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**Disabled, Designed, Displayed: Commodification of Disability in  
Advertisements by Tommy Hilfiger, Gucci, and Smarteyes  
Denmark**

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the commodification of individuals with disabilities in advertisements by prominent fashion brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Gucci, and Smarteyes Denmark. The research is grounded in the growing narrative of inclusivity within the fashion industry, which, on the one hand, opens up representational space, but on the other often masks visual exploitation. Using a semiotic approach, this study analyses how disabled bodies are constructed within the visual and discursive frameworks of fashion advertising. Findings reveal that such representations frequently combine disability with a superficial aesthetic of diversity, wherein disabled bodies are depicted not as complex subjects, but as empathetic objects commodified for brand image purposes. The study highlights the need for a critical reading of the interrelation between disability, gender, and power dynamics in the contemporary commercial media landscape.*

**Keywords:** commodification, disability, advertising, representation, inclusivity

**Paper type:** Research paper

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## INTRODUCTION

An analysis of 68 articles on disability and marketing published between 1985 and 2022 reveals a significant increase in academic attention, particularly since 2020. However, most of these studies remain focused on the tourism, service, and social marketing sectors. Meanwhile, the representation of disabled bodies in fashion advertising and visual branding practices remains a critically underexplored area. (Celestino et al. 2024).

Perceptions of disability are shaped by social and political structures that often reinforce stereotypes and exclusion. Marketers must design strategies that address individual needs while challenging societal views on disability. Even seemingly inclusive advertisements are influenced by decisions made early in the creative process. The study "Crip Theory and Creative Briefs" highlights that exclusion often starts during brief preparation, emphasizing the need for inclusive strategies from the outset. Criticism of disability representation exists not only in media but also in literature, where characters with disabilities are frequently portrayed as burdens. Re-examining these characters reveals that the experience of disability is complex and intertwined with issues of race, class, and socio-cultural perceptions.e collective imagination. (Henderson 2022).

The issue of disability representation in advertising is not new. The commodification of disabled bodies has been ongoing, though historically in more subtle and medicalised forms. (Thomas 2001). Such representations are ambivalent—visually progressive yet socially non-liberating (Södergren et al. 2022). Previous research also highlights a gap between the lived realities of disabled individuals and their portrayal in advertising media. (Hardin 2003).

Some studies have begun exploring commodification through an intersectional lens—for example, research on disabled women in Pond's advertisements using femvertising frameworks and John Fiske's semiotics.

However, these studies have yet to extend their analysis to more structural theories

of commodification. Commodification is also evident in the music industry, where the disabilities of musicians are used as a visual attraction. (Hincapié-Naranjo et al. 2024).

Unlike earlier studies that focused largely on aesthetic symbolism, the analysis of the ad “Move Goodness Beyond Limits” emphasises its affirmative and optimistic tone in a descriptive way. Nevertheless, such approaches often fail to interrogate the potential ambiguities or hidden risks of tokenism. (Entus Nuryana et al. 2024).

In today’s popular culture, marginalised identities such as queer and disabled are no longer necessarily forms of resistance but instead have been commodified into performative elements. These representations are constructed to align with dominant values such as heteronormativity, patriarchy, and market logic. (Ghassani and Adipurwawidjana 2024, Mustafa et al. 2022, Rizal et al. 2024, Subekti et al. 2022). This kind of commodification holds commercial value; a brand is perceived positively when it successfully integrates disability into its advertising campaigns. (Nadutkina et al. 2023).

Dubost’s (2018) *Disability and Consumption* highlights the economic potential of the disability market, often exploited without critical reflection on the representations being constructed. The commodification of diversity also extends to gender and race, as seen in representations of disabled women in advertising, where they are frequently used as symbols of superficial inclusion. These portrayals do not challenge ableist norms but instead reinforce dominant values. (Feasey 2022, Houston 2019).

Although the advertising industry has begun recognising the importance of disability representation, ongoing dialogue and action are needed to ensure that such practices are genuinely inclusive and respectful of the diverse lived experiences of disabled people (Timke 2023). This is increasingly relevant in a society dominated by consumption, where representation no longer merely reflects reality but is designed to serve commercial interests.

Baudrillard (1994, 1998) explains that in consumer culture, signs—such as diversity—are often detached from their original meanings and reduced to simulations tailored to market needs. In this context, the disabled body is no longer

seen as a unique human existence but as a visual tool to capture consumer attention. These representations are carefully crafted to produce a marketable narrative of diversity, while the authentic meaning of diversity is frequently disregarded.

