

The thousand faces of beauty: How credible storytelling unlocks disability representation in inclusive luxury fashion branding

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Abstract

The increasing popularity of inclusive marketing as part of the broader strategies of brand activism, linked to the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) movement, is creating new opportunities for luxury fashion brands to signal their responsibility and openness when it comes to these issues. However, such inclusivity initiatives can lead to consumer backlash when luxury brands rely on perfectionism and self-esteem to elicit admiration and desirability. We ask whether weaving models with disabilities into brand narratives contributes to positive consumer responses. Using signaling theory, our study employs a structural equation modeling approach to show that, despite the negative effect of perceived brand inclusivity on consumers' willingness to buy, the serial mediation by *transportation into brand stories* and *advertising credibility* flips the effect to positive. By doing so, this study also extends extant literature on inclusive advertising in luxury fashion by going beyond dominant manifestations of inclusivity tackling feminism and LGBTQAI+ rights.

Keywords: Inclusive marketing, diversity, disability, luxury fashion, advertising inclusivity, transportation into stories, brand activism

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1. Introduction

The field of luxury fashion marketing is going through a transformative change in response to the growing emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), driven by increasing consumer expectations (Kipnis et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2019; Park et al., 2022). For example, The Prada Group and Burberry were among the first luxury brands to join The Valuable 500 initiative, which advocates for the rights and needs of people with disabilities (Ell & Conti, 2021). This strategic move is significant given that 15% of the global population lives with a disability (World Health Organization, 2019), representing a substantial disposable income exceeding \$8 trillion (Donovan, 2020). In advertising, Gucci has garnered attention for featuring the first model with Down Syndrome in its recent campaigns (Alger, 2022). Additionally, British Vogue's May cover spotlighted five trailblazers from the world of films, sports, comedy and fashion, all of whom have disabilities, as part of a broader initiative aimed at fostering inclusivity and supporting the disabled community (Mowbray, 2023). Many have praised this luxury strategy as it departs from more conventional dimensions of diversity and inclusion, such as women's rights and LGBTQAI+ (McKinsey Report, 2022). Critically, it positions luxury brands in a more socio-politically active role, challenging the systemic inequalities faced by disabled individuals (Michel et al., 2022).

This socio-political role is well captured in the notion of brand activism, which describes a brand's effort to "promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society" (Sarkar, 2018,

p. 554). Within brand activism, brands' efforts to spread the value of the acceptance of diversity by undertaking inclusivity and valorization strategies for marginalized consumers, such as disabled citizens, have emerged as some of the most prominent opportunities for companies to be ambassadors for an important cause, improve society and ultimately reaffirm their long-established role as cultural authorities (Holt, 2002; Moorman, 2020) at a societal level.

However, the diversity and inclusion perspective stands in contrast to the dominant reality of luxury consumption, which is primarily driven by wealth, status and aspiration (Wang, 2022). First, this contradiction is underpinned by a narrow definition of beauty and perfection in fashion (Baek et al., 2022; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012). Many luxury fashion brands have historically utilized unattainable beauty and body images to cultivate consumer admiration (Ko & Megehee, 2012), placing themselves at a psychological distance from the general public, and fostering a perception of exclusivity (Hansen & Wänke, 2011). Yet, the notion of brand inclusivity challenges this exclusivity by emphasizing openness to everyone, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or age (Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021; Zmuda, 2014). Inclusive brands refer to the intention to foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among individuals with often marginalized identities, such as people of color, people with disabilities and older consumers (Licsandru & Cui, 2018; Park et al., 2022). Consequently, luxury fashion consumers, primarily motivated by the desire for aspiration, may perceive the use of disabled models as having low authenticity, which highlights some potential risks (Sipilä et al., 2021). Second, some literature suggests that consumers view this inclusive brand strategy as a form of “woke washing” (Sobande, 2019), where the symbolism of diversity and social justice is hijacked for commercial and short-term gains (Burgess et al., 2022). Given these risks, how can luxury fashion brands authentically engage in inclusive marketing strategies to address their checkered history of promoting unrealistic beauty standards, perfectionism and materialism?

Perceived brand inclusivity refers to consumers' perception that a brand's portrayal of diverse groups helps to foster belonging, acceptance, empowerment, respect and equality (Licsandru & Cui, 2018). To date, research on the effectiveness of inclusive marketing has predominantly focused on non-luxury contexts, with limited attention being paid to the luxury sector (Eisend et al., 2022). In fashion research, the primary emphasis has been on the portrayal of models in advertising, concerning factors such as gender (Park et al., 2023), body type and size (Shoenberger et al., 2020), ethnicity (Strebinger et al., 2018) and sexual orientation (Li, 2022). However, there is very little research exploring disability inclusion, except for Qayyum et al. (2023), who demonstrated that disability representation can enhance consumers' wellbeing. Foster and Pettinicchio (2022) argue that the use of disabled people in advertising is exceedingly rare and often hidden, despite their economic potential. When they are featured, they are frequently associated with pity or 'inspiration porn' (Grue, 2016), which drastically departs from the 'elitism' and 'high quality' image associated with luxury fashion (Michaelidou et al., 2022). Consequently, the current literature does not offer a clear picture of how luxury consumers will react to disability images in a brand's push to be more inclusive (Michel, 2022). This represents a crucial question that luxury fashion brands must address if they are earnestly considering embracing inclusivity seriously.

Using signaling theory, this study aims to answer two interrelated questions: "Does engaging in inclusive advertising by featuring models with disabilities contribute to positive consumer responses?" and "What are the mechanisms that drive such responses?" To answer these questions, we posit that perceived brand inclusivity in luxury fashion can positively shape consumers' willingness to buy via (1) perceived uniqueness, (2) transportation into stories and (3) advertising credibility. In particular, we argue that inclusive advertising, as an emergent manifestation of brand activism, signaled by the portrayal of models with disabilities, leads to higher perceived uniqueness, as it is an atypical and novel approach as compared to other facets

of diversity (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022; Houston, 2022). Additionally, we contend that brand inclusivity can drive strong transportation into stories where meanings can be changed (Grigsby et al., 2022) and subsequently lead to an increased perception of credibility that can mitigate the negative effect of inauthentic inclusion associated with disability in advertising.

