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The Double-Edged Sword of Inclusive Language: Consumer Responses to “Latinx” in Advertising

Anabella Donnadieu Borquez  | Andrew W. Perkins 

Carson College of Business, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, USA

Correspondence: Anabella Donnadieu Borquez (a.donnadieuborquez@wsu.edu)**Received:** 20 July 2024 | **Revised:** 22 April 2025 | **Accepted:** 26 April 2025**Keywords:** advertising | implicit association | Latinx | perceived morality | political orientation

ABSTRACT

The term *Latinx*, a gender-neutral alternative to *Latino* and *Latina*, has become more prevalent in recent years, despite ongoing controversy regarding its use. Across three studies, we test how Hispanic/Latino consumers perceive the use of this term in advertising, and the downstream consequences this has for brands. An IAT, in which participants categorized mock advertisement stimuli featuring *Latinx* or *Latino*, revealed that Hispanic/Latino consumers do not have positive implicit associations with *Latinx*. Further, two experiments that manipulated both inclusive language and the advertised product showed that one's political orientation influences purchase intentions when brands use *Latinx*, regardless of the product advertised. Specifically, we show that politically conservative Hispanic/Latino consumers have less favorable attitudes toward *Latinx*, which drives down their perceptions of a brand's morality when an advertisement uses *Latinx*; this subsequently affects their purchase intentions. Interestingly, we find that politically liberal Hispanic/Latino consumers do not punish a brand for using a specific term, rather they perceive the use of *Latinx* and *Latino* to be morally equal. Our research has implications for brands wishing to engage the Hispanic/Latino community, suggesting they use caution when using seemingly inclusive, yet politically-charged, language that may not resonate with their target consumers.

1 | Introduction

American civil rights activist Raul Yzaguirre was quoted in a *New York Times* article saying, “*The last thing in the world I want to do is fight over what we call ourselves. We really need to get beyond that*” (Gonzalez 1992). Unfortunately, this fight has persisted. Debates over how to address people of Spanish and Latin American origin and descent have been ongoing for decades, with the two most popular terms being *Hispanic* (meaning one who is from a Spanish-speaking country) and *Latino* (meaning one who is from Latin America). In more recent history, coinciding with a larger global movement toward gender neutrality in language (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020), we have seen the introduction of a new pan-ethnic term in the United States (US): *Latinx*.

Latinx is a gender-neutral alternative to the gendered aspects of the Spanish language (Newport 2022). Looking to make visible

Hispanic/Latino individuals who do not identify with the feminine-masculine gender binary, the early 2000s saw the appearance of *Latinx* on social media (del Río-González 2021; Villegas 2023). However, despite being around for more than a decade, there has been much confusion over the meaning of the term *Latinx* and who it is trying to be inclusive of (Salinas 2020).

As our society embraces greater diversity and inclusion, it is important to consider how to use terms like *Latinx*—which deviate from the now well-established use of *Hispanic* and *Latino*—without alienating those we wish to communicate with. For example, a recent Instagram video from an American makeup brand with the text “celebrating our culture during Latinx Heritage Month” received backlash in the form of users commenting things like “*Latina NOT latinex*.” (Reina Rebelde [reinarebelde] 2022). Despite increased use of this term by news and entertainment outlets, blogs, brands, and universities (Guerra and

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Orbea 2015; Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020), the marketing literature has not explored whether marketers should incorporate *Latinx* in their communications to Hispanic/Latino consumers.

To address this gap, we focus on the use of *Latinx* in advertising, since advertising can shape broad social dynamics by either perpetuating or challenging narrow depictions of gender identity (Eisend 2019; Middleton and Turnbull 2021). With increasing violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals fueled by biases against their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Alfonseca 2024), marketers have a critical role to play in promoting inclusivity and respect by using language that acknowledges and values the identities of these consumers. That said, to reduce inequality through the empowerment and inclusion of all, irrespective of factors like race/ethnicity and gender identity (per UN Sustainable Development Goal 10), there needs to be thoughtful consideration of how to balance emerging gender neutrality norms with cultural sensitivity (Brooks 2022). Of note to marketers, these considerations are important because consumers have been shown to subvert or criticize advertising they perceive as harmful (Middleton et al. 2022). Thus, the primary goal of this study is to explore consumer responses to advertisements that use *Latinx* and the downstream consequences this has for brands.

This article is divided into two main parts. Given the sensitive nature of this topic and the possibility of a social desirability bias, we first explore implicit attitudes toward the term *Latinx* (study 1). We then explore how both consumer-specific (political orientation) and product-specific (whether a product is gendered) characteristics impact Hispanic/Latino consumers' responses to the use of *Latinx* (studies 2 and 3). Given that *Latinx* is an inherently political term, the literature on political orientation and system justification serves as a key theoretical foundation for this study. We build on previous research which suggests politically conservative Hispanic/Latino individuals are less likely to support politicians who use *Latinx* (d'Urso and Roman 2024), while those who are politically liberal are more likely to self-identify as *Latinx* (Mora et al. 2022). Finally, we turn to the literature on morality and moral foundations to understand how consumers perceive the use of *Latinx* within a marketing context.

The current research contributes to the emerging literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the marketplace (Arsel

et al. 2022; Khan and Kalra 2022; Naidu and Donnadieu Borquez 2025). First, we provide evidence that who uses *Latinx* matters. Our results suggest that consumers are most receptive to *Latinx* when its use comes from within the Hispanic/Latino community as opposed to a company or brand. Second, we show that a brand's use of inclusive language, though well-intentioned, can backfire and lower perceptions of brand morality and purchase intentions among conservative Hispanic/Latino consumers. Future directions of this study are presented in Table 1 and an overview of our theorizing is presented in Figure 1.

2 | Exploring Implicit Attitudes Towards *Latinx*

The debate around the use of *Latinx* has centered around its appropriateness as a means of addressing the Hispanic/Latino community (Torres 2018). It seems *Latinx* is simultaneously an imperialist attack on the Spanish language and Hispanic/Latino culture (Brooks 2022; Guerra and Orbea 2015; Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020; Villegas 2023), and an indicator of a strong culture adapting to shifting norms (Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015; Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018). It has been criticized for being a symbol of privilege (Salinas 2020) detached from the lived experience of most Hispanic/Latinos in the US (Villegas 2023). At the same time, it has been recognized for rejecting privileged notions of gender identity (Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015). Reactions toward *Latinx* are complex, and the marketing implications associated with its use must be better understood.

There have been surveys that have asked Hispanic/Latino individuals their thoughts on *Latinx* (e.g., Salinas 2020), but none have explored attitudes in a marketing context. Furthermore, while many have argued for and against the use of *Latinx*, consumers' attitudes and judgements are often formed outside of conscious awareness, especially in contexts where bias may be present (Greenwald and Banaji 1995; King and Bruner 2000). Hispanic/Latino consumers may feel conflicting motivations when asked directly whether they support the use of *Latinx* in advertising. For one, they may not want to seem prejudiced against nonbinary individuals, but they may also wish to align themselves with their culture and its language norms. As there is no empirical evidence regarding implicit attitudes toward *Latinx*, we propose H1a and H1b as competing hypotheses and test them in study 1.

