

ARTICLE

Inclusive advertising: The new trend of the advertising industry for people with disabilities

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Abstract

Advertising and media representations help shape social norms, yet people with disabilities and other marginalized groups remain underrepresented or are portrayed through stereotypes that reinforce ableism and exclusion. This paper is an analysis of disability codes from an advertising perspective, drawing on a series of inclusion and digital marketing concepts associated with advertisements and magazine covers aimed at people with different stereotypes or culturally accepted values. The primary objective is to understand and investigate an approach grounded in advertising theory that makes disability and functional diversity more visible and raises awareness, thereby promoting social inclusion through industry and consumer goods. A qualitative methodology was applied across two case contexts: an international agency and a Chilean agency, both of which incorporated disability into the advertising and/or marketing area. Some results from the different mechanisms behind the images of the inclusive campaign through the interpretation of photography possess the advertising of a visual dialogue that seeks to capture the attention of viewers and customers, representing the particular physical characteristics of the models with disabilities that turn them into advertising portraits. The research findings support the arguments presented and reflect the conviction, commitment, and goodwill of all members of an inclusive society willing to challenge stereotypes and promote a positive image. In conclusion, this work suggests that inclusive advertising can contribute to improved quality of life not only for people with disabilities but also for society more broadly by identifying needs rather than assuming them and by clarifying their relationship to discrimination and ableism within inclusive social identity in the advertising and marketing industry.

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1. Introduction

Advertising and marketing are two disciplines related to the innovative and creative agency that generates social reality through the prism of brand identity; of course, advertising and the media—radio, television, internet, brochures, billboards, magazines, shop windows, etc.—are used to transform a message or a brand across multiple platforms.¹ Both play crucial roles in promoting products, services, and social networks, depending on the objectives and methodological approaches. Advertising is part of

marketing, which refers to the activities and strategies to promote a series of advertising objectives (informing, persuading, or reminding) the public/customer about the specific offer. Marketing is a set of activities and strategies designed to create, communicate, deliver, and distribute value to consumers. This increases the visibility and impact of the advertising message by addressing the topic from different perspectives, allowing it to capture the attention of the audience, the viewer, and customers, which is crucial for generating greater awareness of products and consumer goods.

Not all social benefits arise from acquiring a good awareness and sensitivity about advertising exclusion through clients with disabilities and functional diversity. However, this situation, involving both inclusive advertising and inclusive marketing, is affected by disconnection arising from biases, inaccessibility, and stereotypes that marginalize minority groups. This research paper raises a relevant issue related to minority design, pointing out that since its inception, advertising has functioned as a social mirror that conforms to the norms, forms, and styles imposed by the contexts and times in which it develops. Advertising reflects the society in which its commercial tool is created; therefore, it does not always adapt, through marketing, to the lives of people with disabilities across different times and cultural contexts.

It is a complex issue to understand under the “triple discrimination” without drawing on the literature on intersectionality, since advertising and marketing exclude people with disabilities and functional diversity due to their condition, gender, and other social characteristics, limiting their visibility and access to products or services. This reflects a lack of inclusion and accessibility in commercial strategies. This term describes the oppression that an inclusive society faces across multiple dimensions, including gender, race, and social class,²⁻⁴ creating a more complex reality for those who find themselves at the intersection of these identities.

This concept implies that experiences of discrimination do not accumulate independently but rather interrelate and reinforce each other. For example, a woman with a disability may face both sexism related to beauty standards and female ableism, and a person of color with a disability may experience racism and ableism simultaneously, in multiple contexts of oppression. This intersectional perspective focuses on a level of discrimination that allows for a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties these people face in society, particularly in the advertising and marketing sector.

Throughout human history, numerous complex factors

have contributed to integrating minority and excluded groups into a productive and sustainable society. Some countries have signed and ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recognizing the need for the media and advertising to represent a more inclusive and equal society. In this sense, marketing companies must be accessible and promote inclusive representation by featuring people with disabilities in their advertising campaigns, highlighting their abilities and contributions rather than reinforcing inequalities, ageism, and negative stereotypes.