This research makes three important theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to the inclusive marketing literature (Eisend et al., 2022; Kipnis et al., 2021), as part of the broader debate regarding brand activism, by showing that disability inclusion in branding discourse involves greater uncertainty and risk, where the potential costs could be higher, especially in the luxury fashion context. This contradicts existing studies that promote the link between inclusivity, firms' commercial gain and consumers' wellbeing in the non-luxury context (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022; Houston, 2022; Timke, 2019). Second, our research offers a novel approach to mitigate the distance between the concepts of exclusive luxury and inclusivity via two mediators (i.e. transportation into stories and advertising credibility). This means that advertising can play a transformative role with the help of credible storytelling (Grigsby et al., 2022). Third, by focusing on the luxury fashion context, our research extends extant literature on brand activism (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Vredenburg et al., 2020) and the growing segment of competence-based luxury consumers (Wang, 2022) by suggesting that luxury fashion brands, when perceived as engaging, credible and authentic, could play an active role in changing norms and stereotypes. These brands need to be brave and go beyond mainstream manifestations of inclusivity that tackle feminism and LGBTQAI+ rights, to further explore how disability can be added to the diversity conversations. In doing this, brands need to naturally embed disability in brand discourse in a way that can be seen to be honest and coherent with the brand essence. This could provide a more complete understanding of how diversity can contribute to positive luxury fashion.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Brand activism, inclusive marketing and disability representation in luxury fashion

Brand activism, operating at the intersection of culture, purpose and society, has emerged over the last few years as one of the most prominent and fast-growing debates in the branding literature (i.e., Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). The brand activism debate recognizes the role of brands as cultural authorities that are responsible for bringing to the fore and contributing to solving issues that are relevant and cogent at a societal and political level in a certain historical moment (Holt, 2002; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023). Notably, brand activism conceives of the brand not only as a social actor, but also as a “moral subject” (Sibai et al., 2021, p. 2) that has the cultural authority to drive various forms of reform – social, moral, legal, business, economic, political and environmental – through communication and actions (Gambetti et al., 2021; Holt, 2002; Moorman, 2020), all aimed at improving society (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brand activism can also function as a form of virtue signaling, cultivating a virtuous reputation that positively impacts brand equity (Lee et al., 2024). One of the most prominent pillars of brand activism currently is that of inclusive marketing.

Inclusive marketing is a recently emerged branding strategy that is part of a brand activism approach, whereby companies promote a culture of belonging, acceptance, empowerment, respect and equality through communication campaigns that depict diverse groups, with a focus on marginalized minorities (Licsandru & Cui, 2018; Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021), with the aim of improving society. This approach seeks to challenge stereotypes and is typically defined as opposing exclusion or marginalization (Arsel et al., 2022). Research on advertising representation in the fashion industry has predominantly focused on important social categories, including gender, age, body size, race, ethnicity,

religion and cultural identity (Arsel et al., 2022; Timke, 2019). For example, femvertising campaigns aim to challenge traditional female stereotypes (Michaelidou et al., 2022; Shoenberger et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2015) of thin and White Caucasian images. Additionally, McFarlane and Samsioe (2020) found evidence countering negative stereotypes related to age. Despite the significance of these studies in promoting inclusivity, the representation of disability remains relatively rare (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022). In an industry that is overly obsessed with idealized beauty standards, and marginalizes those who do not conform (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), the portrayal of individuals with disabilities in advertising tends to be overly sanitized and naively conceived to elicit favorable consumer reactions. This raises the question of what sets the representation of people with disabilities apart from other aspects of diversity in luxury fashion and is therefore worthy of study.

Disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), refers to a physical or mental impairment that significantly restricts an individual from performing one or more major life activities. In fashion, models with disabilities often find themselves routinely excluded from mainstream advertisements due to the industry's emphasis on a narrow and idealized standard of beauty (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022; Thomas, 2001). Fashion brands tend to 'cherry pick' portrayals of disability such as models in wheelchairs, while overlooking other forms of disabilities (Houston, 2022). Relatedly, empirical evidence regarding consumer responses to disability inclusion appears somewhat contradictory. Some studies (e.g., Eisend et al., 2022; Burgess et al., 2022) suggest that consumers are likely to favor disability inclusion because it signals a brand's altruistic intentions and can evoke positive emotions, including a feeling of connectedness, self-esteem and internal self-satisfaction. Qayyum et al. (2023) argue that inclusive advertising featuring disability on Instagram, in non-luxury contexts, can promote hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing as it resonates with consumers at a deeper level, tapping into their sense of purpose and value. Other studies reveal that consumers consider

models with disabilities as inspirational, attributing to them qualities such as those of superheroes (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022). In contrast, there are studies (e.g., Feng et al., 2019) that suggest that consumers may perceive marketing efforts promoting self-empowerment in disability-inclusive advertising as manipulative. In the context of luxury fashion, there is limited research exploring the impact of disability inclusion in brand campaigns. Consequently, there is a need for further research to understand whether and how inclusivity in luxury fashion influences consumer behaviors and attitudes (Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021).

2.2. Signaling theory in luxury fashion

According to signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973), brands actively use strategic signals to convey specific positive attributes to consumers and reduce information asymmetry, while creating points of difference. Connelly et al. (2011) state that the theory is shown to apply when consumers respond to these signals and evaluate the authenticity of a brand's communication. In the context of disability inclusion within the luxury fashion industry, information asymmetry arises because most consumers tend to overlook inclusivity messages (Carrigan et al., 2013; Joo & Kim, 2021; Joy et al., 2012). This holds true even when brands signal inclusivity by featuring black or plus-size models, with considerations like self-esteem and conspicuousness often outweighing concerns related to social justice and activism in the minds of consumers (McCormick & Ram, 2022). This may be attributed to consumers' preconceived notions that a more diverse and inclusive luxury campaign might still comprise the traditional notions of beauty, sophistication (Thomas, 2001), attractiveness (Watson et al., 2015) and representation of the norm (Heine, 2010), or even be seen as exploitative (Feng et al., 2019). Regardless of the outcomes, a luxury brand's engagement in inclusivity signaling reflects its socio-political values and activist posture. These signals reduce information

asymmetry between the brand and its consumers by providing insights into its socio-political stance. Consequently, consumers assess the brand's commitment to narrowing the divide between authentic inclusion and their own aspirations within luxury consumption.

Recent studies have indicated that some luxury consumers are also intrinsically motivated by 'luxury competencies' and are more inclined to be activists engaged in trying to make luxury more inclusive (Wang, 2022). These competent consumers show a genuine interest in understanding aspects such as design, craftsmanship and aesthetic preference, and have a heightened sensitivity to luxury symbols. These competencies also emphasize diverse consumption goals and underlying ideologies in the debate surrounding luxury consumption that typically include issues around diversity and inclusion, environmental sustainability, working conditions and animal cruelty (Wang, 2022). The existing literature shows a shifting landscape in luxury consumption. Specifically, luxury is transitioning "from class to mass" (Kapferer, 2015), with the emergence of inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2015) and quiet luxury (Shukla et al., 2023), and the rise of ethical luxury (Davies et al., 2012). Consequently, consumers now utilize luxury products to signal not only their financial status but also their depth of knowledge, alignment with social values, sophistication and personal ideologies. This transformation has led to a diluted traditional wealth signal associated with luxury consumption.

In sum, we expect that such luxury consumers with a heightened appreciation for luxury competencies are more inclined to appreciate activism aimed at promoting inclusivity within the luxury industry. When these consumers are exposed to disability inclusion initiatives within luxury campaigns, it is expected to raise their perception of brand inclusivity. As a result, their willingness to buy from such inclusive brands is likely to increase.

H1: Perceived brand inclusivity has a positive impact on consumers' willingness to buy.

