Opportunities and Pitfalls of Disability Testimonials: An Integrative Framework for Future Research across the Advertising Funnel

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Research on disability testimonials in advertising is still scarce, highly fragmented, and lacks an overall theoretical framework explaining it as a distinct endorsement phenomenon. This paper addresses this gap by developing an integrative conceptual framework based on a systematic literature review of marketing and advertising journals. The study organizes findings and derives research propositions along the stages of the advertising funnel (ad exposure, ad processing, brand communication effects, and consumer action) and examines how disability testimonials function through two mechanisms: evaluative conditioning and symbolic meaning transfer. We identify key boundary conditions, which determine whether inclusive portrayals foster durable brand meaning or trigger reputational backlash. By bridging the divide between social inclusion and brand effectiveness, this research provides a structured foundation for future empirical inquiry to offer practitioners robust, mechanism-based guidance for navigating the complexities of disability representation in the modern media landscape.

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