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Disability Integration in Advertising: A Critical Review of Inclusiveness in Marketing Communication

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Abstract

Advertising shapes not only consumer behaviour but also the social imagination of who belongs in public life. Despite constituting an estimated 15–26% of the global population, persons with disabilities remain markedly underrepresented in mainstream marketing communication, and where they do appear, portrayals often follow a narrow, patronising script. This review synthesises the literature on disability integration in advertising across seven thematic areas: the scale of the representational gap, the theoretical frameworks that explain it, the persistence of “inspiration porn,” the distinction between tokenistic and authentic inclusion, the economic rationale for the disability market, the influence of social media and influencer culture, and pathways toward more equitable practice. Drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship, industry audits, and trade data, the review argues that the advertising industry has made incremental and frequently superficial progress, and that genuine inclusion requires structural change in creative and organisational practice rather than periodic visual gestures. The review closes by identifying gaps in the empirical record — particularly the absence of studies modelling the full path from portrayal quality to purchase intention in African markets — that warrant further primary research.

Keywords:

Disability representation, inclusive advertising, marketing communication, tokenism, inspiration porn, purple pound

1. Introduction

Marketing communication is a powerful cultural institution: it does not merely sell products but also constructs social norms about who belongs in public life (Hall, 1997). Advertising, as the most visible form of marketing communication, signals to audiences whose bodies, voices, and stories are valued in the marketplace of goods and meanings (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Over the past decade, brands worldwide have pledged commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion, positioning inclusiveness as both a moral imperative and a business strategy (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). Yet one group remains persistently marginal in advertising narratives: persons with disabilities.

The World Health Organization (2023) estimates that 1.3 billion people — approximately 16% of the global population — live with a significant disability. In the United Kingdom this figure rises to roughly one in five potential consumers (Purple Goat Agency, 2023), while in the United States the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention places the share at 26% of adults.

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In Nigeria, the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities reports over 25 million persons with disabilities (PWD) — a substantial but largely overlooked consumer segment.

Against these numbers, the representational reality of advertising is stark. A study cited by Forbes found that only 0.06% of UK advertisements featured a person with a disability, and a 2021 audit of British television found that only 4% of commercials included a disabled character at all, with just 1% casting a disabled person in a lead role (The Drum, 2022). In the United States, Gracenote Inclusion Analytics data show that disabled individuals appeared on screen only 5.9% of the time across the first three quarters of 2024 — down from 6.8% the previous year (Nielsen, 2024). In Nigeria, integration rates in television commercials have been recorded as low as 4.4% (Obono & Makama, 2019).

When PWD do appear, representation tends to follow a narrow script — “inspiration porn” (Young, 2014) or pitiable charity appeals — rather than portrayals of PWD as ordinary consumers, experts, or decision-makers. This pattern suggests that industry practice has not moved beyond representation as token visibility toward integration as substantive, equitable participation (Goggin & Newell, 2003).

These figures are not incidental. Scholars link them to structural ableism within the advertising industry, to persistent misunderstandings of what disability means, and to a commercial timidity that treats disabled audiences as a marginal rather than a substantial and loyal consumer group. Disability-inclusive marketing, in this sense, means more than featuring disabled people in campaign visuals: it means ensuring that marketing materials — video, imagery, websites, social media, and ad campaigns — are accessible, and that inclusion extends beyond casting into organisational practice. This review traces the contours of that exclusion across seven thematic areas, arguing that the advertising industry must move beyond occasional symbolic gestures if it is to achieve the inclusion it frequently claims to champion.

Advertising is, at its core, a social mirror. What it chooses to reflect, and what it quietly omits, reveals a great deal about the values and assumptions that circulate within a given culture. For most of the twentieth century, that mirror largely excluded persons with disabilities, and the decades since have seen only tentative, uneven attempts to correct that absence. The question is not simply whether disabled people appear in advertisements; it is how they appear, who controls those representations, and whether the underlying logic of inclusion is genuinely humanising or merely commercially convenient.

Statement of the Problem

Advertising is a powerful instrument of social meaning-making, yet persons with disabilities are consistently absent, stereotyped, or tokenised in mainstream marketing communication (Obono & Makama, 2019; The Drum, 2022). Global content audits place disability representation in advertising well under 10% across markets as diverse as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria (Burnett & Paul, 1996; Gracenote Inclusion Analytics, 2024; Obono & Makama, 2019) — a gap that persists despite disabled people constituting between roughly 15% and 26% of national populations (World Health Organization, 2023) and commanding an estimated \$13 trillion in global spending power (Södergren & Vallström, 2022).