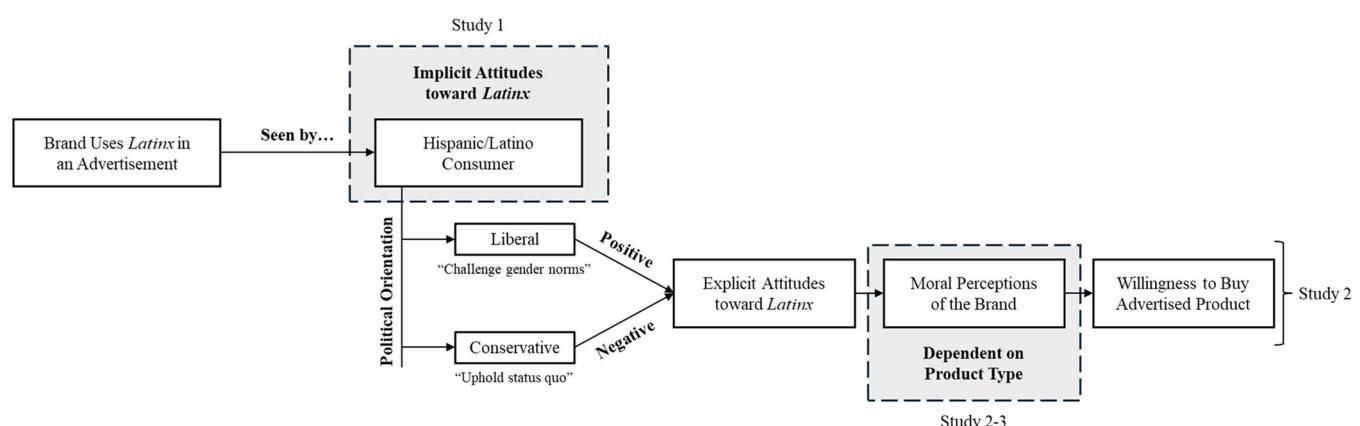


FIGURE 1 | Model framework.

H1a. *Hispanic/Latino consumers have more positive implicit attitudes toward Latinx than Latino in advertisement stimuli.*

H1b. *Hispanic/Latino consumers have more positive implicit attitudes toward Latino than Latinx in advertisement stimuli.*

3 | Study 1

We conducted a pilot study to measure knowledge of, and general attitudes toward, *Latinx* (see Supporting Information Appendix A). The results of the pilot revealed that Hispanic/Latino participants in the US were familiar with *Latinx*, but their general attitudes and perceptions of the term's inclusivity were not significantly higher than the scale midpoint. This suggests that, while Hispanic/Latinos may be aware of *Latinx*, their self-reported feelings toward it are not overly positive.

Elaborating on this, in study 1 we used an Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al. 1998) to investigate whether Hispanic/Latino consumers in the US hold positive implicit associations with the term *Latinx*. Data in this study were collected in Qualtrics using IATGEN (Carpenter et al. 2019). This study, and all subsequent studies, were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the participating university.

3.1 | Methods

Seventy Hispanic/Latino participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.51$, $SD = 11.49$; 43% women) were recruited from Prolific. Three participants did not report being Hispanic/Latino and were excluded from the analyses.

Participants completed an IAT in which terms and images were paired to measure the strength of association between them. Specifically, participants categorized stimuli that represented the target concepts of *Latinx* and *Latino* and words that represented the concepts of *positive* and *negative*. To simulate the use of *Latinx* within a marketing context, the *Latinx* and *Latino* stimuli were designed to look like simplified advertisements (see Supporting Information Appendix B). After the IAT, participants reported their demographic information.

3.2 | Results and Discussion

The results revealed that response times for the incompatible blocks (*Latinx*—*negative*; *Latino*—*positive*) were significantly faster than those for the compatible blocks ($M_{\text{D-Score}} = -0.40$, $SD = 0.45$, $t(66) = -7.35$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = -0.90$). The IAT assumes that individuals can more easily sort stimuli that are closely associated in their minds, and therefore categorization tasks with faster response times suggest that the two concepts are more closely associated than categorization tasks with slower response times (Greenwald et al. 1998). Thus, the results of study 1 show that Hispanic/Latino consumers implicitly view *Latinx* (vs. *Latino*) advertisement stimuli as negative¹, providing support for H1b and rejecting H1a.

To gain additional insights into this relationship, we conducted an exploratory study to investigate Hispanic/Latino consumers' *self* versus *other* associations with *Latinx*, and to measure self-report attitudes toward the use of this term (see Supporting Information Appendix C). Consistent with study 1, our exploratory study revealed that Hispanic/Latino consumers hold implicit *self*-associations with *Latino* (vs. *Latinx*) advertisement stimuli. Additionally, these consumers prefer *Latinx* be used by those from their cultural in-group.

Building on the results of study 1, the following sections provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer reactions toward the use of *Latinx*. Specifically, we explore how attitudes toward *Latinx* may differ based on consumers' political orientations, and how its use in advertising affects perceptions of brand morality and purchase intentions.

4 | Towards a Nuanced Understanding of *Latinx*

4.1 | The Role of Political Orientation

Political orientation—a belief system centered around the goals governing society, which ranges from more liberal/left to more conservative/right (Cakanlar and White 2023; Jost 2017)—has long been studied in marketing as it is correlated with a number of personality traits and can predict a variety of consumer behaviors (Adaval and Wyer 2022; Carney et al. 2008; Jost 2017). Specifically, research shows that consumers who are politically conservative tend to be resistant to social change (Sidanius et al. 1996) and have a strong intolerance for ambiguity (Fibert and Ressler 1998), as well as a desire for tradition (Jost et al. 2008). On the other hand, consumers who are politically liberal are more open-minded, tolerant, and empathic (Carney et al. 2008; Jost 2017). Notably, *system justification theory* condenses the fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives into two attitudinal dimensions regarding the acceptance or rejection of (1) social change, and (2) social inequalities (Jost 2017).

Political conservatism is associated with stronger system-justifying motivations (Jost et al. 2003), with conservatives being much more likely to uphold the status quo and defend social inequalities as fair and necessary. Meanwhile, political liberalism is associated with a desire to challenge and change the system (Jost 2006), with liberals being more likely to condemn the institutions and practices put in place that perpetuate those inequalities. These motivational differences provide an underlying reason for why conservatives and liberals differ in their support of certain policy issues and social movements, such as climate change, health care reform, and immigration (Hennes et al. 2012). Additionally, a motivation to justify the system impacts consumer behavior and can explain why liberals and conservatives often prefer different products (Jost 2017). For example, Shepherd et al. (2015) found that consumers higher in system justification hold more positive attitudes toward large American corporations that represent dominant cultural values. Consumers even use their consumption choices (e.g., choosing a national vs. international brand) to support the system when it is threatened (Cutright et al. 2011).

We extend the system justification framework and apply it to perceived threats to a culture's *language system*—the “formal framework that regulates the possibilities for generating words and utterances in a given language” (p. 392, Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018). Language systems contain norms regarding what is appropriate, and these are challenged by the inclusion of the letter “x” in Spanish nouns to promote gender neutrality (Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018). Furthermore, it is not just language norms that are threatened, but the underlying gender norms residing within the larger social system which do not allow for gender nonconformity. This challenge to established gender norms posed by the term *Latinx* likely produces dissonance for members of the Hispanic/Latino community (Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018).