For example, the Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive advertisement employs visual techniques such as close-ups of the model's face, framing that highlights luxury items, and dramatic lighting to create emotional and aesthetic narratives. These techniques not only present the disabled body as a compelling visual element but also reinforce the brand's image as inclusive and progressive (Gill 2007, Pramaggiore and Wallis 2005). In the case of Smarteyes, a Danish brand that features a model with Down syndrome, diversity is represented through visual symbols aligned with Danish cultural values. As noted by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security (2023). Denmark is known for its strong commitment to equality and inclusivity. However, the extent to which this reflects genuine diversity remains questionable.

This context demonstrates that seemingly inclusive efforts are often marketing strategies rooted in capitalist logic. Borgerson and Schroeder (2002) observe that visuals in advertising are frequently governed by market aesthetics, where commercial value is prioritised. The visual techniques employed in fashion advertisements not only construct an emotional and appealing narrative of diversity but also reinforce the commodification of bodies. This phenomenon aligns with Zhang and Haller's (2013) view that media representations of disability often create inauthentic identities that cater more to market needs than to the individuals themselves.

This commodification can also be understood within the context of global capitalism, where diversity is frequently treated as a marketable asset. Baudrillard (1994) refers to this phenomenon as simulation, where diversity is no longer directly connected to social realities but reduced to a sign that appeals to the market. In this regard, the disabled body is often used to create an illusion of inclusivity without necessarily bringing about meaningful social change. Klein (2014) notes that capitalism often turns social phenomena into market opportunities, making seemingly progressive actions fundamentally rooted in exploitation.

While some advertising campaigns appear promising in creating space for diversity, it is important to remember that the media plays a significant role in shaping public perception. Hall (1997) and Fiske (1987) emphasise that media representations do not merely convey reality—they also construct meaning through specific visual and narrative techniques. In fashion advertising, the disabled body is often used to support a marketable diversity narrative without allowing space for authentic lived experiences.

Accordingly, this study aims to answer two main questions: How are disabled individuals represented in advertisements by Gucci Equilibrium, Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive, and Smarteyes Denmark? How are specific visual techniques used to commodify disabled bodies? By examining the relationship between inclusivity and commodification, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how bodies are constructed in the modern media landscape. Additionally, this research aims to encourage critical reflection on representational strategies employed in the fashion industry and to open up discussions on how diversity can be ethically and meaningfully portrayed.

The novelty of this research lies in the fact that no previous study has analyzed disability representation using three international advertising objects through a cultural studies framework that interweaves the theories of Baudrillard, Fiske, and Foucault, combined with cinematic methods that impact both cultural studies, anthropology, and marketing strategies in media.

### **Theoretical Review**

The commodification of disability in fashion advertising illustrates how disability is symbolised for economic purposes within the framework of capitalism. The representation of people with disabilities not only signals diversity but also captures consumer attention and reinforces brand image. To understand this process, this study draws on three main theoretical perspectives: John Fiske's semiotics (1987), Jean Baudrillard's theory of commodification (1998), and Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics (1977).

### **John Fiske's Semiotics**

John Fiske argues that media constructs social meaning through representations shaped by dominant ideologies. In fashion advertisements featuring individuals with disabilities, the media does not merely reflect reality, but actively constructs social representations. Fiske breaks down the process of representation into three levels: reality, representation, and ideology. Media shapes public perception of disability through visuals and narratives, and these representations form meaning through visual signs. At the ideological level, such analysis reveals how disability is commodified in fashion advertising.

### **Jean Baudrillard's Commodification**

Baudrillard asserts that in capitalist societies, objects are valued based on their symbolic significance. In fashion advertisements, disability becomes a symbol of diversity that is commodified to generate market value. These representations often produce a state of hyperreality, where the image of bodily diversity outweighs the social reality. Disability is transformed into a symbol of inspiration intended to attract consumer attention rather than reflect the lived experiences of disabled individuals, thus serving marketing goals rather than driving substantial social change.

### **Michel Foucault's Biopolitics**

Foucault introduced the concept of biopolitics to explore how power regulates bodies in society. In fashion advertising, the bodies of disabled individuals are often positioned as objects used to construct empowerment narratives. However, despite the appearance of promoting empowerment, these bodies are frequently used to add value to the product rather than to advocate for genuine social transformation. Foucault emphasises that fashion advertising primarily serves to reinforce capitalist power through visual and narrative control over disabled bodies.

