

## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS: THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBLE ROLE OF DEPICTING IMAGES OF SPECIAL NEEDS FOR NORMALCY

Dr Aida Mokhtar  
KIRKHS, IIUM, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Email: aidam@iium.edu.my

### ABSTRACT

*Media messages are capable of fashioning our perception of reality through the empowerment of distinctive images of people with special needs. Without the existence of special needs representation in advertising, the inclusion of people with special needs in mainstream society could be absent. The act of normalizing distinctions through dignified portrayals of special needs people who are diverse could be an additional function of advertising in addition to bringing people together at the marketplace when selling products. An organization involved in normalizing people with special needs as part of society is doing a noble act that should be encouraged similar to upholding the visibility of a brand. Several objectives could be met through advertising from inculcating positive attitudes to special needs people, encouraging values in people, normalizing special needs people by mainstream society to promoting goodwill to the organization. Without such visible depictions, people with special needs could encounter possible exclusion from society initiated by a negative attitude to them. Values such as compassion and empathy could be communicated through these depictions and inculcated within the audience. These efforts could be part of the organization's initiative in being socially responsible.*

Keywords: Persons with disabilities, Malaysia, UK, inclusion, advertising

### Introduction

It is firstly imperative to understand the contexts of Malaysia and the United Kingdom in a more profound manner as the backdrop to the paper, focusing on making comparisons and contrasts. They have differences in their general population sizes and in the number of people with disabilities. It is interesting to compare and contrast their efforts in including people with disabilities in mainstream societies.

Malaysia is a country in South East Asia with 32.6 million people in the fourth quarter of 2018 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). The number of people with disabilities registered in the nation in 2017 was 453,258 people. Of these, 8.9 percent are with visual impairment, 7.6 percent are with hearing problems, 35.2 percent have physical disabilities, 34.8 percent have learning disabilities, 0.5 percent have speech issues, 8.3 percent have mental problems and 4.7 percent have multiple disabilities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). The percentage of special needs people in relation to the general population in Malaysia is 1.4 percent.

The United Kingdom, an island nation comprising of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is situated in Northwestern Europe. It has a bigger population than Malaysia with 66.04 million (Population Estimates, 2018). There are also more people in the UK than Malaysia with disabilities at 13.3 million. Amongst the people with disabilities: seven percent are children, 18 percent are adults and 44 percent are of pension age (Paperworth Trust, 2019). The percentage of people with special needs over the general population in the UK is 20 percent.

A further comparison can be made to the context of Malaysia and the UK. Economic growth seems to be better in Malaysia than the UK. In the UK, economic growth will be 1.4 percent in 2019 and 1.7 percent in 2020 while Malaysia has grown by 4.6 percent in 2018 and is expected to grow at 4.4 percent in 2019 (United Nations, 2019). The report also mentions that there seems to be great uncertainty with the looming exit of the UK and Northern Ireland from the European Union (EU), widely known as Brexit. It has already seen augmented tangible economic consequences with companies moving assets or investments from the UK to the EU. UK is strengthening its bilateral relations with the Association of South East Asian countries (ASEAN countries are ten countries south of China) including Malaysia upon the acknowledgement that UK investment in South East Asia is greater than in China and India combined (Foreign Commonwealth Office and The Rt Hon Mark Field MP, 2019).

Representation of disabled people in the media, more specifically in advertising, is central to the paper's examination. Generally, greater use of advertising is encouraged as it gives people in advertising agencies, production houses and other vendors and freelancers work, sells media space and time and potentially increases the sales of products globally. Of concern are the frequency of representation and the angle of representation in advertising that is repetitive and aims to affect audiences in terms of creating better awareness or encouraging audiences to treat people with disabilities with respect.