Taken together, while attitudes toward *Latinx* may not be overwhelmingly positive or negative, accounting for political orientation may reveal that conservative Hispanic/Latinos are much less accepting of this term than their liberal counterparts as they have a stronger desire to uphold the norms of their language system. In support of this theorizing, a need for cognitive closure (a trait commonly seen in conservatives; De Zavala et al. 2010; Fibert and Ressler 1998) has been shown to be associated with binary views of gender and opposition to gender-neutral pronouns (Morgenroth et al. 2021). Thus, calling attention to non-binary individuals with a gender-neutral term might make conservative Hispanic/Latinos uncomfortable (Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018) and consequently more resistant to a brand that uses *Latinx*. Formally, we propose:

H2. *Political orientation predicts attitudes toward Latinx, such that conservative consumers have more negative attitudes toward Latinx than liberal consumers do.*

4.2 | Moral Implications of *Latinx*

Perceptions of morality impact how consumers evaluate marketplace actors (Kirmani et al. 2017). Research has shown that consumer perceptions of a company, particularly as they relate to what the company is doing to benefit society and the greater good (Grayson 2014), can have meaningful effects on a brand's strength and equity (Hoeffler and Keller 2002). This is especially important in modern society, as consumers increasingly want more from companies and will push them to behave in accordance with their own moral values. However, consumers' perceptions of brand morality are not solely dependent on a company's (un)ethical business practices. Unrelated characteristics, like a company's non-profit (Aaker et al. 2010) or national versus foreign status (Crilly et al. 2016), have been shown to impact morality perceptions as well. That said, perceptions of morality are often related to perceptions of harm (Hofmann et al. 2014), which vary due to individual differences such as values and cultural background (Graham et al. 2009; Graham et al. 2013; Xu et al. 2021).

For Hispanic/Latino consumers, a brand using a controversial pan-ethnic label could be seen as harmful and therefore immoral. *Latinx* is considered by many to be an insulting imposition of US ideals and norms (Brooks 2022; Villegas 2023), and a violation of

Hispanic/Latino norms (Guerra and Orbea 2015). In addition, some believe *Latinx* excludes vulnerable members of the Hispanic/Latino community (Borrell and Echeverria 2022), such as those who may not have sufficient knowledge of the English language to understand the term. For these reasons, many Hispanic/Latino consumers are insulted by *Latinx* (Brooks 2022; Guerra and Orbea 2015; Villegas 2023). Thus, we argue that a brand that uses *Latinx* instead of the traditional *Latino* or *Latina* when talking to Hispanic/Latino consumers will be seen as less moral as that term violates cultural norms and insults members of their community. Formally, we propose:

H3. *Hispanic/Latino consumers perceive a brand to be less moral when the term Latinx (vs. Latina or Latino) appears in an advertisement.*

However, attitudes toward *Latinx* are not universally negative (e.g., Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015), and as described above, might depend on individual factors. Specifically, we argue that perceptions of brand morality will be different between politically conservative and liberal Hispanic/Latino consumers. The literature on moral foundations suggests that people judge moral transgressions in different ways (Graham et al. 2009). For example, liberals are uniquely concerned with issues of harm and fairness compared to conservatives (Graham et al. 2009; Hofmann et al. 2014). Accordingly, because liberals may be more likely to see the use of *Latinx* as a way for brands to be respectful and fair to nonbinary consumers, they will likely perceive a brand to be more moral when it does so. The opposite is likely true for conservatives.

Of importance for marketers, there are measurable benefits to brand morality, and consequences for perceived immorality. Consumer perceptions of brand morality can increase attitudes and positive intentions toward the firm (Khan and Kalra 2022; Sierra et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2012; van Prooijen and Bartels 2019). Alternatively, perceptions of immorality can sour consumers' attitudes toward a company and its products (Folkes and Kamins 1999) and lower purchase intentions (Schmalz and Orth 2012). As consumers judge the morality of a brand's actions differently depending on their political orientation (Graham et al. 2009) and their pre-existing attitudes about what is right and wrong (Campbell and Winterich 2018), we propose:

H4. *Political orientation indirectly predicts willingness to buy an advertised product via attitudes toward Latinx and the perceived morality of the brand, and this effect is moderated by the language used in the advertisement (Latinx vs. Latina or Latino). Specifically, conservative (liberal) Hispanic/Latino consumers will have less (more) favorable toward Latinx, which will reduce (increase) their perception of brand morality when Latinx is used in an advertisement and lower (increase) their willingness to buy the advertised product.*

4.3 | Moderating Role of Product Type

Many products are associated with a specific gender (Fugate and Phillips 2010; Sandhu 2022), and consumers generally

prefer gender-congruent advertisements (Feiereisen et al. 2009), brands (Lieven and Hildebrand 2016), and products (van den Hende and Mugge 2014; Worth et al. 1992). Past research has explored consumer reactions to brand gender bending (for a review, see Sandhu 2017), such as when a gendered brand launches a product aimed at the opposite gender. For example, when Porsche—a traditionally masculine brand known for its sports cars—announced the release of its first SUV, its masculine consumers reacted negatively toward the brand's perceived feminization (Avery 2012). Consistent with this, further research has found that consumers who uphold the traditional gender norms of their social system readily interpret brands in gendered terms and are resistant to the dilution of a gendered brand's essence via its association with a different gender (Ulrich and Tissier-Desbordes 2018). This poses an interesting question about how consumers may perceive the use of a term like *Latinx*, which is meant to be gender-neutral, when it is coupled with a gendered product.

As discussed previously, political conservatism is associated with an opposition to gender-neutral pronouns (Morgenroth et al. 2021) and a desire to justify the system (Jost et al. 2003). Given this, and the fact that system-level gender norms can lead individuals high in system justification to expect gender-consistent behavior (Chiaburu et al. 2014), we argue that our hypothesized indirect effect in H4 will be moderated by product type. We propose that conservative Hispanic/Latino consumers, those with negative attitudes toward *Latinx*, will react unfavorably toward a brand using *Latinx* to advertise a product that promotes traditional notions of gender. Said differently, because a gendered product (compared to a gender-neutral product) will likely make salient system-level gender stereotypes, and exposure to these gender stereotypes can lead to greater system justification (Jost and Kay 2005), our hypothesized effects for conservative Hispanic/Latino consumers should be amplified. As for liberal Hispanic/Latino consumers, the use of a gender-inclusive term in a gendered product advertisement will likely signal a challenge to system-level gender norms and increase these consumers' favorable perceptions of the brand. Formally, we propose:

H5. *The indirect effect of political orientation on willingness to buy an advertised product via attitudes toward Latinx and the perceived morality of the brand is moderated by language used in the advertisement (Latinx vs. Latina or Latino) and product type (gendered vs. gender neutral).*

We test our remaining hypotheses with fictitious brand advertisements in an online experiment (study 2). To increase external validity, we conduct an additional experiment using a real brand and product associated with nonbinary consumers (study 3).

5 | Study 2

In study 2, we tested whether Hispanic/Latino consumers' political orientations and pre-existing attitudes (H2) impact perceptions of brand morality when a brand uses *Latinx* instead of *Latina* or *Latino*, and the consequences this has for the brand (H3-H4). We also tested the moderating effect of product type (H5).

5.1 | Methods

Two hundred nineteen Hispanic/Latino participants ($M_{age} = 34.32$, $SD = 11.00$; 49% women; 55% Liberal) in the US were recruited from CloudResearch. Twenty-five participants did not report being Hispanic/Latino and were excluded from the analyses.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two product conditions: *skincare* (a gendered product, coded 1) or *coffee* (a gender-neutral product, coded 0). We used a skincare product for the gendered category as these have been traditionally aimed at women (Byrne and Milestone 2023), and coffee for the gender-neutral category as coffee is a big part of Hispanic/Latino culture (Global Coffee Report 2017), independent of gender. Participants were also randomly assigned to one of two advertisement language conditions ($0 = Latinx$, $1 = Latina$ or *Latino* [hereinafter: *Latina/Latino*]). See Supporting Information Appendix E for stimuli.