## **METHODS**

The main focus of this research was to identify key scenes featuring people with disabilities using the promoted products. I watched the ads repeatedly to

observe patterns of representation, note significant visual elements, and collect relevant scenes for analysis. Scene selection was done in a structured way, by observing interactions between people with disabilities and products, such as glasses or shoes. Three main criteria were used: the presence of visual elements that support diversity, the visual relevance of the model and product interaction, and the potential of the scene for ideological analysis, especially commodification. For example, a Tommy Hilfiger advertisement features high heels on a model with a wheelchair.

The analysis uses Fiske's (1987) The semiotic approach, which divides media representations into three levels: reality, representation and ideology. At the reality level, visual elements such as mobility aids and body expressions create perceptions of diversity. The representation level focuses on visual cues, such as camera use and lighting, that construct narratives of inclusivity. At the ideological level, the research explores how advertisements reflect the logic of capitalism through the exploitation of disabled bodies as symbols of diversity. Cinematography is an integral part of analysing the level of representation. According to Pramaggiore and Wallis (2005) Cinematography conveys complex social messages. I analysed visual techniques in the ads, including close-ups on the product, framing of the disabled person's body, warm lighting, and slow motion to reinforce the emotional dimension.

At the ideological level, the research draws on Baudrillard's theory of commodification and Foucault's biopolitics. Baudrillard (1998) argues that in a consumerist society, objects and bodies are valued based on their symbolic value. The bodies of people with disabilities are often signs of diversity that create an image of inclusivity, but still serve the logic of capitalism. Foucault (1977) explains that the human body is governed by power. In advertising, the bodies of people with disabilities are visually organised to support the marketing narrative, creating an illusion of diversity structured within the framework of capitalism.

In the advertisements, the bodies of individuals with disabilities are visually organised to support marketing narratives, thereby constructing an illusion of diversity that is structured within a capitalist framework. To strengthen the critical reading, audience responses—such as comments and view counts—are

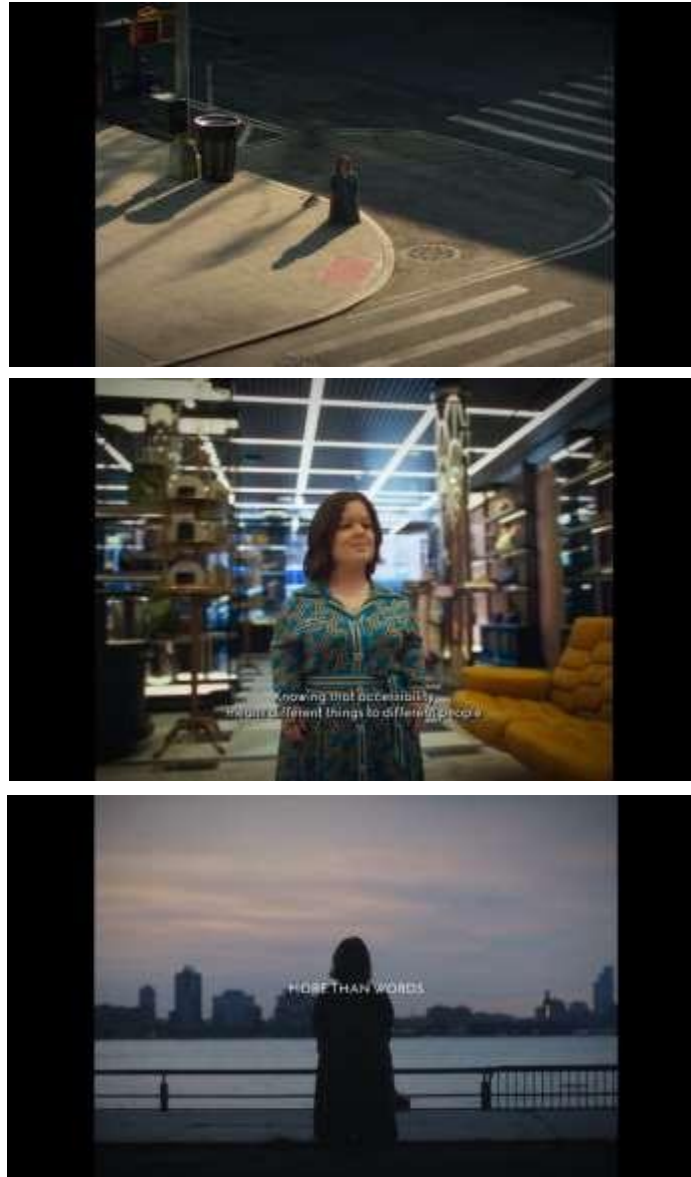
also analysed as part of a reception analysis. This component serves to assess how the public receives representational strategies, and how inspiration porn (Mamo and Haegele 2023) and the logic of spectacle operates in shaping social perceptions of disability. Thus, this method not only examines the content itself but also traces the social resonance and audience reception of commodified forms of diversity. These findings are further contextualised within Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) And Stella Young's articulation of inspiration porn within the field of Critical Disability Studies.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Gucci Ad Discussion

Figure 1.