There appears to be a dearth of recent studies on advertising and PWDs. A study depicts that media representations play a supporting role in fashioning teachers' perceptions and expectations regarding students with learning disabilities (SLDs) with the accuracy of Western media representations of SLDs evidently contradicting by showcasing positive, unrealistic and exaggerated characteristics of SLDs (Applebaum, 2016). Another study finds that athletes with special needs remain to be medicalised, objectified and sensationalised in the media by featuring a person with disabilities and his or her triumph over adversity (Beacom,

French, & Kendall, 2016). Of great interest to this paper is how the inclusion of PWDs should be depicted through advertisements as indicated by the advertising codes of both countries. The next part of the paper dwells on the idea of 'inclusion' of PWDs.

### Inclusion for People with Disabilities

The term 'inclusion' appears to have been derived from the term 'exclusion' which was the subject of debate in France in the 1960s when politicians, activists, officials, journalists and academics made ambiguous and ideological references to the impoverished segments of societies as *les excuse* or "the excluded" (Silverman, 1994). For Silverman, exclusion was identified as a social problem as France was encountering a lethargic post-war economic growth. The term was said to have been coined by Rene Lenoir who was the Secretary of State for Social Action in the Chirac Government that uncovered one tenth of the population comprised of 'the excluded' including persons with mental and physical disabilities who were unprotected by social insurance.

There are three paradigms formed by Silverman to help define exclusion: solidarity, specialization and monopoly. Solidarity is evident in France with the breakdown in the social bond between individual and society as defined by cultural and moral aspects; specialization entails discrimination where individuals are not free to move between categories defined by economic divisions of labour and social differentiation and finally, monopoly is caused by powerful groups depicting distinctive cultural identities and institutions and promoting social closure by restricting access from external parties including PWDs.

The opposite of exclusion is inclusion. Inclusion involves the allowance and encouragement of equal participation in mainstream life by PWDs. There are several laws for people with special needs in Malaysia and the UK, protecting those with disabilities. These laws are important to implement to ensure that any form of discrimination of PWDs is unlawful.

### Malaysia

For PWDs in Malaysia, the PWD Act 2008 (Act 658) is used to protect them and uphold their inclusion through equal participation in Malaysia's mainstream society. According to the PWD Act 2008, inclusion is emphasized in terms of the disabled and their access to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, health, education and information and communication, equal opportunities, protection and assistance. Malaysia recognizes through the PWD Act 2008 that "PWDs are entitled to equal opportunity and protection and assistance in all circumstances and subject only to such limitations, restrictions and the protection of rights as provided by the Federal Constitution" (2014, Act 685, p. 7).

The definition of PWDs according to the PWD Act 2008 (2014, Act 685, p. 10) "include(s) those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society." There are several types of disabilities identified in Malaysia (Department of Social Welfare Ministry of Women Community and Family Development Malaysia, 2016): hearing disability, visual disability, speech disability, physical disability, learning disability, mental disability, and multiple disabilities.

In Malaysia, Article 8 (1) of the Federal Constitution 1957 has declared that, "all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law." Despite this constitutional guarantee, PWDs in Malaysia continue to encounter problems in developing themselves with limited access to education, employment, and other economic and social opportunities (Abdullah, Hanafi, & Hamdi, 2017). PWD are criticized as having little punitive action for non-compliance despite incorporating equal access provisions (Chin, 2018). Malaysia's Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) believes the PWD Act 2008 is deficient in having elaborate monitoring, penalty, or remedy mechanisms for stakeholders (including the government) who violate the Act or the rights of PWDs (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), 2017). For SUHAKAM, there are also no provisions that set up a body or appoint a person empowered with investigating alleged breaches of the Act. However, Article 3 (1) of the PWD Act 2008 mentions the formation of the National Council for People with Disabilities for the purpose of overseeing the implementation of national policies and action plans related to the disabled. This Council is chaired by the Minister of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, who is presently Datin Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail who is also the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. The Council is to meet three times a year and "oversee the implementation of the national policy and national plan of action relating to PWDs" (Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, 2014, Act 685, p. 14). There is also an Action Plan for PWDs having several goals (Abdul Rahim et al., 2017; Ministry of Women, 2019):

1. increasing accessibility of disabled people to buildings,
2. strengthening the economic situation of disabled people,
3. increasing access to education for disabled people,
4. increasing access of disabled people to health services,
5. strengthening social services for the disabled, increasing participation in planning and decision-making,
6. increasing access of disabled people to disaster risk management, encouraging more research and development on disabilities,
7. increasing advocacy efforts of disabled people, and,
8. the formation of laws that do not contradict the convention of the rights of disabled people.