After viewing the advertisement, participants indicated how willing they would be to buy the product ($1 = Not at All Likely$, $7 = Very Likely$). This was our dependent variable of interest. Participants also completed three three-item semantic differential attitude measures to check for additional downstream consequences: attitudes toward the advertisement ($\alpha = 0.98$), the brand ($\alpha = 0.95$), and the product ($\alpha = 0.98$). Next, participants completed Samper et al.'s (2018) four-item scale of perceived brand morality ($\alpha = 0.96$). Finally, participants completed a three-item measure of attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* ($\alpha = 0.94$) and reported their demographic information, including political orientation ($1 = Very Conservative$, $7 = Very Liberal$; Jost 2006; Rotman et al. 2020).

5.2 | Results

5.2.1 | Attitudes Toward *Latinx* (Use)

A one-sample *t*-test revealed that self-report attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* were significantly higher than the scale midpoint ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 2.04$, $t(193) = 3.09$, $p = 0.002$). Moreover, paired-samples *t*-tests of the individual items revealed that Hispanic/Latino consumers are most receptive of the term *Latinx* when it is used by someone in their cultural in-group; see Figure 2. In contrast, their attitudes toward *Latinx* are least favorable when it is used by a company or brand. Additionally, in support of H2, political orientation significantly predicted attitudes, such that the more conservative (liberal) participants were, the more negative (positive) their attitudes ($b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$).

5.2.2 | Perceived Brand Morality

As predicted in H3, the brand was perceived as significantly more moral when its advertisement used *Latina* or *Latino* ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.38$) versus *Latinx* ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.63$; $t(192) = -2.20$, $p = 0.03$). Moreover, a moderation analysis using PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes 2017) revealed a significant interaction between political orientation and language condition on

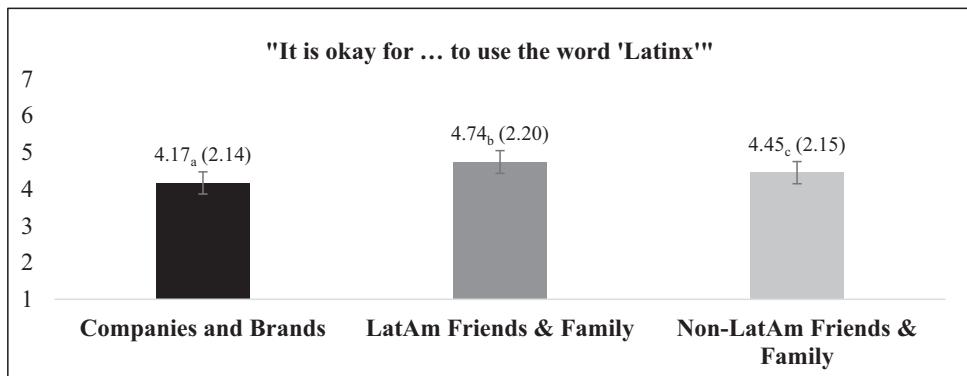


FIGURE 2 | Attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* (Study 2). Note: Means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other ($p < 0.001$). Standard deviations are in parentheses and error bars represent 95% CI. LatAm = Latin American.

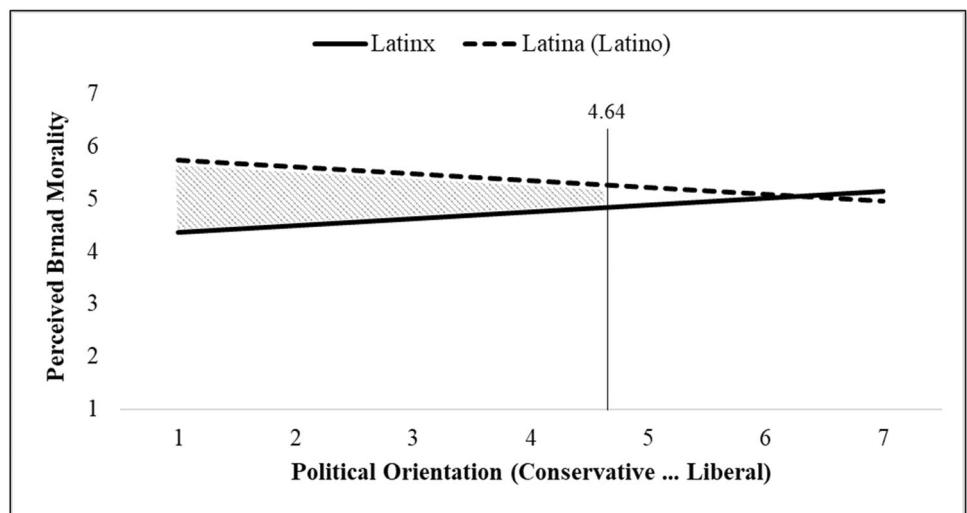


FIGURE 3 | Political orientation and language on perceived morality (Study 2). Note: Shaded region represents the significant Johnson-Neyman region and contains 45% of the sample.

perceptions of morality ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.01$). In the *Latinx* condition, the conditional effect of political orientation on morality was positive and marginally significant ($b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = 0.09$); however, it was negative and marginally significant in the *Latina/Latino* condition ($b = -0.13$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.07$). These results suggest that the more conservative Hispanic/Latino participants were, the more moral they perceived a brand to be when it used *Latina/Latino* compared to *Latinx*. On the other hand, more liberal Hispanic/Latino participants perceived a brand to be equally moral when it used *Latinx* and *Latina/Latino*; see Figure 3.

5.2.2.1 | Moderating Effect of Product Type. To test the moderating effect of product type, we ran a three-way interaction using PROCESS Model 3 (Hayes 2017) with attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* as the independent variable, product type and language as the moderators, and perceived morality as the dependent variable. Political orientation and gender ($0 = \text{Woman}$, $1 = \text{Man}$) served as covariates. The analysis revealed a positive and significant effect of attitudes on perceived morality ($b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$), but the hypothesized three-way interaction was not significant ($b = 0.002$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = 0.99$), thereby rejecting H5. That said,

there was a significant interaction between attitudes and language ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = 0.03$) on perceived morality. Additionally, political orientation was a significant covariate ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.045$), but gender was not ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = 0.23$). These results suggest that perceptions of brand morality are a function of consumers' pre-existing attitudes toward *Latinx* and whether the brand uses *Latinx* or *Latina/Latino* in its advertising, independent of whether the product being sold is gendered or gender neutral.

5.2.3 | Willingness to Buy

As shown in Figure 4, participants reported being more likely to buy the product featured in the advertisement with *Latina/Latino* versus *Latinx* ($t(192) = -2.48$, $p = 0.01$), and we found the same pattern of results with our additional attitude measures.