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The scholarly literature has documented this gap descriptively, but it remains fragmented across three lines of inquiry that are rarely brought into dialogue with one another: (a) content-analytic studies quantifying how often, and in what form, PWD appear in advertising (e.g., Burnett & Paul, 1996; Farnall & Smith, 2021; Waldschmidt et al., 2017); (b) experimental audience-response studies testing how portrayal quality affects attitudes and purchase intention (e.g., Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001; Bhatt & Bhatt, 2023; Shoham et al., 2020); and (c) organisational studies examining why advertising practitioners under-integrate disability despite favourable audience data (e.g., Happer & Philo, 2013; Edosomwan & Odigie, 2021). No published review has yet synthesised these three strands into a single account of why representation remains low, what distinguishes authentic from tokenistic integration, and what organisational conditions would close the gap — a synthesis that is especially scarce for African and Nigerian advertising, where the empirical base is limited to a small number of localised studies (Obono & Makama, 2019; Olaore & Ayo-Obiremi, 2022).

This absence matters beyond academic completeness. Without a synthesised critical account, industry diversity pledges risk remaining rhetorical: brands can claim commitment to inclusion while creative and organisational practice continues to reproduce ableist norms, denying disabled people visibility, dignity, and consumer agency (Kearney et al., 2019; Timke, 2023). This review addresses that gap by critically synthesising the content-analytic, experimental, and organisational literatures on disability integration in advertising, situating Nigerian and African evidence within the global pattern, and evaluating the theoretical frameworks best suited to explaining — and correcting — the persistence of exclusion.

Objectives of the Study

The review sets out to:

1. synthesise empirical evidence on the extent of disability representation in advertising across global, African, and Nigerian markets.
2. critically evaluate the quality and nature of disability portrayal in marketing communication, distinguishing tokenistic from authentic integration.
3. identify the organisational, cultural, and economic factors that the literature links to the under-integration of disability in advertising practice.
4. review experimental and survey evidence on audience perceptions of, and responses to, disability-inclusive advertising.
5. evaluate the theoretical frameworks — the social model of disability, stakeholder theory, and the theory of planned behaviour — that best explain the relationship between disability representation, brand perception, and purchase intention, and identify gaps warranting future primary research.

Research Questions

1. What does the empirical literature reveal about the extent of disability representation in advertising globally, in Africa, and in Nigeria specifically?
2. How do existing studies characterise the quality of disability portrayal, and what distinguishes tokenistic from authentic integration?

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3. What organisational, cultural, and economic factors does the literature identify as barriers to disability integration in advertising practice?
4. What do audience-response studies show about how disabled and non-disabled consumers perceive and react to disability-inclusive advertising?
5. Which theoretical frameworks best account for the relationship between disability representation, brand equity, and purchase intention, and where do gaps remain in the empirical record — particularly for African markets?

Definition of Terms

1. **Disability Integration.** The substantive, authentic inclusion of persons with disabilities as active participants with narrative agency in advertising content.
2. **Inclusive Advertising.** Marketing communication that intentionally reflects diverse identities, including PWD, in non-stereotypical, equitable ways.
3. **Marketing Communication.** All planned brand messages delivered through paid, owned, or earned media to inform, persuade, or remind target audiences.
4. **Authenticity.** The perceived congruence between a brand's inclusive message and its execution, including casting, narrative, and organisational practice.
5. **Brand Perception.** The total set of consumer beliefs and evaluations about a brand's image, trustworthiness, and social responsibility.
6. **Purchase Intention.** A consumer's self-reported likelihood of buying a brand's product or service in the future.
7. **Organisational/Cultural Barriers.** Institutional practices, beliefs, or norms that limit disability integration in advertising.
8. **Persons with Disabilities (PWD).** Operationally, any character explicitly identified as disabled in an advertisement's audio, dialogue, or caption, or displaying an assistive device (wheelchair, white cane, hearing aid, prosthesis) or a clear physical indicator of disability.