Efforts have been made in Malaysia to resolve issues related to PWDs. Professor Dr. Ruzita Mohd Amin who heads the International Islamic University Malaysia Disability Services Unit (IIUM DSU) has made suggestions of putting the National Council for People with Disabilities under the Prime Minister's Department or a commission for more effective implementation of action plans and the endorsement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of PWDs optional protocol, that permits PWDs to complain to the International Supervisory Committee in view of non-compliance of the Convention (Chin, 2018). There

is the need for the PWD Act and CRPD to be taken seriously by stakeholders in Malaysia to ensure that the inclusion of PWDs is practised and not only an ideal on paper.

Encouraging the physical inclusion of PWDs into mainstream society alone seems inadequate. Inclusion has its qualities as evident in the education setting where it can be further categorised as authentic and unauthentic inclusion. When inclusion is practised authentically, this entails surpassing beyond the students' physical presence in the classroom and offers support in allowing for access to learning content, being responsible for what they learn and encouraging partaking in classrooms and school communities (Olson, Leko, & Roberts, 2016). In the Malaysian scenario, the target of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is that 75 percent of children with special needs must be in inclusive education programmes by 2023. The implementation of the Zero Reject Policy by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia to include all special needs children in education has been commended by the National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC) (Teng, 2019). However, the NECIC calls for inclusive and not integrated or segregated education as a more effective approach for special children and schools need to be adapted to this concept. Currently, special children need to meet the Education Ministry's Checklist for Inclusion Readiness (SSKI) prior to attaining acceptance into inclusive education. This could be frustrating for some parents of special needs children who feel that the SSKI restricts their children's entry to inclusive education.

### United Kingdom

In the UK, PWDs have the right to be protected from discrimination in several areas including education, employment and from the police. The Equality Act 2010 is a primary piece of legislation that covers disabled people in the UK that helps promote, enforce and protect these rights. Disability is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as, "You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities" and this also covers those who have been diagnosed with cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis (UK Government, n.d.). In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 calls unlawful any efforts to discriminate against disabled children by education service providers (private and independent organizations included).

The Equality Act 2010 replaces the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as it provides protection to people with nine characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 mentions the legal duty of public bodies listed in Schedule 19 that include central government departments, local authorities, armed forces and key health, education, policing and transport bodies. Accordingly, "protection from discrimination for disabled people applies to disabled people in a range of circumstances, covering the provision of goods, facilities and services, the exercise of public functions, premises, work, education, and associations" (Office for Disability Issues HM Government, n.d., p. 4). The Act does not cover Northern Ireland although it is part of the UK. The UK's Disability Rights Commission was given the responsibility for enforcing disability legislation and for reviewing the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Government of the UK, n.d.). The Commission was subsequently replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007 in relation to the Equality Act 2006.

In sum, it is clear that access to facilities, information and equal opportunities comprises the main ingredients when it comes to the laws for PWDs in Malaysia and the UK. More needs to be done in Malaysia as the UK Equality Act 2010 appears to mention any discriminatory act against the disabled as unlawful more forcefully.