To test our full hypothesized effects, we conducted a moderated serial mediation using PROCESS Model 91 (Hayes 2017), controlling for both gender and product. Gender and product type were significant predictors of willingness to buy ($ps \leq 0.04$) but not significant predictors of brand morality ($ps \geq 0.15$). This

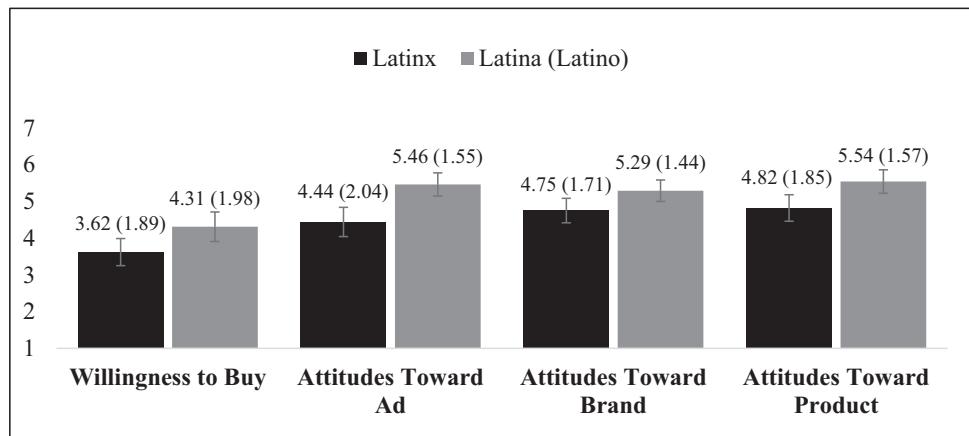


FIGURE 4 | Study 2 DVs by language condition. Note: All means are significantly lower in the *Latinx* condition compared to the *Latina/Latino* condition ($ps \leq 0.02$). Standard deviations are in parentheses and error bars represent 95% CI.

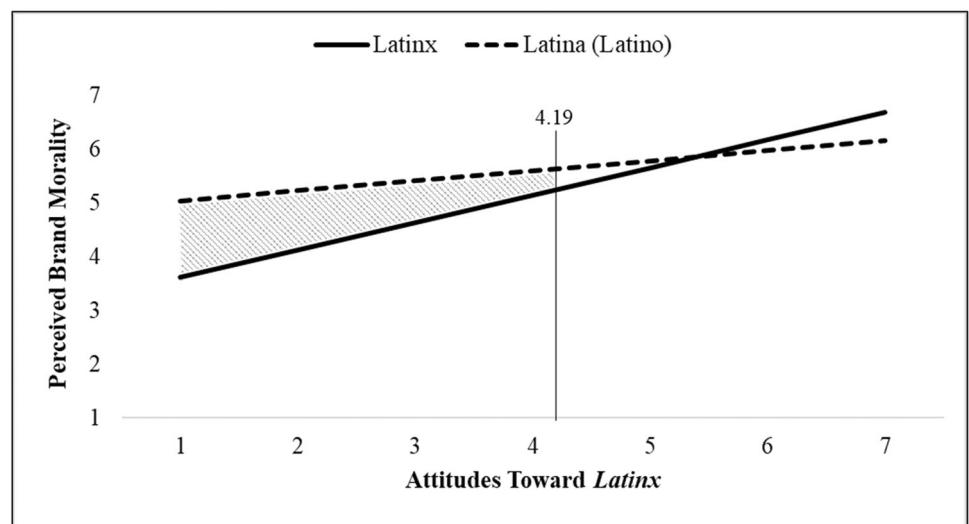


FIGURE 5 | Attitudes toward *Latinx* and language on perceived morality (Study 2). Note: Shaded region represents the significant Johnson-Neyman region and contains 40% of the sample.

model revealed a significant interaction between attitudes toward *Latinx* and language condition on morality ($b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$). The more conservative Hispanic/Latino participants were, the more negative their attitudes toward *Latinx* ($b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$), and subsequently, the more moral they perceived a brand to be when it used *Latina/Latino* compared to *Latinx*. For more liberal Hispanic/Latino participants, their more positive attitudes toward *Latinx* increased their perceptions of brand morality when *Latinx* was used in the advertisement, but they perceived the brand to be equally as moral compared to when it used *Latina/Latino*; see Figure 5.

Importantly, the index of moderated mediation was significant ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% Bootstrap CI $[-0.15, -0.02]$) as was the conditional indirect effect in both the *Latinx* ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% Bootstrap CI $[0.04, 0.20]$) and *Latina/Latino* condition ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% Bootstrap CI $[0.01, 0.09]$). Providing support for H4, political orientation was a significant predictor of willingness to purchase the product via attitudes toward *Latinx* and perceived morality of the brand, and this effect was stronger in the *Latinx* condition; see Figure 6. This

model was also significant with our additional attitude measures as dependent variables.

Given that we do not find support for the moderating role of product type, we tested our hypothesized effects with product type as a covariate instead of a moderator. As further support, we ran an additional study where we only manipulated language (*Latinx* vs. *Latino*), therefore eliminating the need to control for product type. In this additional study, we also tested and discounted alternative explanations of the underlying process for our effects. The results of this additional study support the findings of study 2 (see Supporting Information Appendix F).

5.3 | Discussion

Study 2 provides evidence that using *Latinx* in advertising can significantly impact perceptions of brand morality. Specifically, we found that a brand is seen as significantly less moral when it uses *Latinx* instead of *Latina/Latino* in its advertisements. Additionally, this effect is driven by Hispanic/Latino consumers

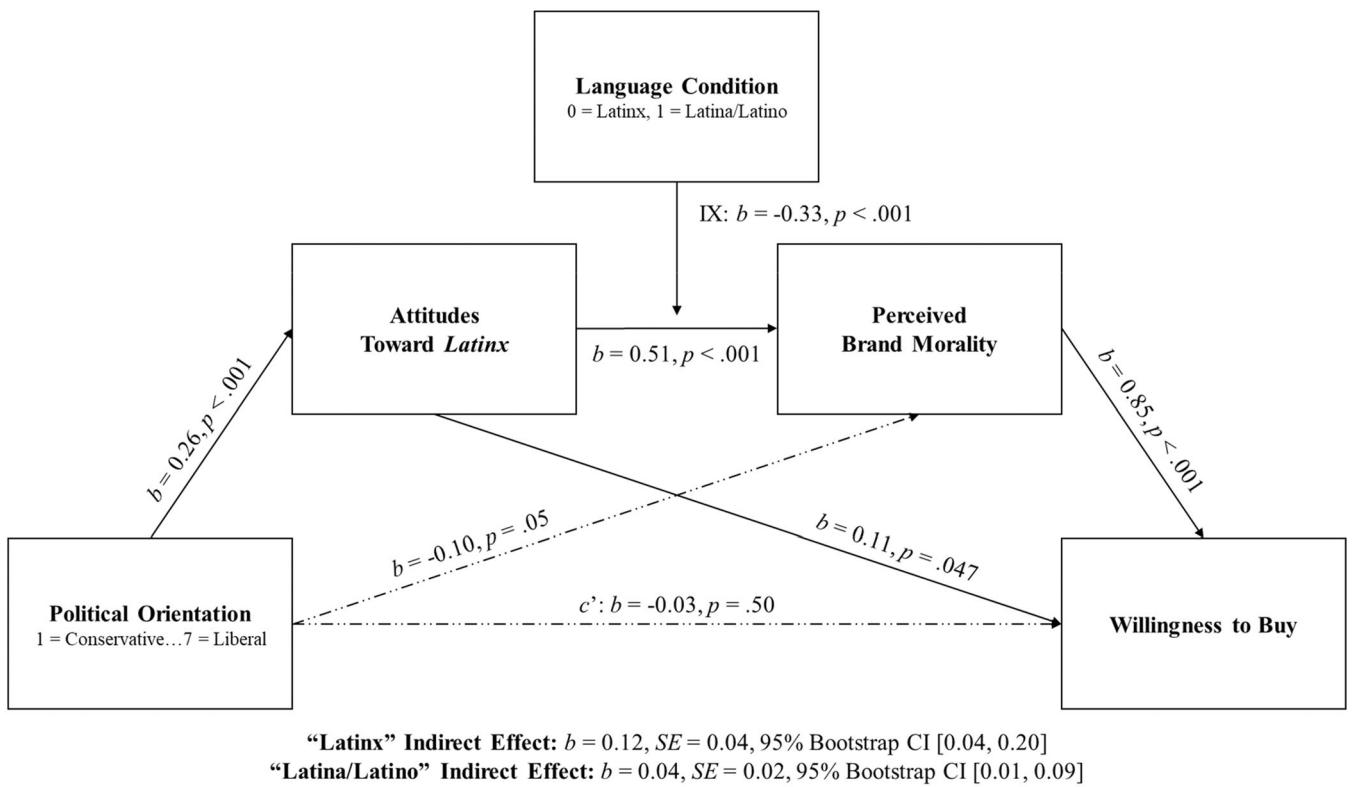


FIGURE 6 | Moderated serial mediation (Study 2).