Conceptual Review

Disability: From Medical Deficit to Social Construction

Disability is no longer conceptualised solely as an individual medical condition but as a social phenomenon shaped by environmental and attitudinal barriers. The medical model frames disability as a personal deficit requiring cure or management, often producing advertising narratives of pity, charity, or “overcoming” impairment. The social model, by contrast, argues that society disables people through inaccessible structures, exclusionary practices, and stereotypical media framing. Within marketing communication, this shift repositions the problem from the individual's body to the brand's messaging: advertisements do not simply reflect reality but help construct it. Disability integration therefore becomes a test of whether advertising disables through exclusion or enables through normalised inclusion.

Marketing Communication and the Promise of Inclusiveness

Marketing communication encompasses all planned messages brands use to create meaning and relationships with stakeholders, including advertising, public relations, digital content, and branding. Inclusiveness in this context refers to the deliberate practice of reflecting



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diverse consumer identities in ways that affirm belonging and agency. In practice, however, inclusiveness is often reduced to demographic visibility — inserting a wheelchair or cane without altering narrative power. This review distinguishes between performative inclusiveness, where diversity is displayed for brand optics, and substantive inclusiveness, where diverse groups participate in storylines with autonomy, complexity, and relevance to the product. A critique of inclusiveness therefore examines not just who appears, but how, why, and to what effect.

From Representation to Integration: A Conceptual Shift

Representation asks: are persons with disabilities present in the advertisement? Integration asks: are they present as consumers, decision-makers, and full participants in the brand world? Representation is quantitative and static; integration is qualitative and relational. Drawing on Hall's work on encoding/decoding, integration occurs when PWD are encoded into the preferred meaning of the advertisement as equals, not as add-ons or moral lessons. Indicators of integration include role prominence (lead versus background), narrative agency (acting independently versus being helped), product relevance (using the product versus symbolising inspiration), and casting authenticity (disabled actors versus non-disabled actors simulating disability). Without these markers, representation risks becoming tokenism — visibility without voice.

Authenticity as the Core of Inclusive Marketing Communication

Authenticity in disability integration refers to the congruence between a brand's inclusive claims and its execution. It has three dimensions: source authenticity (casting actual PWD), narrative authenticity (stories that reflect lived experience without exaggeration or pity), and organizational authenticity (inclusion that extends beyond the advertisement to employment, accessibility, and corporate social responsibility). Inauthentic integration is marked by “inspiration porn,” where PWD exist to make non-disabled audiences feel good, or by “cripping up,” where non-disabled actors play disabled roles. Audiences increasingly penalise inauthenticity as deceptive, which damages brand trust. This review therefore positions authenticity not as an aesthetic choice but as an ethical and strategic requirement for inclusiveness.

Critiquing Inclusiveness: Barriers and Contradictions

A critique of inclusiveness interrogates the gap between industry diversity pledges and advertising practice. Key barriers identified in the literature include commercial risk perception (the belief that PWD alienate mainstream consumers), creative ableism (unconscious biases that limit storylines to tragic or heroic tropes), client gatekeeping (brands avoiding disability for fear of backlash), and production exclusion (a lack of accessible sets, disabled creatives, or casting pipelines). These barriers produce a contradiction: brands claim social responsibility while maintaining aesthetic norms that exclude. This review therefore frames disability integration as both a communication issue and an organisational power issue.

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Global Trends in Disability Integration in Advertising

Empirical work consistently shows low rates of disability integration worldwide, with quality of portrayal more predictive of audience outcomes than mere presence. Burnett and Paul (1996) analysed 1,100 U.S. primetime advertisements and found that only 1.7% featured PWD, mostly in dependent or inspirational roles. Farnall and Smith (2021) examined Super Bowl advertisements from 2010–2020 and reported 2.3% inclusion, noting a shift toward “everyday” portrayals correlated with higher brand-likability scores. In the United Kingdom, Waldschmidt et al. (2017) content-analysed 400 advertisements and found 3.1% integration, with the financial services and automotive sectors least inclusive. These studies establish a baseline: integration is rare globally, but normalising portrayals yield better audience responses.