2.3. The mediating role of perceived uniqueness

Perceived uniqueness is defined as the perception of being unique, special and separable from the majority (Jebarajakirthy & Das, 2021). The perceived uniqueness in the luxury context typically derives from inaccessibility, prestigiousness and rarity (Kapferer, 1998). This is because consumers are more ready to buy unique luxury items to enhance their self-esteem and social status. In line with signaling theory, we argue that brand inclusivity can signal uniqueness in the sense that luxury fashion advertising including models with disabilities is seen as rare, unusual (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022) and atypical (Amatulli et al., 2020; Batra et al., 2010). Disability in the modeling industry is regarded as distinctive because it encompasses a wealth of knowledge, skills, talents, interests and experiences that contribute to the increased diversity and creativity within society. It is often referred to as a source of 'inspiration', similarly to how unique design sets luxury brands apart. This uniqueness contributes to brand differentiation (Zhan & He, 2012). That is, uniqueness in terms of disability enhances brand awareness, increases positive brand sentiment among consumers and, in turn, may generate positive revenue (Brown et al., 2018).

We expect that more inclusive advertising featuring disabled models is likely to drive consumers' perception that the brand is unique and different, deviating from the norm and typical models associated with luxury brands. This deviation can foster a distinctive identity (Goldberg et al., 2016) and can even be perceived as exciting and exclusive (Pochepstova et al., 2010). In addition, perceived uniqueness has extensively been shown to be a driver of willingness to buy in regard to luxury items (Amatulli et al., 2020). Therefore, it is proposed that a mediating effect exists whereby:

H2: Perceived uniqueness positively mediates the impact of brand inclusivity on consumers' willingness to buy.

2.4. The mediating role of transportation into stories

Transportation into stories refers to the process by which an individual fully immerses themselves in a narrative, momentarily disconnects from their current context and self, and engages themselves in the story (Green & Brock, 2000). When individuals are transported into a story, they can empathize with the characters, even if those characters have different values or appearances (Escalas, 2004; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2011). This emotional investment in the narrative, including its plot and characters, has been shown to be important (Van Laer et al., 2019). Previous research indicates that content containing narrative structures increases feelings of identification. In the luxury fashion context, consumers who identify with the inclusivity depicted in marketing campaigns are more likely to be transported into the narrative than those who view a standard luxury campaign. For example, consider the model, Nina Marker, who has worked with major brands like Chanel and Dolce & Gabbana and has openly discussed her experience as a model with Asperger's, a form of autism (Hogan, 2021). Images in editorial or mass advertising, as well as on the catwalk, can evoke feelings of respect, admiration and empowerment, particularly when showcasing such remarkable stories (Gurzki et al., 2019). Hence, a more inclusive advertising campaign featuring disabled models – both physically and non-physically disabled – is likely to drive narrative transportation to a greater extent than a less inclusive campaign.

Additionally, we expect that the degree of transportation into stories may mediate the effect of perceived brand inclusivity on an individual's willingness to buy. In the state of powerful transportation, imagery featuring disabled models is perceived as less intimidating and leads to outcomes such as an increased propensity for attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, positive recommendations and intention to buy (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). In some

circumstances, powerful stories can cause consumers to reevaluate their beliefs and the meanings attached to brands (Green & Brock, 2000), thereby reducing the perceived risks associated with the contradiction between aspirational values and inclusivity (Sipilä et al., 2021). Stories about people with disabilities are particularly valuable in the fashion industry, where social norms are evolving, and younger consumers are demanding greater social responsibility from luxury brands (Batat, 2022). Therefore, it is proposed that a mediating effect exists whereby:

***H3:** Transportation into stories positively mediates the impact of brand inclusivity on consumers' willingness to buy.*

2.5. The mediating role of advertising credibility

Advertising credibility is defined on the basis of honest, reliable, trustworthy and accurate information (Hussain et al., 2020; Xu, 2014) and delivering what is promised (Erdem & Swait, 2004). In this sense, the motive of a firm is important, and credibility is often built and solidified over time through repeated actions but can quickly be lost if trust is violated. We propose that a brand's inclusivity affects its advertising credibility in portraying models with disabilities. Luxury fashion brands have engaged in inclusivity issues in several ways, including designing adaptive fashion (Foster, 2021), digitalization (Joo & Kim, 2020) and, more recently, including models with disabilities in their campaigns. As luxury brands are expected to be exclusive, we argue that quietly featuring models with disabilities alongside typical models can increase the perception of credibility. This is because consumers prefer a quiet approach to a loud one (Janssen et al., 2017). In contrast, when luxury brands shout about their positive initiatives, this is typically perceived as inauthentic (Sobande, 2019) and, at worst, as woke washing (Ahmad et al., 2024). Whilst images of models with disabilities can be

criticized as being sanitized and not providing an accurate representation of the lives of disabled people (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022), a commitment to inclusivity, demonstrated by weaving disability into brand narratives, can be seen as aligning with warmth and altruistic motivations (Joo & Wu, 2021). Hence, consumers are more likely to perceive such initiatives as believable, honest and trustworthy. Past studies also show that advertising credibility leads to positive behavior such as willingness to buy, positive word of mouth and engagement (Sweeney & Swait, 2008). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Advertising credibility mediates the impact of perceived brand inclusivity on consumers' willingness to buy.

2.6. Perceived uniqueness, transportation into stories and advertising credibility: Do we need all these mediators sequentially?

While the previous sections discussed the three mediators separately, the literature also indicates that they can work together. This is known as serial mediation, where all of the mediators need to work at the same time to explain consumers' willingness to buy. Previous studies have repeatedly shown that consumers' response to a firm's inclusivity in advertising depends on its goals and motives (Baek et al., 2022). This is because, with a plethora of inclusivity claims, consumers' inferences about why a luxury fashion brand engages in inclusivity, especially in portraying diverse models, form a pivotal driver of their response (Burgess et al., 2022). In general, these studies have differentiated commercial from authentic motives. For example, commercial motives reflect the perception that a luxury fashion brand's inclusivity effort is motivated by self-interest in terms of increasing its consumer base by manipulating images and representations of models with disabilities (Timke, 2019), which are highly sanitized (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022). There is less accurate representation due to the

fear that such an image will not be beautiful enough or congruent with the luxury brand. In contrast, authentic motives reflect the perception that a firm's inclusive advertising is motivated by altruistic intentions and warmth towards the general public (Kervyn et al., 2012; Jo & Wu, 2021).

In the luxury fashion sector, the need for exclusivity is incompatible with inclusive advertising (Wang, 2022; Winston, 2016). We argue that whether consumers infer altruistic motives from inclusive luxury advertising depends on, first, whether such advertising is perceived as unique. Given that the portrayal of models with disabilities is rare (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022), we propose that a luxury fashion brand's intention to engage in inclusivity through advertising via disability can increase the perception of its uniqueness. However, such uniqueness is not sufficient to drive positive behaviors. This is because consumers need to be emotionally engaged via transportation into stories which can enhance their empathy, for example, with people in need (Grigsby et al., 2022), including disabled people. Hamby and Jones (2022) further suggest that intensity and discrete emotions can foster trust. Hence, the more the consumer is immersed in disability narratives, the more likely they are to perceive the advertising as credible, honest and trustworthy, which is a key ingredient and an important link that mitigates negative judgements (e.g., about woke washing) and reinforces positive outcomes. That is, the more unique, credible and engaging the brand story is, the higher the willingness to buy. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: The relationship between brand inclusivity and willingness to buy is sequentially mediated by perceived uniqueness, transportation into stories and advertising credibility, respectively.