Gucci Equilibrium-2022 Advertisement  
(Source: YouTube (GUCCI 2023))

This ad starts with the face of a woman with Down syndrome who is shot in *extreme close-up*, then the scene immediately moves to the middle of the city, the

model is shown small and far away (Figure 1). The narration shown is "*The world should be designed for everyone, I'm disabled because I live in a world that wasn't designed for me*". This scene shows the busyness of the people around them and the tall buildings, while the model appears alone in the hustle and bustle of the city.

The scene begins to shift to a more positive space, the model is placed with bright light and socially connected people of black and white races. The scene shows the model from various camera angles. The narrative is "*Knowing that accessibility means different things to different people*".

This scene shows a narrow space where the model begins to convey her emotional side again, walking along the sea, trying to understand her condition and the world today. "*Knowing that accessibility means different things to different people and who's not in the room,*" and "*Who will come with us*" are the emotional narratives that emerge.

### **Stage of Reality and Representation of Gucci Equilibrium Advertisement**

At the reality stage, the Gucci Equilibrium-2022 advertisement (GUCCI 2023) Features a model with Down syndrome wearing luxurious clothes in the middle of a busy city. The model is seen standing between majestic tall buildings and crowds of passers-by. This scene creates a contrasting image between the model's presence and the dense urban environment, as if to highlight the isolation of the individual in a space that is not designed for people with disabilities. The model's choice of luxurious clothing becomes an eye-catching visual element, highlighting the role of fashion as a status symbol that is often associated with exclusivity.

The scene then shifts to a warmer and more inclusive atmosphere, where the model starts talking to people from diverse backgrounds. This interaction illustrates the shift from isolation to social connection. The presence of individuals of different races adds an element of diversity. The scene displays a more intimate and friendly atmosphere.

Representatively, the model with Down syndrome is shown using an *extreme close-up* technique that highlights facial expressions in detail. This

technique creates an emotional closeness with the audience while emphasising the sense of isolation. Dark lighting and narrow *framing* support the narrative, "*The world should be designed for everyone, I'm disabled because I live in a world that wasn't designed for me.*"

According to Pramaggiore and Wallis (2005), the use of this kind of lighting and *framing* serves to reinforce the position of the disabled body as marginalised. The *eagle shot* technique of showing the model small and distant amidst the hustle and bustle of the city further emphasises this feeling of alienation. The melancholic background music also reinforces the mood of pessimism, creating a visual sense that a non-inclusive world can make individuals feel out of place. As the scene changes, the lighting begins to shift to be brighter, reflecting the emotional transition from isolation to inclusion. The model begins to look connected to others, including interactions with individuals of different races. The *medium shot* technique is used to show equality in their interactions, providing a visual message that diversity and inclusivity can create social harmony.

Dixon and Linz (2000) Note that racial representation is often associated with stereotyping in the media. In this ad, representations of white and black individuals are used to emphasise diversity. In the final scene, a more overt framing technique shows the transformation of the model's identity. The model is shown confidently wearing Gucci clothes, shown from various angles. The *close-up* technique on her face with bright lighting emphasises her confidence and self-acceptance. This transition supports the narrative: "*We need to reshape how we think about disability and unpick our understanding and beliefs regarding ableism,*" which emphasises the importance of more inclusive representation for people with disabilities.