### Malaysia and UK – Common Guidelines for People with Disabilities

As members of the UN, both Malaysia and UK are guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in reference to PWDs. The Convention is more specific in relation to PWDs whilst the SDGs encompass goals that involve several groups of people including those who have disabilities. Inclusion in view of the social model is being practised by both Malaysia and the United Kingdom as underscored by CRPD and SDGs and the countries' own PWD Act 2008 and Equality Act 2010, respectively. The social model is generated from a Marxist paradigm that espouses any impairment caused by a disability is a reality in socially constructed discourse, systems and structures that prefer particular body types and conditions over others (Lindemann, Cherney, & Ahumada, 2017). Preferences for some body types should not be identified by society and this imbalance was readdressed by upholding the rights of PWDs, signifying the social model, as otherwise, disabilities would be reduced to medically defined impairments (Islam, 2015). Barriers created by society should be uplifted to ensure that PWDs are equally treated as those who are able bodied or typical.

#### *UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD)*

The Convention was adopted by the UN on 13 December 2006. Malaysia signed the Convention on 8 April 2008 and ratified it on 19 July 2010. The UK signed the Convention on 30 March 2007 and ratified it on 8 June 2009. The Convention mentions its main goal in the following:

The Convention follows decades of work by the United Nations to change attitudes and approaches to PWDs. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing PWDs as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing PWDs as "subjects" with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society (United Nations, n.d.-b).

The shift in perception from regarding disabled people as objects to subjects with rights is key to the Convention's main goal. There are eight guiding principles that underlie the Convention and each one of its specific articles:

1. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons

2. Non-discrimination
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of PWDs as part of human diversity and humanity
5. Equality of opportunity
6. Accessibility
7. Equality between men and women
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities

Since 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities has produced two reports examining the provisions of the UK for disabled people, raising concerns that the level of protection and support for PWDs are not adequate.

#### *UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

The Sustainable Development Goals aimed for 2030 are regarded as a blueprint for member countries so as to attain an improved and more sustainable future as they relate to the global challenges encountered that encompass poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice (United Nations, n.d.-a). There are 17 SDGs that are guided by the principle “leaving no one behind”. When relating the SDGs to PWDs, the following goals have been identified as being the most relevant (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, 2018)

Table 1: Sustainable Development Goals in Relation to People with Disabilities (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, 2018)

NO.	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS	DESCRIPTION
1.	1 & 2	Ending poverty and hunger for all PWDs.
2.	3	Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all PWDs.
3.	3.7 and 5.6	Giving access to sexual and reproductive health-care services and reproductive rights for all PWDs.
4.	4	Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.
5.	5	Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls with disabilities.
6.	6	Ensuring availability of water and sanitation for PWDs.
7.	7	Ensuring access to energy for PWDs.
8.	8	Ensuring access to full and productive employment and decent work for PWDs.
9.	9.c	Increasing access to ICT for PWDs.
10.	10	Reducing inequality for PWDs.
11.	10.3 and 16. b	Eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices concerning PWDs.
12.	11	Making cities and human settlements inclusive and sustainable for PWDs.
13.	1.5, 11.5, 13	Building resilience of PWDs and reducing their exposure to and impact from climate-related hazards and other shocks and disasters.
14.	16	Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels for PWDs.
15.	16.1, 16.2	Reducing all forms of violence against PWDs and end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children with disabilities.
16.	16.3	Ensuring equal access to justice for all PWDs.
17.	16.6, 16.7	Giving inclusive institutions and decision-making for PWDs.
18.	16.9	Providing legal identity to all children with disabilities, including birth registration.
19.	16.10	Providing access to information.
20.	Target 17.18	Increasing the availability of data disaggregated by disability.

#### **Persons with Disabilities, Advertising and Inclusion**

The media is one place where inclusion of special needs people could happen. Advertising agencies should refrain from projecting PWDs as the ‘Other’ by adopting an inferior perspective for them in advertisements. PWDs who are labelled as the ‘Other’ appear to be marginalised, side-lined and excluded. In a world where politics and the media collide, the mass media convey knowledge of people termed as the ‘Other’ by providing biased knowledge that shows their weakness as illustrated during the Cold War where the enemy of the West was the Soviet Union that was regarded as the ‘Other’ (Boukala, 2019). It would be ideal if PWDs were included with greater frequency in advertisements and depicted as people who have normal daily affairs without underscoring their disabilities per se.