Disability Integration in African and Nigerian Marketing Communication

African contexts show similar patterns, with additional structural constraints. Obono and Makama (2019) analysed 180 Nigerian television commercials and found that 4.4% featured PWD, predominantly in charity appeals or religious programming rather than mainstream product advertisements; qualitative interviews with Lagos-based creatives identified “client fear of negative sales impact” as the primary barrier. In South Africa, Loury-Okoumba and Vivian (2020) coded 250 print advertisements and reported 5.6% integration, with most PWD shown as passive recipients of care. Olaore and Ayo-Obiremi (2022) surveyed 312 Nigerian consumers and found that 68% had “never” or “rarely” seen PWD in advertisements, yet 71% believed authentic inclusion would improve brand perception. These findings confirm low integration in Nigeria and suggest a disconnect between audience receptivity and industry practice.

Audience Responses to Integration Quality and Authenticity

Experimental studies illuminate how the manner of integration shapes audience response. Kaufman-Scarborough (2001) used print-advertisement manipulations to show that portraying PWD as competent consumers increased purchase intention among both disabled and non-disabled participants, while pitiable portrayals decreased it for both groups. Hardin and Hardin (2004) found that U.S. college students rated advertisements featuring athletic PWD higher on brand modernity and social responsibility than advertisements with no PWD. Bhatt and Bhatt (2023) used eye-tracking and survey data in India to show that authentic casting of PWD increased visual attention by 23% and brand trust by 0.41 standard deviations compared with non-disabled actors playing disabled roles. Notably, Shoham et al. (2020) found no significant difference in purchase intention between disabled and non-disabled Israeli consumers after exposure to inclusive advertisements, challenging the “alienation risk” assumption commonly held by practitioners.

Organisational and Cultural Barriers to Integration

Agency-side research helps explain why integration lags despite positive audience data. Happer and Philo (2013) interviewed 25 UK advertising executives who cited a lack of disabled creatives, inaccessible production sets, and an absence of client demand as systemic barriers. In Nigeria, Edosomwan and Odigie (2021) surveyed 47 advertising practitioners and found that 74% agreed inclusion is “socially important,” yet 61% said clients would reject it for “mass-

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market” brands. Kearney et al. (2019) termed this pattern creative ableism — the unconscious exclusion of disability within ideation and casting. These studies suggest that the barriers are organisational habitus rather than consumer backlash, supporting a critique of industry inclusiveness as performative rather than structural.

Integration, Brand Equity, and Purchase Intention

Few studies directly link disability integration to behavioural outcomes. Tsai (2011) used structural equation modelling on 428 Taiwanese respondents and found that perceived sincerity of disability inclusion mediated the relationship between advertisement exposure and brand attitude ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), which in turn predicted purchase intention. In Nigeria, Omenugha et al. (2020) used a quasi-experiment with 200 undergraduates and found that exposure to an MTN advertisement featuring a deaf influencer increased brand trust ($M = 4.03$ vs. $3.52, p < .01$) and intention to recommend the brand ($M = 3.89$ vs. $3.31, p < .01$). No study, however, has yet modelled the full path from integration quality through authenticity to brand perception and purchase intention in an African market, nor tested whether this path differs by disability status — a clear direction for future primary research.

The Business Case for Diverse Representation

Disability-inclusive advertising is not simply an ethical position; a commercial rationale exists alongside it. A majority of consumers are reported to remain loyal to brands that visibly address social inequality, and inclusive creative work signals to consumers that misconceptions about disability are being actively challenged Nelson (2024). In practice, disabled consumers purchase the same categories of goods and services as non-disabled consumers; the difference lies not in product need but in how inclusively that need is communicated to.

Despite this, disability-inclusive marketing remains uncommon in practice. One industry analysis of roughly 450,000 U.S. broadcast and cable television advertisements reportedly found that only about 1% depicted a person with a disability, related themes, visuals or topics. Nelson (2024).

Where representation does occur, it is disproportionately concentrated in “supercrip” or inspirational-overcoming narratives rather than every day, unremarkable portrayals (Kearney et al., 2019). Disability integration in advertising is best understood as having moved from total exclusion to a visible but frequently flawed presence: brands increasingly court the estimated \$13 trillion global disability market, or “purple pound” (Södergren & Vallström, 2022), yet representation often struggles to progress beyond superficial visibility toward genuine narrative inclusion.

Figure 1. Disability in the population vs. advertising representation. Sources: Gracenote Inclusion Analytics (2024); The Drum (2022); Purple Goat Agency (2023).

The Representational Gap: Visibility, Invisibility, and the Hierarchy of Impairments

One of the most persistent and structurally revealing features of disability advertising is what might be called the hierarchy of impairment: the tendency for certain visible, photogenic, or culturally legible disabilities to receive far more representational attention than others.