However, there were also many changes in the practical implementation of the study, both in the international agency and in the Chilean agency, which began to incorporate people with disabilities into the advertising and/or marketing area. The advertising industry’s portrayal of alternative looks, particularly in high-fashion clothing brands, has been significantly impacted by the revolution of our century. It is crucial to pay attention to the necessary changes in the advertising sector and the new social identity that has emerged with the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Portfolios are designed to eradicate ableism or promote non-normative or racialized beauty to enhance visibility (and awareness); the modeling business is experiencing an increase in demand for models with disabilities.⁵ There are models of different races, with rare diseases (such as vitiligo or ectodermal dysplasia, or other pathologies), and diverse identities in terms of sexual orientation and disability; all of them are present in this excellent example of fashion that uses diversity to break barriers.

However, there is a lack of empirical evidence on advertising strategies and the relationship of model/agency roles towards inclusion. For example, at a societal level, representations of people with disabilities through the media have the potential to combat stereotypes and discrimination. Of course, at a business level, each person with functional diversity can have a potential impact by increasing the number of customers—those with disabilities who feel seen (and who can access the advertisements) and those without disabilities who can also develop a positive association with a brand that appears to be socially progressive.

The primary objective is to understand and investigate an approach grounded in advertising theory, with the aim of making disability and its functional diversity visible and raising awareness, thereby promoting social inclusion through industry and consumer goods. This vision highlights the importance of promoting social inclusion through targeted advertising and marketing strategies.

2. Literature review

Inclusive advertising and marketing relate to a complex and sensitive context, and the concept of “disability” is framed in multiple dimensions (physical, mental, social, and cultural, among others). Such framing is important for supporting inclusion while avoiding falling into stereotypes. It is crucial to recognize functional diversity; however, it is not a homogeneous category. Experiences and realities vary across industry contexts in both advertising and marketing, depending on product categories and consumer goods. This involves promoting the consumption of social advertising in terms of inclusion to transform and make visible a culture that values diversity for all, adopting the elimination of both social and individual barriers through rights and equity.

It is important to consider certain questions that may suggest the following: Is the presence of people with disabilities increasing as a result of inclusive advertising and marketing? Is it growing in the consumer goods category? There is limited evidence and analysis that allows for a more in-depth study of the data or percentages of advertisements that include people with disabilities. It is impossible to determine whether the advertising company is incorporating and increasing the trend of inclusion through the media or dissemination channels.

In fact, the academic literature in this area is extremely limited; only one reference is identified in the present discussion.⁶ In Latin America, research on advertising imagery and on how viewers project their desired identities in response to advertising design remains scarce. This research gap limits understanding of how advertising imagery is constructed and interpreted across media in the region. Nevertheless, it is difficult to measure the impact of increased representation of persons with disabilities in advertising on sales or brand loyalty, and it was not feasible within the scope of this study to obtain qualitative interviews with companies to document casting practices or related experience.

3. Materials and methods

A qualitative methodology was applied in this advertising study, examining both an international agency and a Chilean agency and focusing on how people with disabilities are represented in advertising and/or marketing. First, a series of documentary reviews was conducted using the Google search engine to identify images related to the identities of people with disabilities. We also verified that the agency was recognized in its country of origin and that the magazine or international press source was reputable, because relying on misleading advertising^{7,8} and digitally manipulated photographs⁹⁻¹¹ to represent human identity

was considered too risky. Additionally, images related to the advertising agencies were analyzed, focusing on individuals with disabilities across various age groups, geographic locations, and socioeconomic statuses, to inform the analysis of advertising in marketing and media across different brands.

Finally, the analysis considered how agencies frame contributions to human development within advertising campaigns and marketing strategies, particularly through the inclusion of disabilities across public and private entities, to convey sensitivity and social awareness.

4. Results

Through photographic interpretation, the mechanisms used in inclusive-campaign images generate effects that constitute a form of advertising designed to capture the attention of viewers and consumers (customers). These images feature models with disabilities, highlighting their particular physical characteristics, which become advertising portraits. Inclusive advertising breaks traditional stereotypes, favoring a more authentic connection with the industry’s visual field in advertising and marketing, while promoting new values in the perception of human life through the representation of people with disabilities.