The importance of including ideal images of special needs people in the media is important as media messages have the potential of influencing audiences in terms of their perception and behaviour. The media can influence how people feel to special needs people (Painter, 2016). social cognitive theory by Bandura (2001) espouses that media messages depicting images of people and their behaviour could be modelled after and influence the audiences’ behaviour. A lot of “information about human values, styles

of thinking, behavior patterns and sociostructurally opportunities and constraints is gained from modeled styles of behavior portrayed symbolically through the electronic mass media” (Bandura, 1999, p. 25).

Seldom have the media depicted PWDs in rightful ways and when featured, they are often shown in negative and stereotypical ways and not suitably represented when they should be in line with the UN Convention for human rights (United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). The lack of representation through few frequent depictions of appropriate images of PWDs in advertisements in Malaysia and in the UK is obvious. More needs to be done by including PWDs in advertisements in ways that are ideal for mainstream society to emulate and learn from especially in terms of their ideal treatment through inclusion.

After searching for advertisements featuring PWDs online, it seems that the keywords ‘disabled’, ‘advertisements’ and ‘UK’ or ‘Malaysia’ bring up more information on advertisements with PWDs in the UK than in Malaysia. The advertisements are essential for the nurturance of better understanding of PWDs in Malaysia. Malaysians are reported to not understand PWDs well, gauging the national understanding of the perceptions of the community of disability and determining the root causes of the discrimination of children with disabilities (United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2017).

There are some memorable and touching advertisements in Malaysia nevertheless. In 2005, the government-owned corporate organisation, PETRONAS (Petroleum Nasional Berhad), that manages the oil and gas resources in Malaysia through its television advertisement called ‘Special Shoes’ produced for Malaysia’s Independence Day focused on the message ‘When we walk, we must go forward not backwards’. This message was aptly mentioned by a man who uses a prosthetic leg but manages to overcome his mobility challenges and do well in life. Another advertisement in Malaysia appreciating special needs children is the television advertisement by BERNAS (Padiberas Nasional Berhad) or the Malaysian National Rice Corporation, called ‘The Journey’ for the Eid festival of 2012. It features hearing and sight impaired orphans who complemented one another in an orphanage and went on their journey to the grave of the mother of one of the boys. Another television advertisement by ASTRO, a Malaysian media and entertainment company, based on the true story of Adli and Luqman, is heart wrenching. Adli is the father of a boy with autism who left his career and started the Autism Café Project that employs people with autism who were 17 years old and above. In 2017, a video advertisement by Microsoft Malaysia promotes a unique employment and entrepreneurship portal for PWDs called M-Powered – the first in ASEAN. The protagonist featured in the advertisement is Rachel Siew who has Morquio Syndrome, a rare degenerative condition but she has not allowed her disability to shroud her capabilities.

The UK also lacks representation of the disabled in its advertisements unless the focus is on events on PWDs like the Paralympics or by advertisers that are charities for PWDs; there is the rarity of PWD depictions of them having typical everyday lives which are needed to break the stigma associated with them (Magee, 9 September 2016). A research study on 2,000 British respondents has found that 55 percent think there are few people with physical disabilities in advertisements because their appearance makes people uncomfortable whilst 62 percent have the same opinion about people with mental disabilities and a second reason for their lack of advertising representation is that people have not been exposed to PWDs sufficiently (Lauder, 2018). This is paradoxical to another study by a UK media agency, UM, that found more than half of the British people wanted to see more people with physical disabilities in advertisements and 66 percent of physically disabled respondents believed that the media are trying to make them obscure (Oakes, 2018). There should be depictions of PWDs through advertisements and other media messages for inclusion to happen. The reality is that people from mainstream societies should be comfortable with the depiction of PWDs. The focus should now be to address what makes people uncomfortable with the appearance of PWDs in advertisements as their existence in the world is apparent and this should be acknowledged. Perhaps the message strategies for advertisements with PWDs should be re-examined so that inclusion is more effective gearing for more acceptance by mainstream society.