who are more politically conservative, while liberal consumers see a brand as being equally moral when it uses *Latinx* or *Latina/Latino*. Notably, perceptions of morality impact consumers' willingness to purchase the advertised product, as well as their attitudes toward the advertisement, product, and brand.

While this study does not support the moderating role of product type as hypothesized, we only tested two product categories: gendered versus gender-neutral. To enhance the generalizability of our findings, we conducted study 3.

6 | Study 3

In study 3, we tested whether our hypothesized effects hold when Hispanic/Latino consumers in the US are exposed to an advertisement for a product largely aimed at nonbinary consumers. For this study, we created fictitious advertisements for Woxer, a real brand that sells boxer shorts for female consumers.

6.1 | Method

Three hundred eighty Hispanic/Latino participants ($M_{age} = 33.70$, $SD = 10.85$; 57% female; 54% Liberal) were recruited from Prolific. Twenty-one participants did not report being Hispanic/Latino and were excluded from the analyses.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two language conditions (0 = *Latinx*, 1 = *Latina*) for a Woxer advertisement (see Supporting Information Appendix G for stimuli). After viewing the advertisement, participants completed measures to assess their familiarity with the Woxer brand and then

completed the same measures as study 2: willingness to buy; attitudes toward the advertisement ($\alpha = 0.97$), brand ($\alpha = 0.94$), and product ($\alpha = 0.98$); perceived brand morality ($\alpha = 0.95$); and attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* ($\alpha = 0.94$). Finally, participants reported their demographic information, including political orientation.

6.2 | Results

6.2.1 | Familiarity With Woxer

Most participants (93%) had not heard of Woxer before completing the study. Of those who had, only seven participants indicated they owned a Woxer product, while 19 indicated that they did not. Excluding these participants had no impact on results; analyses used the full sample.

6.2.2 | Attitudes Toward *Latinx* (Use)

A one-sample *t*-test revealed that self-report attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* were significantly higher than the scale midpoint ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.85$, $t(358) = 5.71$, $p < 0.001$). Consistent with our studies, paired-samples *t*-tests of the individual items revealed that Hispanic/Latino consumers are most receptive of the term *Latinx* when it is used by someone in their cultural ingroup; see Figure 7. In contrast, their attitudes toward *Latinx* are least favorable when it is used by a company or brand. Additionally, in support of H2, political orientation significantly predicted attitudes, such that the more conservative (liberal) participants were, the more negative (positive) their attitudes ($b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.001$).

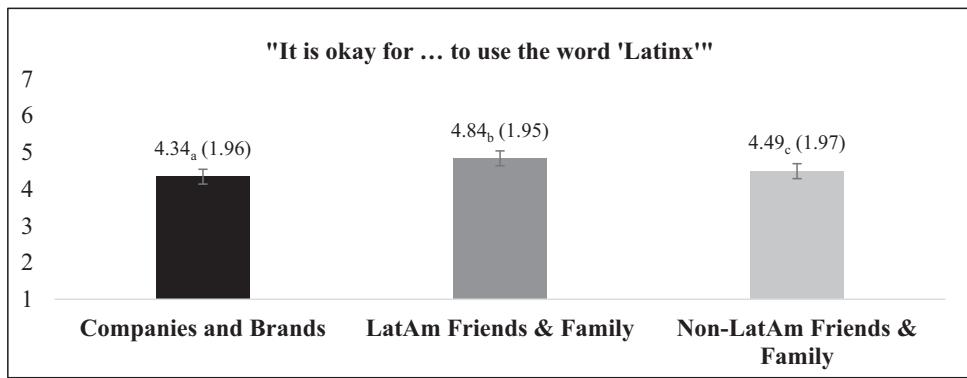


FIGURE 7 | Attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* (Study 3). *Note:* Means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other ($ps \leq 0.006$). Standard deviations are in parentheses and error bars represent 95% CI. LatAm = Latin American.

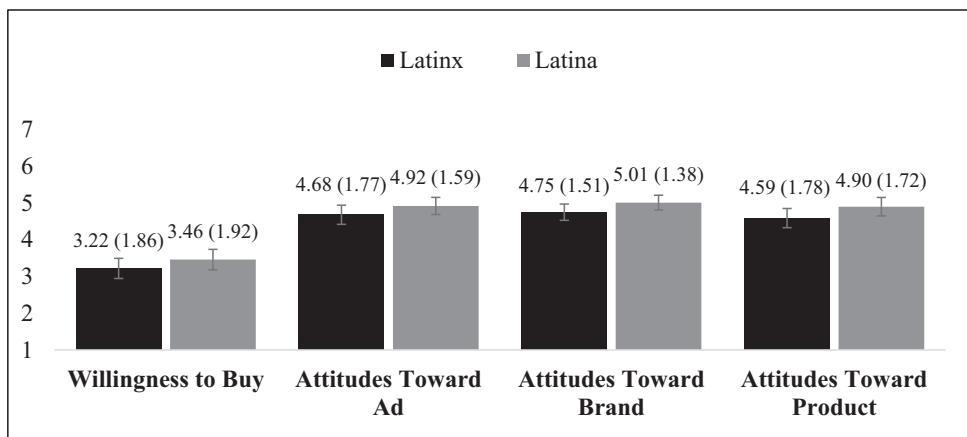


FIGURE 8 | Study 3 DVs by language condition. *Note:* For each DV, the means are not significantly different from each other ($ps \geq 0.08$). Standard deviations are in parentheses and error bars represent 95% CI.

6.2.3 | Perceived Brand Morality

Contrary to study 2 and our prediction in H3, there was no significant difference in perceptions of brand morality when the advertisement used *Latina* ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.36$) versus *Latinx* ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.36$; $t(357) = -1.04$, $p = 0.30$).

6.2.4 | Willingness to Buy

There was no significant difference in participants' willingness to purchase the advertised product when *Latina* ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.92$) versus *Latinx* ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.86$) was used in the advertisement ($t(357) = -1.20$, $p = 0.23$). We found the same pattern of results with our additional attitude measures; see Figure 8. While we do not hypothesize main effects for our dependent variables, the discrepancy between the significant effects in study 2 and the null effects in study 3 are likely due to the nature of the advertisement stimuli. The Woxer brand is aimed primarily at nonbinary and gender nonconforming consumers who are biologically female. The fact that our participants may not fit the brand's target market likely influenced their responses to these measures. That said, the effects are directionally consistent with study 2.