In summary, this study answers the calls for research to examine the multiple, specific interrelationships between brand inclusivity and willingness to buy. We hypothesize a path whereby the effect of perceived brand inclusivity on willingness to buy is mediated by perceived uniqueness, transportation into stories and perceived credibility: perceived brand inclusivity → perceived uniqueness → transportation into stories → advertising credibility → willingness to buy. The conceptual model is summarized in Figure 1:

<Insert Figure 1 here>

3. Methodology

3.1. Research context, sampling and data collection

We tested our model with a sample of individual consumers within the context of the luxury fashion industry in the UK. This context is of interest for several reasons. First, the UK is one of the world's leading countries in the promotion of DEI and has specific aspirations to increase employment among people with disabilities (Gov.UK, 2022). The Office for National Statistics (2021) reports that the number of disabled people in employment in the UK is 4.8 million, representing an increase of 1.9 million since 2014. Second, there is a growing trend for advertisers to make more effort to increase society's awareness and acceptance of people with disabilities (Ell & Conti, 2021) by portraying disabled models in advertising campaigns. As the acceptance of disabled models is an emerging notion and the empirical understanding of consumers' or society's perceptions of this notion remains limited (Foster & Pettinicchio, 2022), this research study can be considered timely, particularly as it can guide businesses that wish to operate within this market.

Data collection involved three phases: a pre-test, a pilot test and main data collection. This comprehensive process ensured methodological criteria were met for survey development, minimizing sampling bias and ensuring truthful, high-quality responses (Haws et al., 2022). Except in the pre-test, data were gathered online via Prolific Academic, a commonly used platform in marketing and branding research (Palan & Schitter, 2018).

3.2. *Questionnaire design and item measures*

To operationalize and generate measures for the five constructs in Figure 1, we extensively reviewed prior literature. We considered the constructs' relevance to our study's goals and examined whether their definitions and associated items were suitable and empirically validated. We followed Bagozzi's (1984) Holistic Construal and Haws et al.'s (2022) guidance in deploying scales and items. While using empirically validated scales 'as is' is preferred, adapting or modifying them is acceptable (Haws et al., 2022). Four constructs (Perceived Uniqueness, Transportation into Stories, Advertising Credibility and Willingness to Buy) required no modification, but Perceived Brand Inclusivity was slightly adapted due to its lack of alignment with our specific context (i.e., using disabled models).

Perceived Brand Inclusivity: Due to the limited validated scale that existed, we adopted five items from Liscandru & Cui (2018) and three items from Power et al. (2010) ($\alpha = .98$). *Perceived Uniqueness* was captured using three items from Jebarajakirthy and Das (2021) ($\alpha = .91$). *Transportation into Stories* came from Green & Brock (2000) ($\alpha = .95$). *Advertising Credibility* came from Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) ($\alpha = .92$) and was measured through three scale items: Not Credible/Credible; Untrustworthy/Trustworthy, and Deceptive/Honest. Finally, the *Willingness to Buy* measure was adapted from Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) ($\alpha = .90$). In total, a set of 28 Likert-type items (anchored 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 =

strongly agree) was developed to measure the five constructs. Table 1 summarizes all of the measures used in this survey.

The survey had two parts: (1) We screened respondents based on previous luxury fashion purchases and assessed their familiarity with brands using disabled models in ads; (2) we presented images of disabled models in ads and descriptions of luxury brands' inclusivity efforts before asking the respondents to answer a series of questions regarding the focal construct. We examined the Top 100 luxury fashion brands (Brand Finance, 2022) and identified those that featured disabled models. Since the representation is scarce, we chose Gucci and Victoria's Secret as they are well known in the industry, and have been pioneers in featuring disabled models in their brand campaigns, increasing ecological validity (van Heerde et al., 2021). As a result, we selected well recognized images of (a) Winnie Harlow, a model with vitiligo, walking the runway for Victoria's Secret (Valenti, 2018), (b) models using wheelchairs in fashion shows and (c) Ellie Goldstein, the first model with Down Syndrome, who made her mark by modeling for Gucci (Yates, 2020) (see Appendix A). These images, along with a short description, served as an external cue for our respondents. Then, they were prompted to envision their favorite luxury brand and consider what might influence their perceptions before responding to the primary question.

3.3. Pre-test (content and face validation of survey items and questionnaire)

Next, in the *content validation stage*, we asked three marketing experts, including one psychologist, to examine all of the developed items and the full questionnaire, to ensure that our statements of the items addressed in the survey and the images were valid and delivered the intended meanings. Based on these detailed discussions, we were asked to make some adjustments. For example, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were familiar with, or aware of, any luxury fashion brands that had used disabled models. We also added a further

screening question that referred to the timing itself (i.e., the last time they had seen such advertising). Upon completion of this process, we proceeded to the *face validity* stage, which was conducted using postgraduate marketing students in two different universities in London, and in which we obtained a total of 47 responses. We then proceeded to the pilot study.

3.4. Pilot study

The pilot study had two aims: (1) assessing item convergence and (2) evaluating item reliability. We implemented various screening checks, including attention checks and randomization, following Arndt et al.'s (2022) approach, to ensure attentive and truthful responses. We gathered 110 responses through Prolific Academic, with 104 being usable. Most respondents provided brand names in the open-ended section, indicating high-quality responses. We conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and calculated Cronbach's alpha to validate and ensure reliability.

Since the main aim was to test whether all of the items fell within the underlying constructs, EFA was used. Gerbing and Hamilton (1996) recommend EFA as a useful first step for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), particularly when an a priori theoretical model has been used to generate the data. The EFA results indicated that all five factors should be retained and that the EFA items converged very well (Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 = 2815$, $p < 0.000$, $df = 378$). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic was .907, demonstrating the adequacy and suitability of the study's data. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .90 to .94 (Hair et al., 2017). Table 1 exhibits the EFA and Cronbach's alpha results. The study then proceeded to the main data collection.

4. Main data collection and analysis

The main data were collected through Prolific Academic, and we received a total of 701 responses, of which the final usable total was 676. The study's participant demographic reveals a distribution comprising 64% women, with age categories as follows: 57.6% falling within either 25 to 34 or 35 to 44 years, 34% being aged over 45, and 7% falling between 18 and 24 years. In terms of income, 18% of respondents reported earnings above £75,000, 22% fell within the £50,000 to £74,999 range, and 32% reported annual incomes between £25,000 and £49,999. Specifically, individuals within the 25 to 34 age group predominantly earned between £25,000 and £49,000, while those in the 35 to 44 age group mainly fell within the £50,000 to £74,999 income range. Regarding education, 76% of participants held either a Bachelor's degree or had a high-school-level education.

Comparing our study's demographic data to the broader UK population, it is noteworthy that the average income for individuals aged 25 to 34 is £43,000, while those in the 35 to 44 age group have an average income of £44,696 (Clark, 2023). This aligns with the fact that 88.6% of UK consumers who purchase from the fashion industry (which includes apparel goods) fall within the 25 to 44 age range. This specific demographic, of individuals aged 25 to 44, exhibits a significant interest in fashion and generally possesses higher discretionary incomes than younger age groups (Sabanoglu, 2023). Therefore, the study's sample is representative and relevant. Additionally, there is a reported trend in the luxury industry, particularly in fashion, of millennials and Generation Z exerting increasing influence. These generations place significant emphasis on environmental and social impact considerations when buying luxury fashion products, resulting in the industry moving towards ethical and sustainable products and experiences (Sabanoglu, 2023).

