



REPRESENTATION OF PWD IN ADVERTISEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

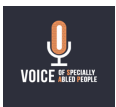
Over one billion people worldwide live with disabilities, composing nearly 15% of the global population—a proportion set to rise as life expectancies and chronic health conditions increase. For this reason, representation of people with disabilities (PWD) is needed now more than ever. While companies have made efforts to increase representation in recent years, there is still a lack of representation of PWD. Though efforts have increased, the few times PWD are represented in advertising, the portrayals often reinforce “ability norms,” by suggesting that PWD must overcome their disability to perform physical tasks and achieve unlikely success to be celebrated by society. This study focuses on three major perspectives of advertising—advertisement agencies, marketing executives of major companies, and social media influencers with disabilities—in an attempt to understand the reason behind the lack of representation and misrepresentation of PWD.

The perspective of advertising agencies was essential in this study as they invest time and money into the advertisements released. During this study, over 150 advertising professionals at top agencies were asked to complete a 12 question survey via QuestionPro to gain insight on their experience with PWD and their view on diversity and inclusion in advertisements. In addition, two informational interviews were conducted to dive deeper into those topics. After receiving the survey and interview responses, there seemed to be a disconnect in the answers. Many agencies said that they felt that general inclusion was extremely important in advertising; however, 25% of those respondents have not worked on an advertisement featuring PWD, 33.3% are not inclined to increase representation in future projects, and 16.7% had never seen an advertisement depicting a person with a disability. This indicates a lack of information and knowledge on disability representation amongst advertisement agency employees which needs to be improved, as ad agencies are the champions driving the change in inclusivity and proper representation.

Company perspectives were also essential to understanding disability representation. In this study, over 150 marketing executives were contacted to fill out a short Question Pro survey focusing on a given respondent’s marketing experience in years, their brand’s relationship with PWD, and specifically whether PWD are included in their target audience and if this is reflected in their advertising. The responses suggested that companies whose products could be offered to PWD and who have featured PWD in previous advertisements are encouraged to continue doing so. However, companies with products that are not accessible to PWD are less motivated not only to market to PWD, but also to evolve products to become accessible to PWD.

¹ World Health Organization, “Disability and Health,” December 1, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>.

² Shauna Kearney, Ian Brittain, and Eva Kipnis, “‘Superdisabilities’ vs ‘Disabilities’? Theorizing the Role of Ableism in (Mis)Representational Mythology of Disability in the Marketplace,” *Consumption Markets & Culture* 22, no. 5–6 (November 2, 2019): 546, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2018.1562701>.



It is also crucial to gain the perspective of social media influencers with disabilities because it is a rising major marketing platform that can be profitable for marketing executives, advertisement agencies, and the influencers themselves. Over 100 disability influencers of all different types of disabilities and neurodiversities were sent the QuestionPro, along with the option to be interviewed. Interviewees discussed their personal experiences engaging in sponsorships and advertisements as disability influencers.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lexie Van OS was the project manager for this research and Katherine Li, Kelsey Kussman and Me'Chele Sevanesian were the researchers.

Lexie Van OS, is a student of University of California and has done several volunteering projects working for PwDs in past and wants to make an impact in Disability Sector.

Katherine Li, is a student of University of Southern California and aims to be an advocate for equal representation, rights of PwDs and aspires to work in a Public Office and Campaigns in future.

Kelsey Kussman, is a student of University of Southern California and wants to change the lives of people and make a positive impact.

Me'Chele Sevanesian is a student of California State University and have worked in past with children with disabilities. She plans on taking a law school to represent PwDs and focus on building disability education in her community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VOSAP acknowledges tremendous contribution by Priscilla Amorim, who led the entire project as Research Manager. We thank Pranav Desai, founder of VOSAP, for his expertise in the disability sector and invaluable insights for our work

WHY THIS MATTERS TO VOSAP

VOSAP's mission of Data driven Advocacy has been strengthened by collaboration with the Data Sciences Department of UC Berkeley. While Covid19 Vaccination drive is going on VOSAP wanted to find data on Vaccination against Rubella Virus. Reason being, even after 50 years of vaccine invention to protect against Rubella Virus. 110 thousand children were born with disabilities as per GAVI report. Because of the Rubella virus infecting the pregnant woman, the sufferings and cost associated with maintaining the life of specially abled children is enormous. This research project provides inputs on the investments and associated returns for various countries which students of UC Berkeley collected and analyzed data available for UNICEF and WHO. VOSAP intends to present its findings to help ministers, policy makers and ambassadors to the UN of selected countries.

ABOUT VOICE OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE INC

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. In addition to enabling individuals with assistive devices, surgical interventions, scholarships etc, VOSAP has created innovative digital transformation tools to promote inclusion of Person with disabilities such as (a) Virtual Art Gallery on Disability to educate masses on disability and promote inclusion, (b) create crowdsource demand for accessibility of public places and create mass movement of virtually connected ~ 10,000+ volunteers/changemakers using VOSAP App.