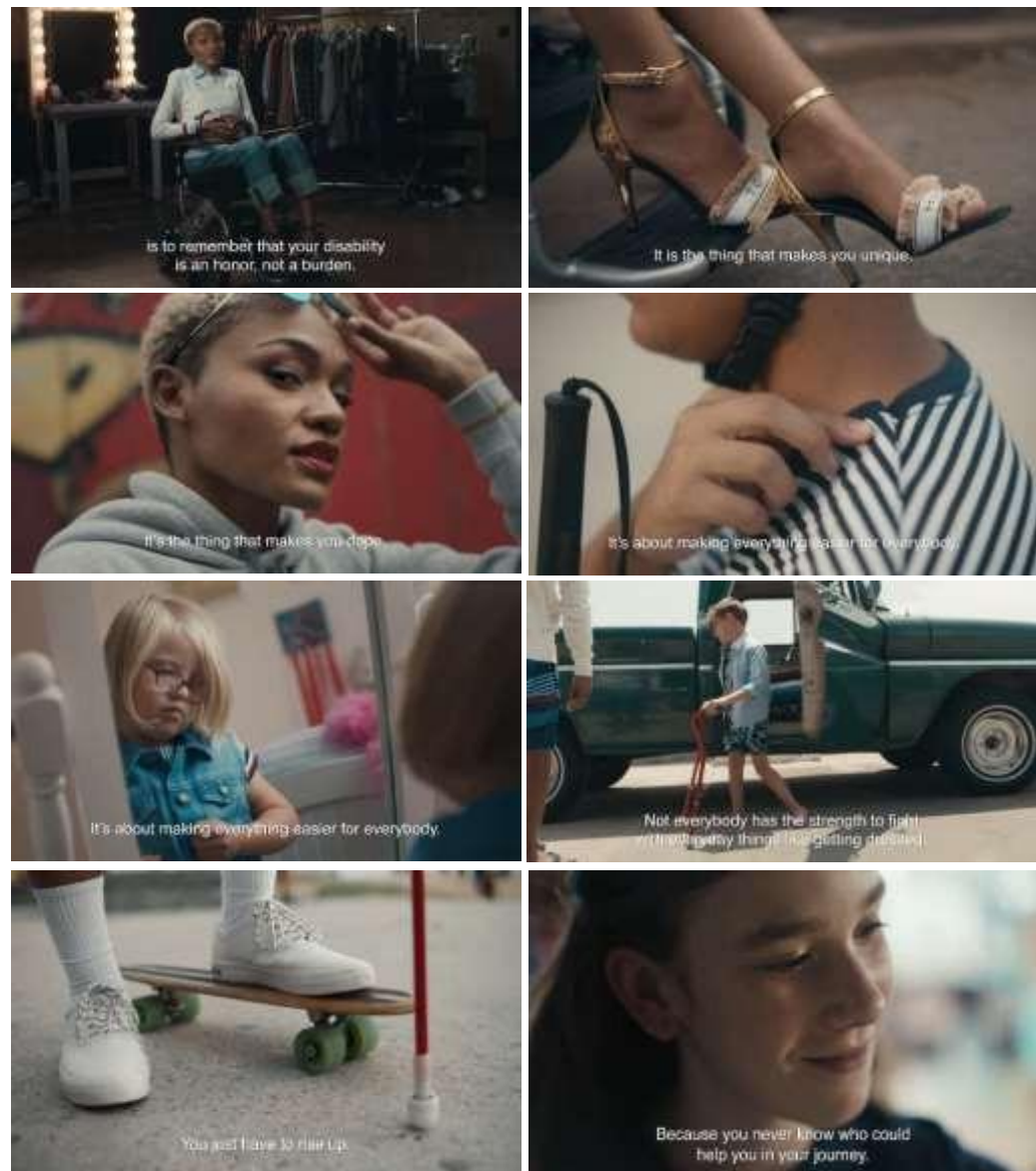
Fiske (1987) argues that media not only reflects reality but also constructs social meaning through signs. Initially, people with disabilities were marginalized, but now they are integrated into a broader social narrative. The shift from pessimism to optimism highlights this change. The final scene's vague shadow allows the audience to envision themselves in it, fostering an emotional connection with inclusivity and accessibility. The question "Is this accessible?" underscores

the need to examine social and physical structures, while "Who's not in the room?" encourages critical thinking about decision-makers. disability access, underscoring the importance of representation.

This ad as a whole shows models wearing Gucci clothes from various *angles* while using techniques to attract emotional audiences, presented with narration and dominant *close-up* camera techniques.

### Tommy Hilfiger Ad Discussion

Figure 2.



Tommy Hilfiger Ad-2018, (Source: YouTube (Hilfiger 2018))

The scene begins with a black narrator in a wheelchair with *high heels*, with Tommy Hilfiger saying, "Remember that your disability is an honour, *not a burden*." (Figure 2.) In Figure 3, we see a man wearing Tommy Hilfiger clothing, identifiable by the black walking aid visible on the screen, indicating that he is a person with a disability. The scene also features a girl with Down syndrome, who is wearing a Tommy Hilfiger shirt and looking at herself in the mirror. The accompanying narration states, "*It's about making everything easier for everybody*," highlighting the brand's commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in fashion.

Additionally, another scene depicts a man exiting a car with the assistance of a walking aid. This moment is followed by the narration, "*Not everybody has the strength to fight with everyday things like getting dressed*." This emphasises the importance of designing clothing that is easy to wear for everyone, regardless of their physical abilities.