To check for robustness, reliability and validity of the data analysis, a preliminary examination of all items and constructs was undertaken. Specifically, we followed the guidelines outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) and scrutinized the significance levels, means and standard deviations of all items. As shown in Table 2, the standard deviations of all constructs were low, suggesting that the respondents' answers did not deviate significantly. Additionally, we also controlled for respondents' characteristics, such as age, gender, education level and income by testing for significant differences in all constructs. The results showed that these differences were statistically insignificant, implying consistency in responses across different demographic characteristics. Hence, we proceeded to the next level of analysis: structural equation modeling (SEM).

We employed a two-step SEM approach, using the default method (maximum likelihood) in Amos 28, where Step I refers to the measurement model and Step II the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In Step I, the measurement model was run based on the 'total disaggregation technique', where each item's error is allowed to be freely estimated (Bagozzi & Heartherthon, 1994). In Step II, the structural model tested the study hypotheses and nomological validity. All 28 items were subjected to CFA and the results are reported next.

5. Results

5.1. Step I: CFA, first-order and measurement model

First, the Step I model showed a good fit (Hair et al., 2017): for example, $\chi^2_{[307]} = 926.701$; $\chi^2/df = 3$; IFI = .96; TLI = .96; CFI = .96; and RMSEA = .05. It is also worth noting that all of the constructs and items exhibited good construct validity except for three items (one from Perceived Brand Inclusivity, one from Transportation into Stories and one from

Willingness to Buy), which were removed one at a time due to high modification indexes and cross loadings (Byrne, 2001). No further examination was needed at this stage since all remaining items had standardized residuals greater than 2.58 (Byrne, 2001).

With regard to the reliability tests, both the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha scores were above the recommended level, ranging between .90 and .94; the correlations (covariance) among the constructs were also acceptably low, ranging from .36 to .71, and the average variance extracted (AVE) were greater than or equal to .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, discriminant validity was confirmed for all of the latent constructs (with the square root of the constructs' AVEs exceeding the bivariate correlation). Finally, convergent validity was supported, as all of the significant parameter estimates were greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). Table 1 exhibits both the EFA and CFA loadings at the two different data collection stages and Table 2 shows the discriminant and convergent validity, as well as the reliability of the scales.

Before proceeding to Step II, we also conducted two additional robustness checks: (1) collinearity diagnostics (via the variance inflation factors, known as VIFs) to ensure that common method bias was not an issue; and (2) that our data were normal (via an examination of the skewness and kurtosis coefficient). The VIF result indicated that all values were less than 3.3 (i.e., ranging from 1.68 to 2.8) and skewness between -2 and + 2 and kurtosis between -3 and +3. Hence, our data were found not to be contaminated by common method bias (Kock, 2015) and not to violate the normality assumption (Hair et al., 2017). Upon confirmation that the reliability and validity of the measurement model were supported, we proceeded to Step II: the full structural model (or nomological validity), in which our study hypotheses were tested.

<Insert Table 1 and Table 2 here>

5.2. Step II: The full structural model – Direct and indirect effects

First, the hypothesized relationships H1, H3, H4 and H5 were all significant. However, H2, Perceived Uniqueness → Willingness to Buy, was found to be insignificant [$\beta = 0.4$; $p = .44$]. Second, H1 (Perceived Brand Inclusivity → Willingness to Buy), although significant, had a negative correlation [$\beta = -0.14$; $p = .03$]. Third, although we found a partial mediation for the remaining hypotheses [H3, H4 and H5] given that both the direct and indirect paths had a significant impact on Willingness to Buy (Zhao et al., 2010), they showed significantly ‘positive’ outcomes.

For example, we found that both H3 [Perceived Brand Inclusivity → Transportation into Stories → Willingness to Buy] and H4 [Perceived Brand Inclusivity → Advertising Credibility → Willingness to Buy] had significant indirect effects ([$\beta = 0.21$; $p < .01$ $CI_{LL} = 0.14$, $CI_{UL} = 0.31$] and [$\beta = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$ $CI_{LL} = 0.10$, $CI_{UL} = 0.25$], respectively). Using the estimand approach to conduct serial mediation (Collier, 2020), a similar result was found for H5, i.e., Perceived Brand Inclusivity → Perceived Uniqueness → Transportation into Stories → Advertising Credibility → Willingness to Buy [$\beta = 0.44$; $p < 0.01$ $CI_{LL} = 0.36$, $CI_{UL} = 0.55$], with the largest effect sizes (R^2) being for Transportation into Stories [$R^2 = 0.21$; $p < 0.01$], followed by Advertising Credibility [$\beta = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$ $CI_{LL} = 0.36$, $CI_{UL} = 0.55$]. Surprisingly, we found an insignificant result for Perceived Uniqueness [$\beta = 0$; $p = .44$] and hence this mediator was not included in the final serial mediation.

In summary, we show two key findings: (1) Perceived Brand Inclusivity does affect consumers’ Willingness to Buy the brand (either directly or indirectly due to a partial mediation case), and (2) to have a positive outcome, we need both mediators, Transportation into Stories and Advertising Credibility. While consumers are willing to buy ‘less’ due to the direct negative effect, the inclusion of both mediators can turn the negative into positive outcomes. Hence, both Transportation into Stories and Advertising Credibility are key mechanisms in

explaining Willingness to Buy. In summary, H1 is partially supported; H3, H4 and H5 are fully supported; and H2 is rejected. Table 3 below summarizes the hypotheses' results.

< Insert Table 3 here>

6. General discussion and theoretical contributions

The study set out to examine the impact of perceived brand inclusivity in luxury fashion brand campaigns featuring disabled models, which represents a novel and emerging inclusive trend. As such, we extend prior research that has predominantly focused on diversity and inclusive advertising within non-luxury contexts (Eisend et al., 2022; Kipnis et al., 2021; Gurrieri et al., 2022) by providing an initial inquiry into inclusive advertising in the luxury fashion sector, presenting some of the first empirical evidence on the relationship between disability in inclusive advertising and consumers' willingness to buy.

Our findings make three important contributions to the literature. First, although there are conventional studies in luxury marketing on the notion of beauty perfection (Baek et al., 2022; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012), on aspiration and elitism (Ko & Megehee, 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2022) and on wealth-based luxury (Wang, 2022), for signaling exclusivity, our paper adds to the knowledge of brand inclusivity in the context of featuring disabled models in brand campaigns to respond to the expectation of DEI. By examining the effect of perceived brand inclusivity in luxury fashion, our research demonstrates an unexpected and direct negative influence on consumers' willingness to buy. This finding diverges from previous studies that have typically indicated a positive relationship between inclusivity and consumers' satisfaction, empowerment (Park et al., 2022) and wellbeing (Qayyum et al., 2023). Intriguingly, in the context of luxury fashion, we observe a reverse relationship. Despite luxury

fashion brands' efforts to signal inclusivity through disability inclusion, it appears that luxury consumers may not respond favorably. In fact, this approach might even dissuade them from buying luxury fashion items, as they may perceive them as incongruent with their expectations (Davies et al., 2012).