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Wheelchair use, for instance, has become a shorthand for disability in advertising even though wheelchair users account for fewer than 8% of the disabled population (Purple Goat Agency, 2023). The visual convenience of the wheelchair as a legible symbol of difference says more about the needs of art directors than about the lived experience of the disability community.

Inspiration Porn and the Supercrip Narrative: Objectification Under the Guise of Celebration

Perhaps the most extensively critiqued pattern in disability advertising is what disability activist Stella Young (2014) termed “inspiration porn” in a widely cited TED talk. Young used the phrase to describe the practice of objectifying disabled people as sources of emotional uplift for non-disabled audiences, typically by presenting them performing mundane or physically demanding activities accompanied by captions urging the viewer to reflect on their own relative fortune. The term has since become a central concept in disability media studies, generating a considerable body of scholarly analysis.

Tokenism, Performative Inclusion, and the Authenticity Question

As disability has climbed the agenda of diversity and inclusion discourse, a new problem has emerged alongside it: the risk that brands adopt its visual grammar without engaging its substance. The advertising industry has a documented tendency toward what critics call “diversity washing” — a term that applies equally to race, gender, sexuality, and disability — in which marginalised groups appear in campaigns without their interests being structurally integrated into the organisation producing them.

Timke's (2023) critical discourse analysis of ANA, Adweek, and Ad Age publications found that industry discourse around disability inclusion tended to emphasise surface representation rather than systemic change. Trade articles frequently recommended that brands “feature” disabled people in campaigns as a strategic step, but rarely engaged with the deeper questions of who writes the briefs, who sits in the creative meetings, and whether disabled people have meaningful input into how they are shown. This is not a trivial distinction: campaigns produced without meaningful disabled participation tend to reproduce the very stereotypes they claim to be challenging, simply because the people making creative decisions lack the lived knowledge to do otherwise.

Several high-profile examples illustrate the tension between performative and genuine inclusion. Nike's Go FlyEase sneaker, released in 2021 and designed in collaboration with disabled people for hands-free use, was widely praised for its co-design process. Yet disability advocates noted with frustration that the promotional campaign barely mentioned the disability community or acknowledged Matthew Walzer, the activist whose letter to Nike originally inspired the design (Psychology Today, 2021). Disabled consumers were, in effect, the origin story and the target market, but not the visible subject of the communication.

Consumer research suggests that younger audiences are increasingly sophisticated in their ability to detect the difference between authentic and performative inclusion. Kumar and Stewart (2023) found that Millennial and Generation Z consumers were more likely to support companies that could demonstrate consistent and genuine engagement with diversity, while Garcia and Lewis (2023) found that tokenistic or inauthentic inclusivity could actively damage

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brand reputation. These findings suggest that the commercial case for authentic rather than superficial disability representation may be stronger than many brand managers have yet appreciated.

The Economic Argument: Disability as an Untapped Consumer Market

One of the more striking paradoxes of disability advertising is that the commercial argument for inclusion is exceptionally compelling, and yet brands have historically been slow to act on it. The term “purple pound” was coined in the United Kingdom to describe the collective spending power of disabled households, and it has become a useful, if somewhat reductive, shorthand for the economic logic of disability inclusion.

Estimates of that spending power are substantial. In the UK, disabled households and their families are estimated to spend approximately £274 billion annually, while the online spending power of disabled people alone is estimated at over £16 billion (We Are Purple, 2020; Purple Goat Agency, 2023). In the United States, the disability community commands an estimated \$490 billion in annual disposable income, influencing an extended market valued at more than \$1 trillion when the spending of friends and family is included (American Institutes for Research, 2018, as cited in Nielsen, 2024). Globally, the combined spending power of disabled individuals and their households is estimated to exceed \$13 trillion (Södergren & Vallström, 2022). These are not marginal figures.

The commercial penalties for ignoring this market are equally significant. Research by Scope (2019), published through AbilityNet, found that 75% of disabled people and their families had walked away from a UK business due to poor accessibility or inadequate customer service. The Click-Away Pound survey (2019) estimated that inaccessible websites alone cost UK businesses approximately £17.1 billion in annual revenue. More recently, Accenture research from 2023 found that businesses that lead on disability inclusion generate 1.6 times more revenue and twice the economic profit of comparable firms that do not prioritise accessibility. Accenture annual reports (2023)

Theoretical Framework

This review is anchored in three complementary theories that explain the construction of disability, organisational decisions on inclusion, and audience behavioural outcomes.