The scene (Figure 4) then shows camera highlights on items such as Tommy Hilfiger shoes on skateboarding, with the narrator's voice saying "skateboarding", then the appearance of a model surfing, and then a man with artificial legs dancing, and the narrator again says, "*man dancing*". There is a narrator's explanation behind the scenes. This scene is followed by narration in each scene. In this scene, the narration is "*You just have to rise up*", "*Keep going and never give up*". So, there are three sources of narration: the written narration that appears on the screen, the voice of the black female narrator and a voice that sometimes appears to clarify the advantages of the product or who is using the product.

This study contributes to interdisciplinary fields on visual culture, marketing ethics, and media representation by exposing how the aesthetics of diversity can simultaneously obscure and reinforce structural inequalities under the guise of inclusion.

Following these scenes, we see a woman with a walking disability drawing, while the narrator states, "*Because you never know who could help you in your journey*," and the female model then adds, "*My ability is stronger than my disability*," reinforcing the theme of empowerment and the importance of support in overcoming challenges.

### **Reality and Representation Stage of Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive Advertisement**

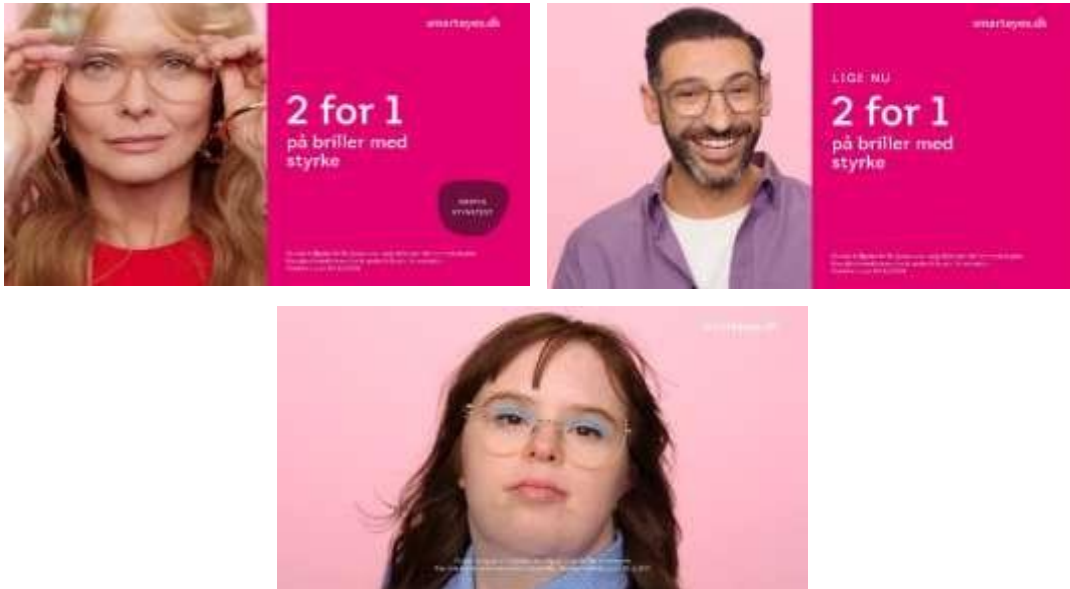
In Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive advertisements, people with disabilities are shown in a variety of everyday life contexts that highlight the diversity of identities of individual expression, and particular passions and experiences. These visual representations include individuals of diverse ages and racial backgrounds who demonstrate engagement in social activities,

One scene shows a black model with a disability wearing *high heels* with building a symbolic image of strong presence and identity in public spaces. Other scenes depict models drawing, surfing, playing musical instruments and engaging in social interactions, expanding the scope of meaning about participation and inclusivity in everyday life. They are shown wearing Tommy Hilfiger products with confidence. Through facial expressions and dynamic settings, the advertisement creates a picture of reality that is not only inclusive but also emphasises cultural diversity and human experience as an essential aspect of its visual narrative. At the Representation stage, this ad uses visual techniques to create an emotional connection with the audience. *Close-ups* are often used to highlight the product or the subject's facial expression, such as a smile or a confident look. This technique not only adds aesthetic details but also reinforces the audience's sense of closeness to the narrative. Positive narratives such as "*I'm unstoppable*" combined with music that changes from soft to energetic, create an emotional flow that feels alive. This transition invites the audience to experience the journey of optimism.