To test our full hypothesized effects, we conducted a moderated serial mediation using PROCESS Model 91 (Hayes 2017), controlling for both sex ($1 = Male$, $2 = Female$) and familiarity with Woxer ($0 = No$, $1 = Yes$). Sex and familiarity with Woxer were not significant predictors of brand morality ($ps \geq 0.14$) or willingness to buy ($ps \geq 0.05$). This model revealed a significant interaction between attitudes toward *Latinx* and language condition on perceived morality ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.04$). As in study 2, the more conservative Hispanic/Latino participants were, the more negative their attitudes toward *Latinx* ($b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.001$), and subsequently, the more moral they perceived a brand to be when it used *Latina* compared to *Latinx*. For more liberal Hispanic/Latino participants, their more positive attitudes toward *Latinx* increased their perceptions of brand morality when *Latinx* was used in the advertisement, but they perceived the brand to be equally as moral compared to when it used *Latina*; see Figure 9.

In this analysis, the index of moderated mediation was marginally significant ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, 90% Bootstrap CI $[-0.05, -0.002]$) as were both conditional indirect effects (*Latinx*: $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.02$, 90% Bootstrap CI $[0.03, 0.08]$; *Latina*: $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, 90% Bootstrap CI $[0.01, 0.05]$). Providing support for H4, and consistent with study 2, political orientation

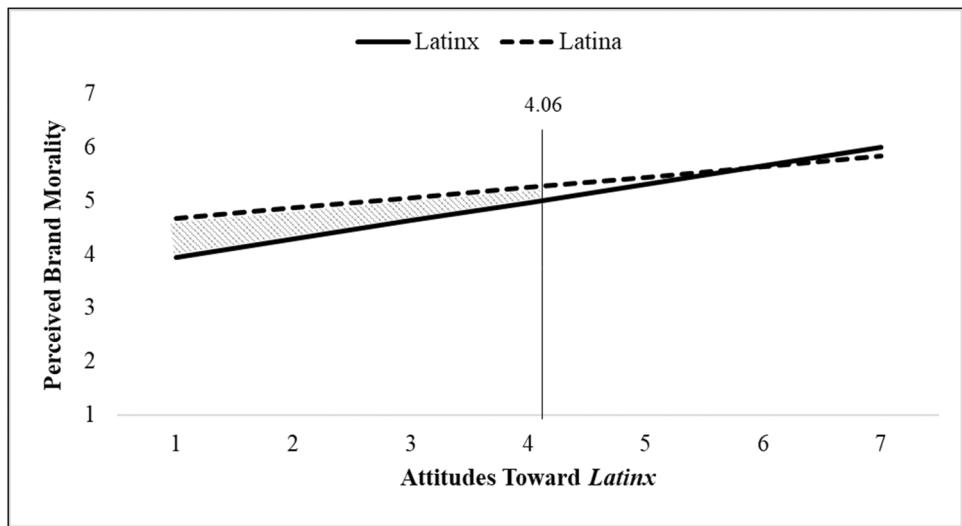


FIGURE 9 | Attitudes toward *Latinx* and language on perceived morality (Study 3). Note: Shaded region represents the significant Johnson-Neyman region and contains 40% of the sample.

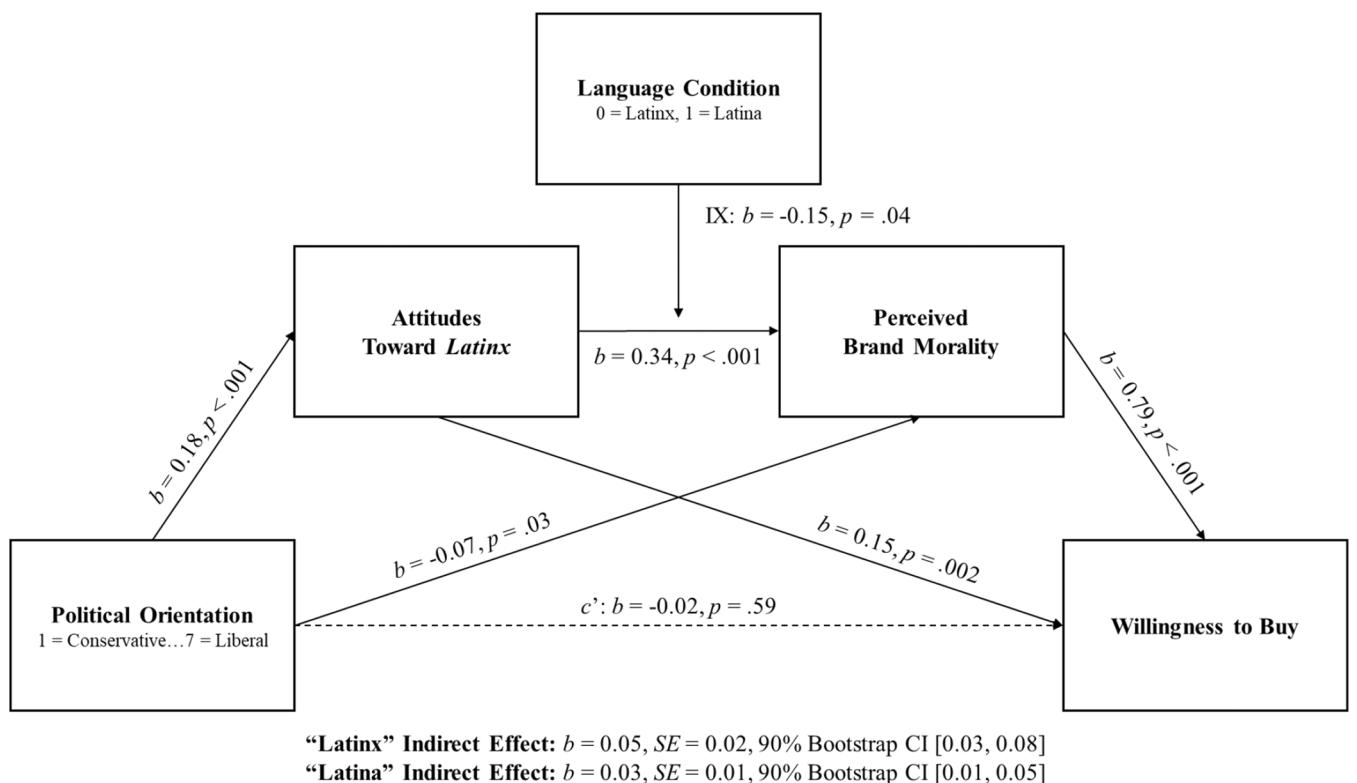


FIGURE 10 | Moderated serial mediation (Study 3).

predicted willingness to purchase the product via attitudes toward *Latinx* and perceived morality of the brand, and this effect was marginally stronger in the *Latinx* condition; see Figure 10.

6.3 | Discussion

Study 3 provides further evidence that using *Latinx* in advertising can significantly impact consumption behavior. While participants did not perceive the brand in the *Latinx* advertisement as significantly less moral than the one in the *Latina* advertisement

(rejecting H3), our full hypothesized model accounting for political orientation and pre-existing attitudes toward *Latinx* (H4) was supported, albeit marginally. Interestingly, compared to study 2, our hypothesized effects appear weaker when *Latinx* is used in the context of an advertisement for a product associated with nonbinary consumers. This suggests that negative reactions to *Latinx* among politically conservative consumers may be buffered given the right product type, though future research is still needed to explore this. We also note that we attempted to increase external validity of the research by using a real brand in this study. However, most of our sample was not familiar with

the Woxer brand, indicating a need for future research, particularly because our sample was not the main target audience for the brand.