4.1. Social media modeling agency

The relevance of this study lies in its attempt to approach the social sphere through representation, highlighting inclusion and functional diversity. It aims to demonstrate that individuals with disabilities can become role models and achieve success in the fashion and social media industries. Additionally, one of the main opportunities is to promote employment inclusion, encompassing both traditional advertising fields and new, inclusive campaigns. This process involves a shift in the narrative, promoting a renewed visual perception of fashion for people with disabilities, which supports the construction of a creative, talented, and attractive identity. It also offers an innovative source of inspiration by sharing the stories and experiences of these models, contributing to acceptance and social awareness. This approach also favors the creation of support communities, at both personal and professional levels, between models with and without disabilities, which benefits both the industry and the consumer goods sector.

The Mexican agency *Cambiando Modelos* (“Changing Models” in Spanish) has carried out limited inclusive advertising work in casting people with disabilities and functional diversity—based on culturally accepted disability value systems—to represent the advertising industry across various media (magazines, advertisements,

TV commercials, fashion shows/runways). It includes multiple models of different ages and conditions (Figures 1 and 2) to support aesthetic representation, such as visual communication or advertising design, transforming

inclusive fashion.

The young British woman with Down syndrome, Ellie Goldstein, began her career in a highly influential and renowned campaign in the fashion industry for Ken

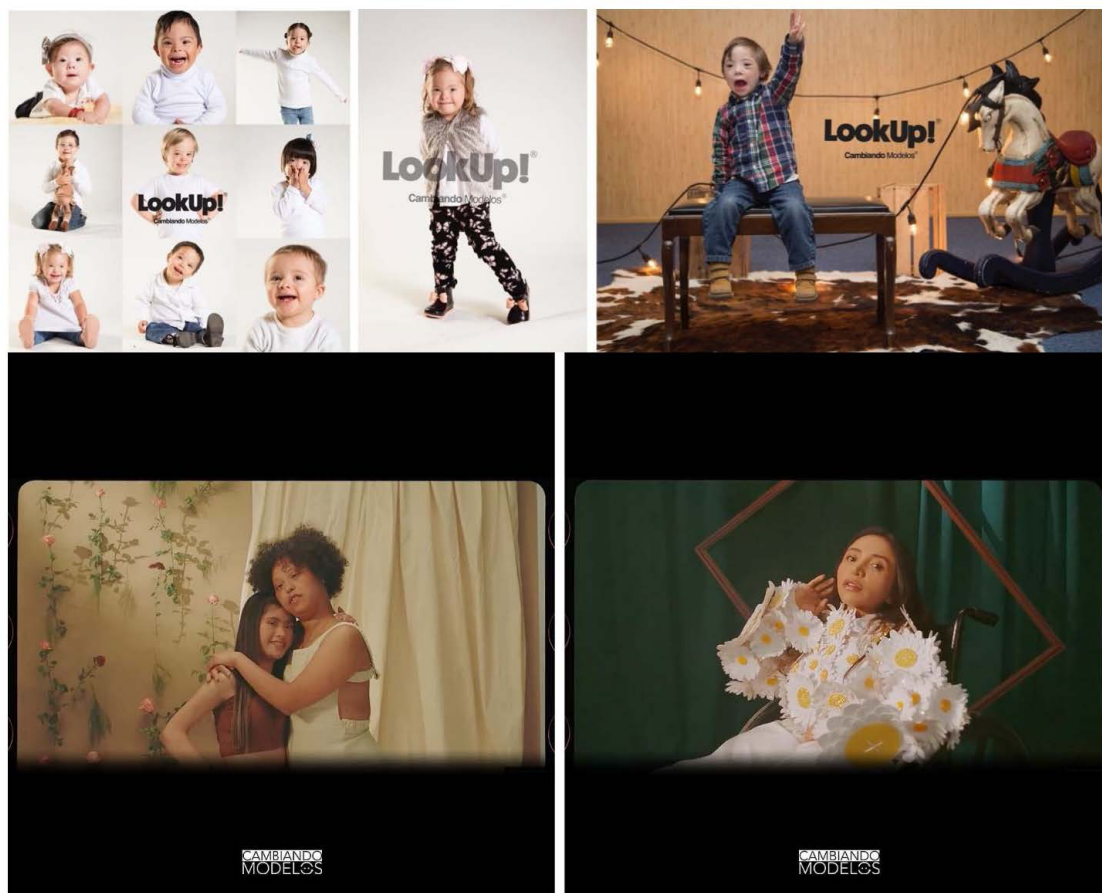


Figure 1. Some photographs from the inclusive modeling agency of Mexico¹²⁻¹⁶



Figure 2. Some photographs of the inclusive catwalk of "All Inclusive Runway" in Mexico¹⁷⁻¹⁸

