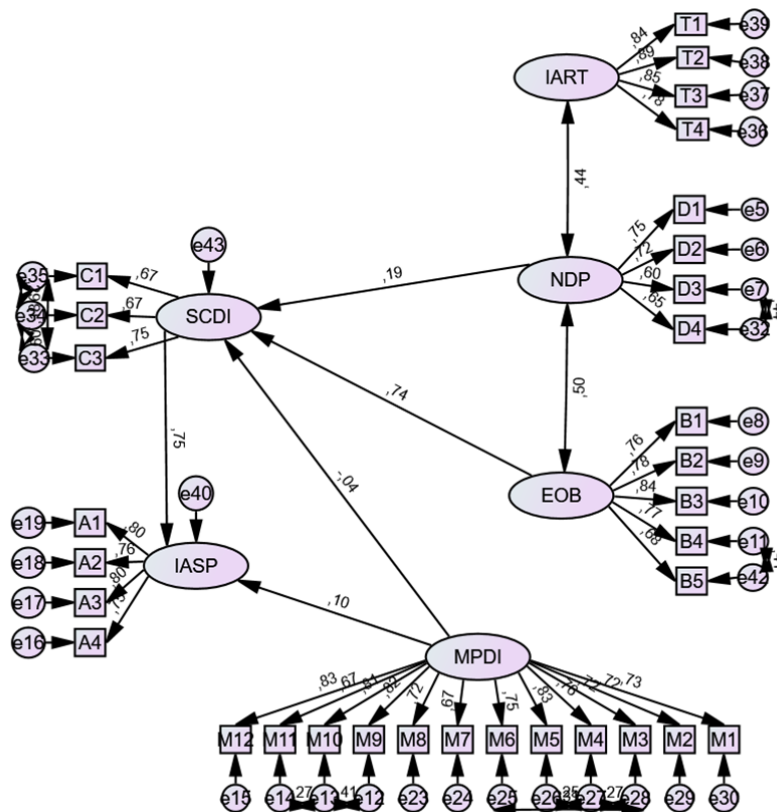DOI 10.34624/iciemc.v0i6.39872

Figure 2 – Standardized path results of structural model

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. DISCUSSION AND THEORICAL IMPLICATIONS

By exploring the interrelationship between LGBTIQ-friendly organizational and corporate identities in the tourism sector, this study reinforces the importance of aligning internal policies and practices with external ones as a key mechanism for building an authentic LGBTIQ-friendly identity. This alignment, grounded in internal D&I practices, highlights the power of value co-creation based on equity and inclusion for corporate authenticity (Foroudi et al., 2024; Freudenreich et al., 2020). A unique contribution of this study lies in the empirical relationship between internal and external D&I practices, a relationship previously unexplored at the organizational level. Structural D&I policies, such as equal opportunities and benefits, non-discrimination, and awareness and training programs, not only promote a supportive organizational climate but also help translate organizational values into inclusive frontline behaviors. This study reinforces the findings of authors such as Kyaw et al. (2021) and Patel and Feng (2021), who show that inclusion and equity policies enhance relationships with and between employees and consumers, extending this discussion to the tourism context by identifying the influence of the D&I-supportive climate on service attitudes. Contrary to the findings reported by Ro and Kang (2025), who did not identify a significant interaction between internal policies and employees service behaviors, the results of this study demonstrate that these elements are interconnected through internal support mechanisms, such as organizational support on a D&I climate. This internal mediation can help explain how organizational practices translate into inclusive attitudes in interactions with clients, complementing the work of these authors.