Lighting is crucial in creating atmosphere. Dimly lit scenes are used to emphasise focus, such as when the black narrator is speaking; this light gives an intimate and reflective feel. In contrast, scenes of outdoor activities use bright light to emphasise the freedom and happiness of daily activities. The use of *eye-level* camera angles in live interaction scenes gives the impression that the audience is in the same place as the subject. This creates a strong sense of connectedness, as if the audience is not only watching but also being part of the story being told. The ad utilises a combination of narration, visuals and music to convey a message of inclusivity and optimism.

### Discussion of SmartEyes Denmark Ad

Figure 3.



Smarteyes DK-2024 advertisement

(Source: Youtube (smarteyes.dk 2024))

The scene (Figure 3) opens with a woman in a stylish red dress, preparing to put

on her glasses. She looks fashionable, accessorised with a beautiful bracelet and earrings, and her confident gaze reflects her self-assurance. Next, we see a man smiling broadly, showcasing his cheerful demeanour while wearing Smarteyes glasses. In the third scene, a woman with Down syndrome appears, adding to the diversity of the presentation. The scene concludes with a repeated display of the woman in the red dress, emphasising her elegance and confidence.

### Fiske's Approach: Reality and Representation

At the level of reality, the Smart Eyes advertisement selects elements of diversity such as *stylish* women, men of Middle Eastern descent, and individuals with Down syndrome to reflect the diverse Danish population. At the representation level, visual techniques are an important element used to frame diversity as the core of the narrative. *Zooming* in on the faces of individuals with Down syndrome emphasises their facial expressions and details, creating an emotional closeness between the audience and the subjects. This technique, as

described by Pramaggiore and Wallis (2005) It not only highlights the individual as the main focus but also directs the audience's perception towards inclusion as a core value. Consistent *framing* places the subject at the visual centre, making it the centre of attention in the narrative. The slow-motion technique slows down the motion to provide a deeper space for interpretation, allowing the audience to absorb each gesture as part of a meaningful visual narrative. The use of warm lighting and bright colours reinforces positive representations, generating an optimistic atmosphere that is in line with the message of inclusion (Pramaggiore and Wallis 2005).

### **Ideology in Gucci, Smart Eyes, and Tommy Hilfiger Ads**

Commodification is a process in which something that is not originally a commodity, such as diversity or identity, is used as a tool to generate economic value in a capitalistic market (Baudrillard 1998, Marx 2022). In Gucci, Smart Eyes, and Tommy Hilfiger advertisements, racial diversity and disability are presented as symbols of inclusivity that appear progressive. However, such representations reflect a more subtle ideology of capitalism. Based on Baudrillard's *hyperreality* theory (Baudrillard 1998), such representations create a simulation that is separate from social reality. In this simulation, diversity is nothing more than a tool to enhance brand image within the framework of capitalism, without providing real structural change.

In the Tommy Hilfiger ad, for example, the *zoom* technique is used to highlight a legless person wearing the brand's jacket. This technique is both dramatic and aesthetically pleasing. However, on closer inspection, the individual is not truly empowered. The visual focus on the jacket and the imperfect legs suggests that the disabled individual's body is merely a tool to highlight the product. The subject is not seen as someone who is respected or empowered, but simply part of the brand narrative. As Baudrillard (1998) suggests, this representation is a form of *hyperreality*, an illusion of diversity that does not reflect the social reality of the individual being represented. The product itself does not offer real solutions, such as the ability to walk, but simply becomes part of a capitalistic aesthetic designed to accentuate the product.



The narrative in the ad that states "*Because you will never know who could help you in your journey*" is also interesting to observe. It tries to associate the product with values such as solidarity and social support. However, the message is actually manipulative. There is an impression that buying Tommy Hilfiger products can help or be a solution in one's life journey, when in reality, this is not the case. As Fiske (2010) explains, popular culture often uses this kind of strategy, where brands are associated with moral or emotional values that are not inherent in the product itself. This creates the illusion that the product has transformative powers, even though its primary function remains as merchandise.

Meanwhile, the Danish Smart Eyes ad uses a *zoom-in* technique on the face of a person with Down syndrome, combined with a wind effect that gives a dramatic impression. This visual is designed to create an aesthetic of inclusivity. However, as Foucault (1977) explains, this discourse does not actually free the individual from power relations. The wind and *zoom* effects actually emphasise the commodification of diversity by making the bodies of people with Down syndrome an aesthetic tool to support the brand image. The use of *makeup in this advertisement also confirms how the individual is standardised* to fit the dominant beauty norms. In Baudrillard's (1998) view, this is a form of simulation of reality, where diversity is reduced to a marketing tool.