This finding is interesting for two reasons. First, with the current global imperative of brand activism, engaging in inclusivity marketing is expected to increase the commercial appeal of brands and products. It is viewed as part of positioning a brand as a cultural authority and advocate for a fairer, more just and inclusive society (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Moorman, 2021; Sarkar, 2018; Sibai et al., 2021). Second, previous research has highlighted the tokenistic approach to woke advertising (Sobande, 2019), which may be perceived to lack authenticity (Baek et al., 2022; Joo & Wu, 2021). Advertisers have been criticized for cherry-picking their favorite issues, such as 'size' and 'race', while neglecting other facets of diversity, particularly disability (Arsel et al., 2022; Henderson & Williams, 2013; Timke, 2019). A single portrayal of disabled models on runways or in editorials may not sufficiently demonstrate this luxury brands' commitment to inclusivity. Even when they do feature disabled models, the portrayals are often inaccurate and overly sanitized. This risk is intensified in the luxury fashion context, as a sudden shift towards inclusivity and acceptance contradicts the traditional expectations of luxury buyers, who associate luxury fashion with 'exclusivity' (Carrigan et al., 2013; Wang, 2022). In sum, this is a significant finding as it extends prior research on disability inclusion in the luxury fashion context, going beyond other facets of diversity (e.g. Eisend et al., 2022) by showing how luxury fashion brands' engagement in inclusive campaigns can potentially harm their brand image.

Relatedly, we extend signaling theory by incorporating behavioral outcomes to explain how transportation into stories can bolster consumers' trust in luxury fashion campaigns, ultimately leading to a greater willingness to buy, notably via advertising credibility. Similarly,

Kharouf et al. (2020), in their study of the service recovery effort, explain that consumer responses and trust can be restored through the signaling of positive message framing. Consequently, our findings suggest that consumer purchasing decisions are influenced indirectly, rather than directly. The findings also show that consumers tend to take into account the uniqueness of the narrative and whether it is perceived as credible and trustworthy, leading to more favorable behavioral responses.

Second – and linked to the abovementioned aspect of narrative uniqueness – this study contributes new insight into the mechanisms that have the potential to translate the strategic value of inclusivity into positive consumer behavior outcomes (Eisend et al., 2022; Strebing et al., 2018; Michealidou et al., 2022). Our research uncovers an indirect and positive relationship, mediated by transportation into stories and advertising credibility. The study indicates that developing powerful, warm and empathetic storytelling via narrative transportation can change consumers' beliefs and meanings, which will eventually lead to positive behaviors. These stories can manifest in heroic stories and empowerment stories that luxury consumers can relate to. More importantly, this shows the power of advertising to normalize what is considered beautiful as well as to showcase belongingness, as good business in the fashion industry (Gurrieri et al., 2022). Linking this to our finding that a single, superficial portrayal of disability may not be sufficient to signal a brand's true commitment to inclusivity, we conclude that embedding disability narratives in luxury brand storytelling, in an empathetic, genuine and systematic way, may result in a more coherent narrative. Such an approach can lead to higher trust and appreciation of the brand message by consumers, which can ultimately increase their willingness to buy.

Last, we contribute to the growing debate in the advertising literature about societal responsibility, equity, inclusion and sustainability (Burgess, 2022; Gurrieri et al., 2022). First, with regards to inclusion and sustainability, extant research on DEI has predominantly focused

on widely discussed global issues such as gender, race, LGBTQAI+ and women's rights. However, our research extends the contemporary branding agenda by emphasizing the representation of disability in advertising. This shift not only aligns with the ongoing brand activism theoretical debate between authenticity and woke washing (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Moorman, 2022) but also underscores the conditions under which inclusive advertising can assert a brand's cultural authority in today's society (Holt, 2002).

Secondly, regarding societal responsibility, being a brand activist entails more than just advocating for equal opportunities. It involves fostering a culture of respect and understanding within the broader community (Ndiaye, 2007). This cultural shift aims to encourage the acceptance of a business environment that enables individuals with disabilities to actively participate and thrive, challenging stereotypes, especially in domains like luxury fashion marketing, and ensuring accessibility in various aspects of life, including employment. Consequently, having a disability should not be perceived as a societal barrier, but rather as an enrichment of the variety of modalities through which people with all their diversity can participate in the construction of contemporary business and society. Hence, when a model with a disability is embraced as a positive initiative by companies and gains societal acceptance, this momentum can potentially enhance the societal and reputational value of the brand's purpose, which could in turn translate into higher consumer appreciation and better financial performance for the brand.

6.1. Managerial implications

The findings of this study have three practical implications for brand managers navigating inclusive advertising in luxury fashion. The overarching takeaway is that effective inclusive advertising has the potential to increase willingness to buy, only when brands

consistently build engaging narrative stories that are perceived as credible, and especially when portraying models with disabilities. Firms with a steadfast commitment to inclusivity need to make a higher advertising investment (Park et al., 2022) so as to educate and train their practitioners. As diversity issues are complex and multi-faceted, many practitioners lack education and awareness around disability issues and barriers. A more strategic approach involving encouraging managers to engage with relevant nonprofit organizations could elevate those managers' goals when communicating about inclusivity, thereby helping a firm differentiate its position.

Second, our study provides insights into how managers can be more confident about engaging in inclusive advertising and narratives (Ferraro et al., 2022). Given that consumers are increasingly seeking out inclusive brands (McKinsey, 2022), it is crucial that managers use transportation into stories to build warmth and empathy in order to be more credible. Managers need to move beyond the 'inspiration porn' and pity narratives that seem to be associated with disability, and be more open about new stories. For example, luxury fashion brands could explore the potential of technology such as the metaverse to develop deeper emotional engagement with customers in relation to inclusivity. For instance, this has just happened with the introduction to the market of Kami, the first virtual influencer with Down Syndrome (Kozinets et al., 2023). Kami is a project of Down Syndrome International (DSi), which partnered with the global digital modeling agency The Diigitals. With the introduction of Kami, the educational aim was to make the metaverse a space for everybody. Creating Kami also represents a cultural challenge to brands to think forward and follow her example, making the digital space a more inclusive and friendly place where disability is finally valorized and normalized, starting with the world of fashion, which has always popularized the opposite values of physical perfection and exclusivity. In this regard, for Kami to offer a credible representation of real women with Down Syndrome, a panel of young women volunteers with

Down Syndrome, from different countries, were engaged to collaborate on her creation as a virtual model—acting as the faces, bodies, gestures, voices and personalities that Kami would embody (Kozinets et al., 2023, p. 331). In addition, managers might consider crafting narratives of warmth and courage in collaboration with activist nonprofit organizations (Lee et al., 2024) that have a history of advocating for equality among marginalized communities, as a means to engage their audience.

Third, brands could adopt a more holistic approach to inclusivity, to truly see a positive societal change in the luxury ecosystem. For example, luxury businesses and practitioners could focus on hiring a diverse team, in addition to featuring diverse models in their campaigns, to broaden the metrics of success. Hence, understanding how customers would react to a frontline service employee with a disability in luxury retailing is an important aspect of building a truly inclusive brand (Essa, 2023), besides designing effective inclusive advertising.