In addition, while market positioning on D&I plays a significant role in shaping inclusive service attitudes, it does not directly impact the D&I-supportive climate. These findings highlight that the effectiveness of external initiatives depends on how they are internalized by employees. Authenticity is not merely a consumer perception but a lived experience that emerges from the alignment between internal practices and corporate

discourse. In line with the work of scholars such as Beverland et al. (2010) and Newman (2016), this study contributes to the extant literature on corporate authenticity, demonstrating that employees who perceive and participate in a supportive and inclusive culture and climate tend to exhibit service behaviors aligned with company values, elevating the LGBTIQ customer experience and reinforcing corporate identity. Conversely, the notion that market positioning on D&I influences employees' attitudes toward consumers suggests that public commitment functions as a symbolic reinforcement for these employees, who are often meticulously selected, trained, and incentivized to provide superior service (Berezan et al., 2015). As observed by Ma and Latif (2022), the effects of external initiatives are not universal, which reinforces that D&I initiatives are more effective when employees perceive individual benefits in them.

5.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Findings present significant practical implications for TBs committed to building and maintaining an LGBTIQ-friendly identity. First and foremost, they highlight the importance of clear, consistent, and systematically embedded internal D&I policies and practices in organization's routines. Such guidelines should ensure equal opportunities and benefits, as well as inclusive proactive procedures for addressing discriminatory behaviors, including appropriate disciplinary actions and sanctions. In addition, the importance of ongoing awareness and training programs aimed at individuals or groups resistant to D&I principles is emphasized. These initiatives, rather than merely responding to ethical imperatives, serve as a structural component for an organizational climate that promotes and sustains diversity, equity and inclusion.

To optimize the efficacy of these practices, it is important that employees not only understand but personally feel and recognize their inherent benefits of these initiatives, whether in terms of well-being, safety, belonging, or professional development. Clearly communicating these benefits along with integrating them into existing recognition and reward systems, helps ensure that D&I are seen as fundamental elements of individual and collective growth within the company. Ongoing monitoring of the organization's climate is also recommended through tools such as surveys, focus groups, active listening channels and educational activities. These mechanisms help identify concerns, discriminatory behavior and areas in need of improvement (Di Marco et al., 2021), while also reinforcing a culture of inclusion and appreciation for diversity. Finally, although market positioning on D&I may not influence directly the internal climate, it can serve as a powerful symbolic reinforcement of inclusive service delivery, particularly when aligning with internal D&I practices. Marketing strategies must therefore reflect the company's genuine commitment, avoiding superficial or performative approaches that could undermine perceptions of authenticity.

5.3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations. First, while having TBs from two countries adds variety, Portugal and Spain have socio-cultural, legal, and institutional similarities due to their geographic proximity. This may restrict the findings' applicability to other countries with distinct legal-sociocultural dynamics or degrees of institutional support for LGBTIQ people. Future study might look at how these internal-external practice interactions appear in more varied or opposing contexts, allowing for more detailed comparisons. Second, the study used a cross-sectional design, which restricts the capacity to draw causal inferences between internal and external practices. While significant associations were identified, longitudinal study would allow future studies to investigate how these interactions change over time and the long-term implications internal practices may have on exterior positioning, and vice versa. Third, the sample was predominantly constituted of senior managers and department heads. While this ensured organizational-level perspectives, it may have underrepresented the experiences and opinions of employees at lower levels. A larger range of organizational positions might help to identify any gaps or misalignments between policy and practice. Finally, while quantitative data is useful for large-scale organizational research, it may not completely represent the complexities of how LGBTIQ-friendly practices are seen, understood, and implemented. Future research could use a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights to investigate other factors such as organizational experiences and narratives around inclusion.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated that TBs that fully integrate D&I both internally and externally are not merely enhancing their organizational and service climate - they are actively shaping an organizational

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identity grounded in equity, learning and collaboration. By embedding D&I into their daily operations, these businesses construct an identity that signals authenticity to both employees and consumers. As noted by scholars such Dass and Parker (1999) and Ely and Thomas (2001), a proactive approach to diversity not only manages differences but also learns from it, incorporating these lessons in the formation of their identity. This way, LGBTIQ-friendliness becomes a central element in defining what the company is and how it projects itself to the world.

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