



INCLUSION OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE IN CORPORATE ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BY **JULIA LIN** | AUGUST 2020

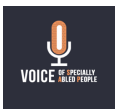
Whether walking down the aisle at a store, scrolling on the internet, or watching TV, it is abundantly clear that the images presented do not include people with disabilities. Though 15% of the world population lives with a disability (World 2018), a very low percentage of the world's media represents disability in an accurate and inclusive way, if at all. In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries, companies, and individuals alike have had to make significant changes to increase accessibility in a socially distant world. This shift in mentality provides an opportunity for companies to reconsider their marketing strategies and the way they include people with disabilities not only in the present moment, but as a long-term step towards a more socially-conscious corporate market strategy. To address the noticeable lack of representation of people with disabilities in corporate advertising and media, companies and marketers should take steps to include people with disabilities in their advertisements as well as in the advertisement development process, and should actively foreground anti-ableist practices in their organizational structures.

The study was conducted through a survey leading company representatives —predominantly those from marketing and Human Resources departments— through a series of questions beginning with prompts regarding the inclusivity of the company as a whole and what policies they have in place. The survey consequently branched based on whether or not the company had run advertisements or media including people with disabilities. The data demonstrates that companies are beginning to address the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in advertising and marketing, although these efforts may not be reflected in the mainstream media yet. Due to the limited number of responses, the data can not be generalized to speak for the wider corporate community. But, given the diversity and size and type of the companies that did respond, the study suggests that increasing representation of people with disabilities is a topic that is on companies' radars. Of the companies that responded, 62.5% indicated that they had some sort of policy in place to promote inclusivity in advertising and 85.7% of companies said they plan to expand their inclusion efforts in the future.

It is abundantly clear that there is very little easily accessible information on the state of inclusion in corporate marketing and advertising, especially regarding the representation of people with disabilities specifically. Further research should aim to gather more responses from companies, utilize a standard metric system



to measure inclusion efforts, and focus on analyzing company policies. Along with research, it is important that advocacy efforts are emphasized as an important vehicle for changes in both companies' willingness to discuss the issue and in the media they produce, as a result. Based on the conclusions reached through this research, subsequent studies should consider education along with research because increasing public awareness of the issue would help apply pressure on corporations and encourage them to make changes and be more transparent about related information. By understanding this, the research opens up space for a broader conversation about specific actions corporations have taken or can take in the future, about why there is a general lack of information, and about how to continue research efforts to further demonstrate the need for more inclusive media.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Julia Lin is a student from Seattle, Washington studying journalism and political science at the University of Southern California. At USC, she is the Social Media Director of the Daily Trojan, an arts editor of Palaver Arts Magazine and a guide for SC Outfitters. She loves all things reading, writing, music and art-related. She hopes to combine these passions into a future working with incarcerated and underprivileged groups. She also really likes clouds in cool shapes and baking banana bread.

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WHY THIS MATTERS TO VOSAP

VOSAP has been a champion of advocating for the inclusion of Specially Abled People, especially by pushing for a representative, authentically inclusive, and empowering-of-all media representation. This research project analyzes the representation, or lack thereof, of SAPs in advertisement media. Through this work, VOSAP hopes to continue to advocate for (1) more inclusive advertising, (2) diversify the company representatives, and (3) deliver more inclusive representation in modern media.

ABOUT VOICE OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE INC.

The Voice of Specially Abled People (VOSAP) is a global advocacy organization built on the principles of Empowerment of Specially Abled People. In Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, VOSAP is working to create an Inclusive and Accessible world by accelerating implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and goals of UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) treaty. The organization has created the VOSAP Mobile App through which volunteers can take a pledge to volunteer and rate the accessibility of public places, creating a crowdsourcing platform to aggregate demand for accessibility.