7. Limitations and future research

This research has several limitations, which point to important avenues for future research. First, our study is based on a cross-sectional design using structural equation modeling. This was appropriate because this approach provides “better psychometric scales or corroborates existing scales” and is a great tool for testing advertising theories (Hair et al., 2017, p. 172). However, it does not allow the inference of causality, which was beyond the scope of this research. Future research could consider an experimental design that manipulates and captures fashion brands that engage or do not engage in brand inclusivity, and the perceptions and effectiveness of these campaigns with regard to disabled vs able-bodied consumers. Future studies could also differentiate between visible and hidden disability to examine their differential effects.

Second, our study is based on one sector – luxury fashion – and is focused on disability. This could hinder the generalizability of our results to other contexts. Hence, it would be fruitful for future research to explore and compare a variety of industries that are embracing a strategy of inclusive advertising and attempting to address other diversity facets such as ethnicity, body size, age and intersectionality. Not all facets of diversity are equal. It would be particularly interesting to look at whether the mediators found in this study, such as storytelling, continue to have a positive effect.

Third, our study is based on a UK sample and, on balance, primarily reflects a developed economy and Western culture. It remains for future research to examine cross-cultural differences by replicating the results with samples from other countries (Veloutsou et al., 2021). There is clear merit in examining consumers' responses to brand inclusivity in luxury fashion brands beyond those that occur in European and North American countries. For example, how differently is brand inclusivity in luxury fashion brands received in countries with low equality rights and free speech? How would this be interpreted in communities that tend to be culturally marginalized? Moreover, what is considered good narrative transportation may be different in other contexts. The luxury sector has witnessed the emergence of HENRYs (higher earners not rich yet), who are rational towards luxury and seem to embrace a mixed attitude of pleasure and pain in regard to it (Batat, 2022). Hence, how would luxury fashion brands adapt their inclusivity communication strategies to these audiences?

To conclude, inclusive advertising is complex. While luxury fashion has always been seen as an exclusive business, the shift in societal expectations and wokeness (Vredenburg et al., 2020) is forcing luxury fashion firms to recalibrate and embrace inclusivity in their advertising, specifically in addressing beauty for all (Chandy et al., 2021). Despite that, whilst many luxury brands are speaking out because the costs of silence are high, the costs of 'woke

washing- – e.g. through a single act of disability representation – can be even higher. Our study shows that brand inclusivity can indeed be risky and not financially beneficial to the brand. This is because disabled model inclusivity is perceived as too far from the stereotypical world of flawless female beauty that is usually portrayed in luxury fashion advertising and is therefore perceived as not authentic. However, our findings reveal that the situation changes when inclusivity in advertising is embraced with purpose and embedded in a credible story. We believe that this study may stimulate further research aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the most powerful conditions and constraints that aid and hinder luxury fashion brands' attempts to be perceived as genuinely inclusive toward models with disability, thereby enhancing their brand activism efforts, and enabling them to balance profit with cultural authority and purpose.

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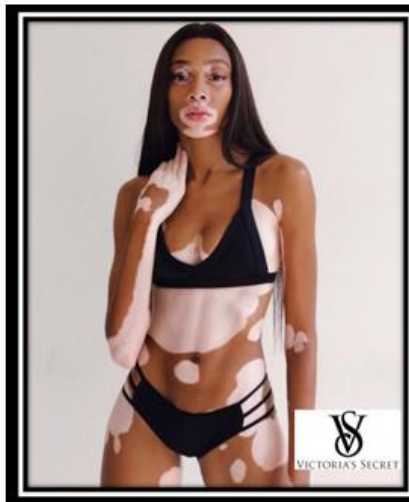
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Appendix A – Images and descriptions used in experimental survey

Photo A



Victoria's Secret is a luxury lingerie brand that runs an annual fashion show.

Victoria's Secret is keen to show **commitment to inclusivity and diversity**; and hence used Winnie Harlow as the first model with vitiligo – a skin condition that causes patches of pigmentation loss on the skin - to walk the runway for the lingerie brand.

Retrieved from: <https://www.vogue.com/article/winnie-harlow-2018-victorias-secret-show-casting-interview>)

Photo B

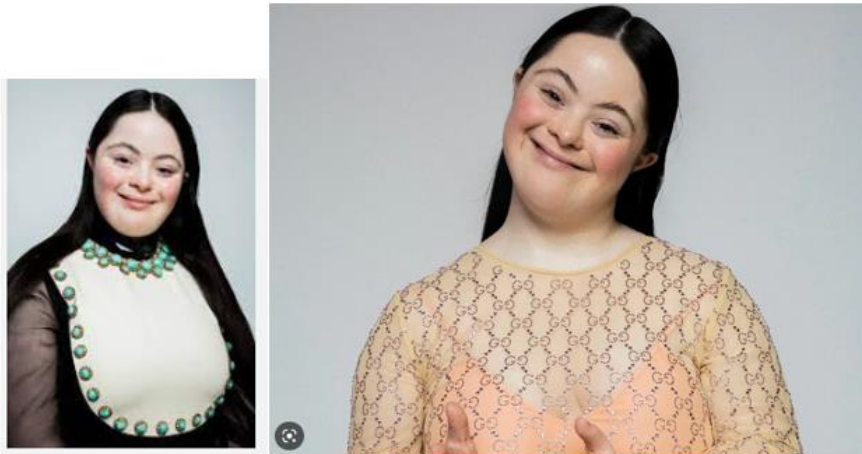


In many fashion shows, luxury brands featured **models in wheelchairs** alongside models without any sort of disability wearing similar outfits.

This is part of luxury fashion brands' efforts to demonstrate that the world of fashion is **accessible to all**.

Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2955283/Disabled-models-catwalk-wheelchairs-New-York-Fashion-Week-promotes-diversity.html>

Photo C



Gucci is an Italian luxury fashion brand. Recently, Gucci started to show inclusivity by fronting Ellie Goldstein, a model with **Down Syndrome** to allow more visibility for all types of people with disabilities.

Gucci shared the stories on the brand's Instagram and the post has become its most-liked image ever with over 83,600 likes and over 1,500 comments praising the casting choice.

Retrieved from: https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/style/story/elli_e-goldstein-model-syndrome-stars-gucci-beauty-campaign-71670206