Scott's beauty collection at Gucci (Figure 3). Undoubtedly, the fashion industry and beauty standards have evolved over the years, and through various campaigns, brands demonstrate greater inclusivity in society.¹⁹ In addition, she has appeared on the covers of several major magazines, including *Elle*, *L'Officiel*, *Glamour*, *Allure*, and *Vogue*, and has also participated in campaigns for brands seeking to promote inclusion and transformative change within the industry and society at large.



Figure 3. Cover of Mission Magazine from the United States²⁰

However, the new images and models representing the advertising industry, particularly the fashion industry, are reshaping the concept of comprehensive inclusion, encompassing both disability and cultural diversity, while also seeking to avoid intersecting discrimination based on gender, prejudice, and stereotypes across different social statuses. Inclusive advertising also requires an educational positioning strategy to consolidate democracy through beliefs, values, codes, senses, and/or concepts that benefit new social experiences, such as those of clients or viewers with sensory disabilities and other types of disabilities.

There are many influential models of Deaf and Deafblind individuals in fashion magazines and/or advertising campaigns that seek to integrate into the advertising industry. For example, a notable mention is the Brazilian Deaf model Brenda Costa (Figure 4), whose experience with the book *Bela do Silêncio* ("Beauty of Silence" in Portuguese) serves as inspiration for her own dreams.

It is challenging to incorporate inclusive language terminology and portrayals of women with disabilities, as advertising communication is shaped by target-market strategies. This involves understanding the context of belonging and building connections between consumers and relevant brands. However, designers have the professional responsibility to communicate effectively with everyone, and thus, they must include people with diverse abilities in their target audiences.



Figure 4. Several covers of the fashion magazine with Brazilian Deaf model, Brenda Costa²¹⁻²⁷

4.2. The issue of “casting” and “marketing” for people with disabilities

This new context in the advertising industry, involving the casting of actors with disabilities, is important to enable them to fulfill their dreams. Having a disability should not be a barrier. Therefore, it is essential that advertising media and agencies adapt to provide inclusive access to communication for people with disabilities, both in mass media and through new technologies, to strengthen their future participation in advertising.²⁸ Additionally, advertising media and agencies should incorporate various disciplines in the development of campaigns and commercials. Designers should strive to base their decisions, as much as possible, on reliable and understandable information, but the shaping process always requires “a leap into the void,” moving from a series of recommendations to the creation of a visual form; it involves too many decisions to be made in a linear and digitally controlled manner.²⁹

These new challenges reflect the broader concept of advertising, encompassing communicative strategies in advertising design and innovative tools intended to address difficulties in visual communication and the complexities of advertising language in pursuit of social inclusion. However, through determination, agencies and teams have been able to overcome the various criteria and challenges that arose with the new phase of inclusive advertising work, thereby enhancing social and functional diversity to improve opportunities for casting and marketing participation for persons with disabilities within the

framework of inclusive design prestige.

4.3. Renew the inclusive campaign

In different cases (or some), Chilean companies target the potential market of people with disabilities in advertising campaigns or commercials to encourage consumer engagement. It is challenging to adapt the change in behavior of the general population in order to facilitate access to the message itself, making audiovisual content accessible so that viewers with sensory disabilities can understand it. This involves using various accessible audiovisual tools, while considering the physical appearance stereotypes or different types of disabilities in casting.

Advancing a stance on gender and disability inclusion in the advertising industry requires innovative products, diverse creative thinking, and quality. This emphasizes various categories through advertising design (brand awareness, advertisers, advertising agencies, media) to promote inclusion.