Social Model of Disability

The social model, formalised by Oliver (1990), rejects individual-pathology explanations of disability and instead locates disability in societal barriers — physical, attitudinal, and communicative. Barnes (1991) extended this to media, arguing that cultural representations are disabling when they confine PWD to tragic or heroic stereotypes. Applied to marketing communication, the social model reframes non-integration as a structural choice by brands rather than a reflection of market demand. It provides the critical lens for this review's critique of inclusiveness, asking whether advertising removes or reproduces disabling narratives. Garland-Thomson (2009) further argued that staring relations in visual media can either misfit or accommodate disabled bodies; integration occurs when advertisements normalise PWD without

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making impairment the story. *The social model* explains why disability integration may be low across product categories because of industry-wide ableist norms, and why organizational and cultural barriers persist despite policy rhetoric. It also sets the standard for distinguishing “normalising” from “pitiable” portrayals in future content analysis.

Stakeholder Theory

Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory posits that organizations must create value for all groups who affect or are affected by corporate objectives, not shareholders alone. Carroll (1991) operationalised this through the pyramid of corporate social responsibility, in which ethical and philanthropic duties include fair representation of marginalised groups. In marketing, Smith (2003) argued that consumers, employees, and activist publics now evaluate brands on inclusiveness, making PWD legitimate stakeholders rather than a niche audience. This theory challenges the “commercial risk” narrative by framing exclusion as a breach of stakeholder obligations that creates reputational risk. Bhattacharya et al. (2008) showed that CSR-linked marketing improves stakeholder identification, but only when perceived as authentic.

Stakeholder theory frames PWD as legitimate stakeholders whose authentic integration should improve brand perception and purchase intention because it signals ethical consistency. It also explains why gatekeeping by clients and creatives reflects a narrow, shareholder-first logic that ignores broader stakeholder pressure.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour explains behavioural intention through three predictors: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In advertising contexts, Schlosser (2003) applied the theory to show that advertisement exposure modifies attitudes toward both the product and the social group depicted, which then influence purchase intention. This theory connects representation to action: if disability integration in advertisements fosters positive attitudes toward disability and signals inclusive social norms, it should increase behavioural intention to purchase from the brand. Vermeir and Verbeke (2008) confirmed that ethical brand attributes operate through the theory's attitude pathway, but only when consumers perceive low effort and high control in choosing the brand.

The theory of planned behaviour is the mechanism linking portrayal quality to attitude toward disability, authenticity to brand perception via norms and credibility, and both to purchase intention. It also predicts the null finding between disabled and non-disabled consumers reported by Shoham et al. (2020): if social norms shift for all consumers, intention should not differ by disability status.

Conclusion

The advertising industry's engagement with disability has been characterised more by contradiction than by consistency. Brands have simultaneously claimed to value inclusion while producing campaigns that reduce disabled people to convenient symbols of inspiration, pity, or novelty. The scale of the representational gap, the persistence of narratives that serve non-disabled audiences at the expense of disabled ones, the commercial logic that treats disability as



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a niche rather than a mainstream concern, and the structural exclusion of disabled people from creative processes together constitute what might fairly be described as a systemic failure of marketing communication.

At the same time, the critical and commercial conditions for change are arguably stronger than they have ever been. Consumer expectations around authenticity are evolving; the financial case for disability inclusion is increasingly well documented; social media has created new channels for disabled voices and alternative representations; and a small but growing number of agencies and brands have begun to translate the principles of authentic inclusion into practice. The question that remains is whether these developments will accumulate into a genuine structural shift, or whether disability will continue to occupy the margins of advertising's diversity agenda.

The answer will depend, in no small part, on whether the industry is willing to move from representation as a visual strategy to inclusion as an organisational principle — rethinking who is in the room when decisions are made, whose experiences are treated as valid source material, and whose presence in public life is considered worthy of ordinary, unremarkable depiction. For research, the clearest priority is a study that tests the full path from portrayal quality through authenticity to brand perception and purchase intention in an African market, disaggregated by disability status — the gap this review has identified but which existing scholarship has not yet closed.

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