Figure

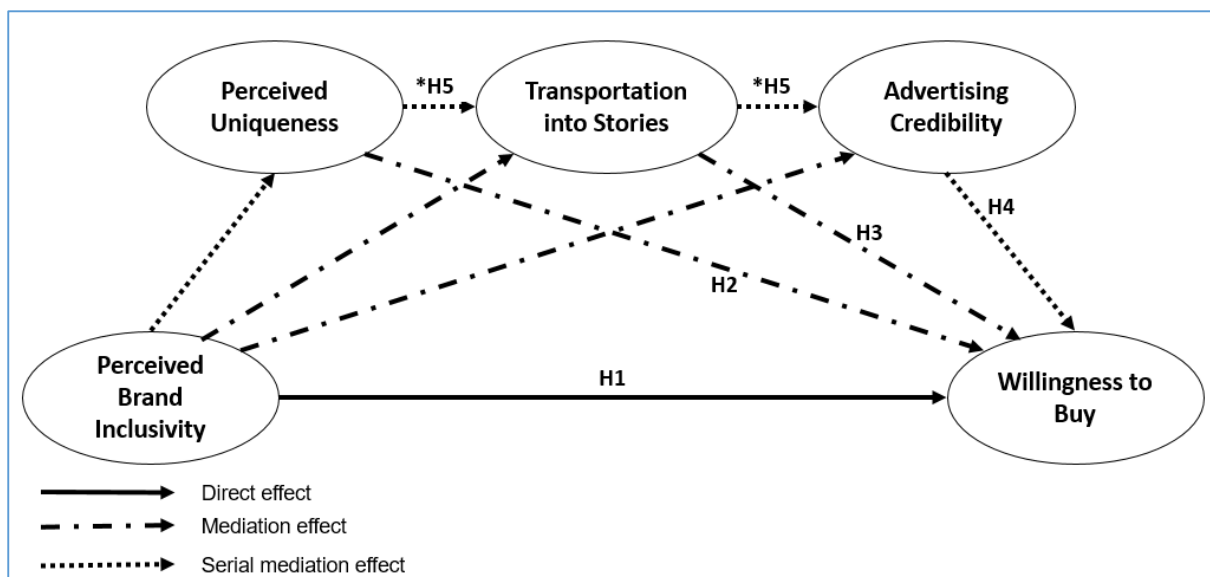


Fig. 1. Research model of the influence of perceived brand inclusivity on willingness to buy

Tables

Table 1

Constructs, item measures and loadings for pilot and main data collection stages.

Constructs/sources	Items	Loadings for	
		EFA Pilot (104)	CFA (Step 1) Main (676)
Perceived brand inclusivity (8 items) Liscandru & Cui (2018), Power and Green's (2010)	Brands using disability models show they care about the society	.783	.844
	Brands using disability models improve the industry	.778	.847
	Brands using disability models find it easier than other brands to attract consumers	.745	.793
	Brands using disability models make me feel emotionally belong to the society	.705	.661
	Brands using disability models make me feel empowered	.610	.864
	Brands using disability models make society more open to diversity	.604	.744
	Brands using disability model make society more equal	.592	.841
	Brands using disability model make society more respectful	0.71	.837
Transportation into stories (8 items) Green & Brock (2000)	*Luxury brand X stories enable me to picture myself in the scene of the events described in the advertisement	.806	*
	Luxury brand X stories make me mentally involved in the advertisement while viewing it	.790	.771
	Luxury brand X stories make me curious about the brand	.778	.82
	Luxury brand X stories excite me about the brand	.763	.861
	Luxury brand X stories raise my expectations about the brand	.724	.899
	Luxury brand X stories make me feel more confident in the brand	.718	.859
	Luxury brand X stories allow me to easily picture the events it is taking place	.698	.873
	Luxury brand X stories help me provide assurance in the product	.642	.729
Perceived uniqueness (3 items) Jebarajakirthy & Das 2021	I perceive this [luxury ad with a disability model] as highly unique	.862	.847
	This [luxury ad with a disability model] is one of a kind	.788	.879
	This [Luxury ad with disability model] is special	.656	.876
Ad Credibility (3 items) Reimer & Benkenstein (2016)	"1" not credible - "7" credible	.857	.872
	"1" untrustworthy – "7" trustworthy	.798	.925
	"1" deceptive - "7" honest	.778	.896
Willingness to buy (6 items) Parasuraman, et al. (1996)	I believe this brand is my first choice for relevant product intentions	.895	.657
	I will choose this brand next time when I buy this product category	.814	.764
	I am willing to try new products of this brand	.783	.693
	I am willing to pay a higher price for this brand than others	.756	.885
	It is very likely that I will recommend this brand to people who ask for suggestions.	.748	.912

I will speak positively about this brand

.615

.792

- Note:
1. All CFA loadings are significant at $p < .01$.
 2. * refers to an item that was removed during purification at the measurement model. In total, 1 item was dropped from further analyses, as it was cross-loaded with high modification indexes (MI) and has large, standardized residuals (SR) (> 2.58), (Byrne, 2001).
 3. EFA loadings refer to pilot data which were 104 responses; CFA loadings refer to final/main data collection with usable - 676 responses.

Table 2

Zero-order correlations, composite reliability, Cronbach alpha, AVE and VIF.

	Mean	S.D.	PBI	TS	PU	AD	WB	Composite reliability	Cronbach Alpha	VIF	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived brand inclusivity (PBI)	4.80	1.25	.806					.94	.938	2.62	-0.80	0.76
Transportation into stories (TS)	4.27	1.29	.698**	.849				.94	.953	2.23	-0.50	-0.03
Perceived uniqueness (PU)	4.33	1.35	.667**	.620**	.867			.90	.907	2.00	-0.28	-0.32
Ad credibility (AD)	5.09	1.28	.641**	.591**	.550**	.897		.92	.924	1.86	-0.60	0.29
Willingness to buy (WB)	4.32	1.04	.458**	.625**	.434**	.497**	.789	.93	.902	1.71	-0.82	0.60

PBI – Perceived Brand Inclusivity; PU- Perceived Uniqueness, TS – Transportation into Stories, AD –Advertising credibility and WB – Willingness to Buy

Note:

1. ** indicates that correlation coefficient is significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed).
2. The square roots of the AVEs (italic and bold) are reported along the diagonal shown that each construct is greater than the correlation coefficients between those constructs and other constructs, hence, discriminant validity is satisfied (Byrne, 2013; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).
3. Further test was conducted for each correlation coefficient using (X^2); results indicated all values are $< AVE$ [i.e., 0.188 – 0.487].

Table 3

Hypotheses results and summary.

	β	p	Bootstrapping indirect effects BCa 95% CI		R^2	Result	Decision
			LL	UL			
H1: PBI $\rightarrow$ WB	-0.14	0.03	-	-	-	Significant (negative) direct effect	Partially supported
H2: PBI $\rightarrow$ PU $\rightarrow$ WB Direct effect: PBI $\rightarrow$ PU [$\beta=0.72$; $p<0.01$]	0.40	0.44	-	-	-	Insignificant between Perceived uniqueness $\rightarrow$ Willingness to buy	Not supported
H3: PBI $\rightarrow$ TS $\rightarrow$ WB	0.21	0.01	0.14	0.31	0.34	Partially mediated by Transportation into stories (positive)	Supported
H4: PBI $\rightarrow$ AD $\rightarrow$ WB	0.17	0.01	0.10	0.25	0.23	Partially mediated by Advertising credibility (positive)	Supported
H5: PBI $\rightarrow$ PU $\rightarrow$ TS $\rightarrow$ AD $\rightarrow$ WB [Serial mediation]	0.44	0.01	0.36	0.55	0.41	Serial mediation case exists, mediated by Transportation into stories and Advertising credibility	Supported

Note: β - Standardized regression weights; PBI – Perceived Brand Inclusivity; PU- Perceived Uniqueness, TS – Transportation into Stories, AD –Advertising credibility and WB – Willingness to Buy. BCa - bias corrected and accelerated at 95% CI (confidence Interval) with 5000 bootstrap samples (a procedure to mediation test via AMOS), LL lower limit, UL upper limit (Hair et al., 2017).