The same can be seen in Gucci and Tommy Hilfiger advertisements. In one of Tommy Hilfiger's 2018 ads, the use of Tommy Hilfiger brand high heels on individuals who are unable to walk becomes part of the aesthetic they create. On the other hand, Gucci's ads showcase racial diversity, where black individuals are positioned on equal footing with whites. At first glance, this looks progressive, but in reality, these bodies are commoditised to support the dominant aesthetic. As Baudrillard (1998) explains, diversity in this context is not really celebrated as an independent subject, but rather as a tool to create a more inclusive image for the benefit of the brand.

From Foucault's (1980) From this perspective, these advertisements show how the discourse of power works to normalise these bodies in narratives that continue to serve existing social hierarchies. This representation is a disguised form of power reproduction, where inclusivity does not truly create liberation. Instead, inclusivity is used to strengthen the brand image without challenging the dominant discourse. As Fiske (2010) explains, popular culture tends to utilise

symbols of diversity to maintain the structures of capitalism. Racial diversity and disability are often commodified as elements that can be marketed to audiences who are considered progressive.

Furthermore, in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Guy Debord argues that in modern capitalist societies, everything tends to be reduced to spectacle. The representation of diversity in fashion advertising can be understood as part of the logic of capitalist spectacle, where the bodies of people with disabilities are not portrayed to express their lived experiences but are instead constructed as visual imagery that supports a progressive narrative for brand enhancement. In this context, the disabled body becomes a spectacular symbol—a visual object that sells a commodified lifestyle and moral values.

Within the framework of Critical Disability Studies, the concept of inspiration porn—popularised by Stella Young and elaborated by Mamo and Haegele (2023)—refers to the media’s tendency to depict individuals with disabilities solely as sources of inspiration for nondisabled audiences. Advertisements that rely on narratives of courage, perseverance, or personal miracle often fall into this pattern, objectifying disabled individuals as instruments for evoking shallow empathy or reinforcing a brand’s moral positioning. Slogans such as “I’m unstoppable” or “My ability is stronger than my disability” in Tommy Hilfiger’s campaign, for example, represent disabled figures through the lens of tokenism and an inspirational aesthetic that obscures the structural realities and systemic inequalities faced by the disability community.

Chaewon Song and Sujin Song’s study *Are Ads with People with Disabilities Cooler?* (2023) confirms that inclusive marketing featuring individuals with disabilities can enhance brand perception not only in terms of warmth and empathy but also in appeal and perceived “coolness.” Comments on Tommy Hilfiger’s campaign videos—both those uploaded by the featured model and by the brand’s official channel—are overwhelmingly positive, praising the brand for promoting inclusivity and labelling it as “cool.” This indicates that the dominant discourse of disability as a consumable image has been successfully internalised by the public—a manifestation of cultural capitalism’s success in commodifying difference.

A similar phenomenon is evident on the YouTube channel of Smarteyes Denmark. Of approximately 80 uploaded videos, those featuring models with disabilities experienced a significant spike in viewership. While previous videos garnered only dozens to hundreds of views, those with disabled representation soared to 103,000 views, and subsequent uploads maintained elevated figures (3,000, 47,000, and up to 71,000 views). This data aligns with recent studies suggesting that the representation of disability in advertising significantly enhances marketing effectiveness and generates more favourable consumer responses compared to campaigns without such representation (Wang and Wei 2024). As Rendon Alin, Manzaba, Berna et al. (2024) argue, the way individuals with disabilities are portrayed in advertisements directly influences public perception and their willingness to engage with the brand.

## CONCLUSION

The use of disabled models in media, particularly in advertising, has proven effective in generating distinct appeal and contributing to enhanced brand image. This trend has led many global brands to incorporate representations of disability into their campaigns. Although branding videos featuring disabled individuals often receive positive audience responses, this phenomenon also reveals how the public has unconsciously internalised the capitalist logic that drives the commodification of disability—where disabled bodies are reduced to visual commodities marketed through empathy and admiration. This study argues that disability representation has shifted from political expression to an aesthetic of diversity that conceals power relations and normalizes exclusion. It shows that media portrayals of disability are ideologically driven rather than neutral. By analyzing these visual and narrative constructions, the study assesses whether brands genuinely pursue inclusivity or commodify disability for strategic gain. The findings offer interdisciplinary insights into how disability representations are produced and circulated within global capitalism.

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### About the Author

Dinda Akhlakulkarimah is a Master's student in Cultural Studies at Universitas Padjadjaran. She holds a Bachelor's degree in French Literature from the same institution. Her research interests include media representation, culture, and the ideological dimensions of advertising and film. Her current work explores how visual narratives construct meaning within global consumer culture.

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