Through a collaboration between the Chilean agency and the international beauty brand AVON, an inclusive campaign was launched featuring two Deaf hosts in advertising posts on social media and promotional videos—mainly on Facebook and Instagram—and on the brand’s website under its national domain, to develop proposals for inclusive advertising (Figures 5 and 6). These initiatives are related to beauty technologies and activism for women, inclusive societal participation, and environmental care, and were presented under the slogan “Look Again” to coincide with their 135th anniversary in



Figure 5. Some sequences from two videos of the advertisement in Chilean sign language for the new nail polish product “Gel Shine”^{30,31}



Figure 6. Two web banners from the Avon Chile website, Nails section³²

2021.

5. Discussion

Fashion agencies have not always been a key space for advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities in advertising and marketing. However, they not only provide job opportunities that promote inclusion, but also help brands understand the importance of authentic representation that reflects diverse identities and experiences. In this way, they facilitate models with disabilities to become visible on digital platforms.

It is difficult to envision a radical change in some of the major fashion events. However, such a change is one of the key conditions for fashion shows—especially those that include women with disabilities or rare diseases—to gain increasing acceptance among the public and the international press. This will also depend on the support of professional fashion designers and brands from different countries.^{33–36}

The research findings support the arguments presented, emphasizing the conviction, commitment, and goodwill of members of an inclusive society who are willing to challenge stereotypes and promote a positive image. In addition, the findings are linked to the new key categories within the conceptual networks of marketing, advertising, and social advertising that seek to transform fundamental areas such as health and public welfare, marginalization and discrimination, environmental protection, and international solidarity. These efforts aim to promote awareness and drive actions and changes in people's thinking, with the goal of generating a real impact on their behaviors and perceptions.³⁷

A current focus of the debate is that the selection of certain types of models by some fashion and beauty brands may function more as a marketing strategy than a genuine commitment.⁵ It is therefore crucial to rethink what it really

means to use inclusion as a symbol within the advertising context of the industry.

It is essential to transform and evolve the advertising and consumer goods industry by using inclusive language in communication activities and advertising media. Adequate visibility and participation are needed so that people feel included and are not excluded from mass media. This depends on advertising, social marketing, products, sales, and marketing social responsibility, ensuring a balance between demand and supply to preserve the well-being and long-term satisfaction of inclusive customers.

The growing inclusion of people with various types of disabilities (sensory, physical, intellectual, cognitive, multiple, etc.) or illnesses that hinder their access to work and cultural participation has enabled greater participation in modeling and advertising campaigns through diverse representation in the industry. In this way, disability becomes a visible element in the representation of any individual, regardless of their physical characteristics or conditions, favoring their incorporation into strategic work in both visual communication and corporate communication. This, in turn, drives the motivation for academic and professional research in various advertising fields.

6. Conclusion

Today, a renewed focus on functional diversity in advertising, supported by collaborative and inclusive methodologies and committed professional practices, facilitates the generation of significant commitments and thoughtful actions. This is achieved by raising awareness through campaigns that reach all actors in the sector, using social networks and mass media dissemination.

In conclusion, inclusive advertising has helped improve the quality of life for all people, not just those with disabilities, as it is not about assuming needs but

studying them to understand their impact in relation to discrimination and ableism with the context of inclusive social identity in the advertising and marketing industry. Both advertising and the media have played a major role in perpetuating exclusion against people with disabilities, as well as oppressed groups.³⁸

It is therefore essential to identify the distinct standards of inclusive advertising to effectively integrate disability in the media. This involves addressing key elements such as: (i) authentic, accurate, and positive representation without stereotypes; (ii) guaranteeing workplace and cultural accessibility, making advertising materials available to everyone through subtitles, sign language interpretation, audio description, and formats for people with visual and hearing disabilities, along with fair pay for inclusive workers; (iii) promoting inclusion in the creative process by engaging models with disabilities and inclusive casting to reflect their perspectives and needs in advertising campaigns; (iv) ensuring adherence to standards and protocols, supported by relevant laws and regulations, that uphold the rights of people with disabilities in the advertising industry; and (v) providing training and raising awareness among advertising and marketing professionals about the importance of inclusion in their campaigns.

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