7 | General Discussion

The current research explores how US consumers respond to the use of *Latinx*, a new pan-ethnic term meant to be inclusive of all gender identities. Across three studies, we find that Hispanic/Latino consumers do not universally have positive attitudes toward *Latinx*, and these attitudes drive perceptions of brand morality and purchase intentions when consumers see an advertisement with *Latinx* versus *Latina* (*Latino*). More specifically, we find that conservative Hispanic/Latino consumers have more negative attitudes toward the use of *Latinx* compared to their liberal counterparts. Regardless of product type, it is conservative consumers who punish brands for using *Latinx* by perceiving them as less moral and subsequently reporting lower purchase intentions. Interestingly, liberal Hispanic/Latino consumers (i.e., those with more positive attitudes toward *Latinx*) appear to perceive a brand that uses *Latinx* to be equally as moral as one that does not. Finally, we find that consumers are most receptive to *Latinx* when its use comes from within the

Hispanic/Latino community compared to from a company/brand or friends/family outside this community.

This research has important practical and social implications. As advertisers increasingly recognize their role in influencing societal norms related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Middleton and Turnbull 2021), brands need to be careful about how they communicate with their target audience. The term *Latinx* was ostensibly created to be representative of all people of Latin American origin or descent (del Río-González 2021; Salinas 2020), particularly those who do not identify with the gender binary (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020; Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018), but our results suggest that Hispanic/Latino consumers may respond negatively when it is used in marketing communications. While research has found that some Hispanic/Latino individuals support the use of *Latinx* as a pan-ethnic label (Thompson and Martinez 2022), companies should take care in where and how they use *Latinx* because this practice is intrinsically tied to political and social issues and could negatively impact brand perceptions (Middleton and Turnbull 2021). To aid in broader goals of global sustainable development, it is important for companies to make visible historically marginalized members of the LGBTQIA+ community, but these companies must be careful to not do so to the

TABLE 1 | Limitations and questions for future research.

Limitations of current research	Questions for future research
We do not investigate how consumers' multiple selves (e.g., Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and nonbinary gender identity) impact their attitudes toward the use of <i>Latinx</i> by brands.	Do Hispanic/Latino consumers who do not identify with the gender binary have more favorable attitudes toward gender-neutral terms like <i>Latinx</i> ? Do these consumers feel an internal conflict between being true to their gender identity versus their ethnic identity?
We only investigate the use of <i>Latinx</i> within an advertising context.	How do consumers perceive the use of gender-neutral language when it is part of a brand's corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy? Are negative reactions toward <i>Latinx</i> buffered when the brand also engages in relevant CSR actions?
Our studies have generic stimuli that do not provide information about the brands using <i>Latinx</i> or the intentionality behind its use.	We find that consumers are more receptive to the use of <i>Latinx</i> when used by someone within the Hispanic/Latino community. Are negative reactions toward this terminology buffered when it is used by a Latin American brand or by a Latin American influencer partnering with a brand? Will Hispanic/Latino consumers see the use of this terminology by someone in their ethnic group as a betrayal? When will consumers perceive the use of this terminology as genuine versus inauthentic/profit-motivated (Sands et al. 2024)?
While we consider race/ethnicity and political orientation, we do not examine how other individual factors may impact attitudes toward the use of <i>Latinx</i> by brands.	For Hispanic/Latino consumers, how do individual differences such as their bicultural identity identification (Benet-Martínez et al. 2002), strength of ethnic identification (Laroche et al. 1998; Phinney 1992), and cultural distinctiveness (Torelli et al. 2017) affect their reactions toward a gender-neutral term that contradicts their culture's language norms?
Our studies focus exclusively on the term <i>Latinx</i> and its use within the United States.	Are Hispanic/Latino consumers more receptive to terms like <i>Latine</i> , which can be pronounced in Spanish? How are gender-neutral terms in other gendered languages (e.g., French) perceived when used in marketing communications? Are other countries adopting gender-neutral terms for Hispanic/Latino individuals and if so, are reactions similar or different to reactions within the United States?

detriment of accurately representing Hispanic/Latino consumers' identities.

That said, as mentioned previously, we also find evidence to suggest *who* uses *Latinx* matters. Hispanic/Latino-owned companies may have more success using *Latinx* if their consumers recognize their ties to the community. Additionally, for other companies, partnering with those within the Hispanic/Latino community (such as influencers) may lessen the backlash associated with *Latinx*. Given the inherent complexities with using *Latinx*, companies may also consider recent research which found that Hispanic/Latinos living in California who self-identify with *Latinx* still identify with the more traditional *Latino* and *Hispanic* (Mora et al. 2022). In other words, companies may find that using this term in combination with established terminology may have a more positive impact on brand perceptions.

This research contributes to several theoretical domains in consumer behavior and marketing. First, it extends system justification theory to language systems, demonstrating how consumers' political orientations influence their reactions to challenges of linguistic norms. This novel application provides insights into how deeply ingrained language conventions interact with ideological beliefs to shape consumer perceptions. Second, the research advances our understanding of moral foundations theory in a marketing context, showing how the use of inclusive language can differentially impact perceptions of brand morality based on consumers' pre-existing attitudes and political identities. Third, we contribute to the discourse on diversity and inclusion in marketing by examining the effectiveness and potential pitfalls of using gender-neutral terminology. Collectively, these findings contribute to a theoretical framework for understanding consumer responses to evolving linguistic norms in marketing communications.

This research is not without limitations, and these provide avenues for future research; see Table 1. For example, we do not specifically survey nonbinary Hispanic/Latino consumers, though they are likely the ones most impacted by the use of a gender-neutral term in this context. Despite the 1.2 million LGBTQIA+ adults in the US who identify as nonbinary, 15% of which are Hispanic/Latino (Wilson and Meyer 2021), research has largely neglected to study nonbinary consumers (Eisend 2019). Future research should consider these consumers' perspectives, especially in light of recent calls for greater consideration of intersectionality in gender-related research (Eisend and Rößner 2022), and for more research to look at LGBTQIA+ issues from a cultural perspective (Coombes and Singh 2022). Furthermore, our research focuses on a single gender-neutral term for people of Latin American origin/descent (*Latinx*) and explores use of this term solely within the US. Future work should explore consumer perceptions of terms such as *Latine* and *Latin@* and investigate reactions to gender-neutral terms for Hispanic/Latino individuals in other countries. Another limitation of this study is that we only measure behavioral intentions, and not behavior itself. While similar dependent variables are common in the marketing literature, we recognize that such measures allow for less external validity than measures of real behavior. To mitigate this concern, we analyzed textual data from our studies and conducted an additional qualitative study

(see Supporting Information Appendix H). The results of this analysis support our findings and provide evidence of Hispanic/Latino consumers' complex attitudes toward *Latinx*, and how these attitudes impact consumption behavior. Finally, we acknowledge that online samples (Prolific, CloudResearch) may not fully represent the diversity that exists within the Hispanic/Latino community. Future research should consider additional methods of approaching this population.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Endnotes

¹An additional study using the same *Latinx* IAT was conducted with nonbinary participants (13% Hispanic/Latino). Consistent with study 1, nonbinary participants implicitly viewed *Latinx* advertisement stimuli as negative despite their perceptions of the term's inclusivity and their favorable self-report attitudes toward its use. For study details, see Supporting Information Appendix D.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.