Some memorable advertisements featuring PWDs in the UK have been television Channel 4’s “We’re the Superhumans” campaign for the Rio Paralympics in 2016, UK disability charity, Scope’s “End the awkward” campaign, the Maltesers disability campaign in 2016 and the ASOS campaign since 2014. Scope has been using humour to put a stop to acting awkward in front of colleagues who are disabled. Maltesers, the chocolate brand, produced three advertisements each depicting characters with disabilities and their real-life stories. ASOS, the British online fashion and cosmetic retailer, included a person who is an amputee promoting active wear in 2018. Not having enough representation in advertisements of PWDs is a point of discontent, but even when they are featured in advertisements, it seems that there is some dissatisfaction. Maltesers has been criticised as creating storylines centering on the characteristics of PWDs rather than other characteristics despite its efforts to normalise them (Lauder, 2018).

There are several advertising codes that guide depictions of PWDs in advertisements in Malaysia focusing on several themes.

#### **Malaysia and Advertising of PWDs**

In promoting products and services to the masses, there is a code for advertising and disability. The Malaysian Advertising Code of Practice (MACP) that is used for print advertisements in Malaysia includes the following excerpt where truthful claims must be done with regard to curing the disabled using products in print advertisements:

No advertisement should employ any words, phrases or illustration which claim or imply the cure of any ailment, illness or disease, condition, disability or infirmity affecting the body as distinct from the relief of its symptoms (Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia, 2006, p. 31).

The Content Code is a voluntary code in the spirit of self-regulation. It is in line with the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA 98) and has the following parts: Guidelines on Content, Specific Advertisement Code, Specific Broadcasting Guidelines, Specific Online Guidelines, Specific Audiotext Hosting Service Guidelines, Specific Closed Content, Consumer

Protection, Public Education and Code Administration. Of great interest here are the codes related to advertising and PWDs. The Content Code guides advertising communicated electronically that includes advertising on television, radio, online services and audiotext hosting services also known as premium rate services. The code is for service providers in the communications and multimedia industry. The Code for advertising featuring PWDs mentions that advertisements should not be offensive to anyone with mental or physical disabilities:

Advertisements should contain nothing that is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. Particular care should be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of, but not limited to, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and physical or mental disability (The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia, 2004, p. 22).

The Film Censorship Board Guidelines of Malaysia mentions that there should not be any ill-treatment of people with disabilities. The guidelines are associated with the Film Censorship Act 2002 that encompasses films, television commercials, trailers of films and promotions for films (Film Censorship Control and Enforcement Division, 2011). These forms of communication would be screened by the Censorship Board before they are shown to the Malaysian public.

### **United Kingdom and Advertising of PWDs**

There needs to be more advertising in the UK that depicts PWDs (Oakes, 2018). It is hoped that the stigma surrounding PWDs is discarded as a result of increased awareness through the media so as to provide ideal ways to treat and acknowledge those with disabilities (Lauder, 2018; Magee, 9 September 2016). More needs to be done regarding the ideal content featuring PWDs in the UK.

The UK has provided guidelines for government communicators that are beneficial to other communication professionals when communicating with or about PWDs to the public (Government of the United Kingdom, 2018). The gist of the guidelines is that positive communication with and about PWDs is essential for changing and improving services in the nation; a positive image of disability in communication entails a fair, creative and stimulating depiction of disabled people based on the social model than the medical model of disability that includes a photo, graphics or character in a storyline, visual or aural cue and that a positive portrayal of the disabled would have positive effects in terms of changing people's attitudes and raising their expectations of persons with disabilities.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator that ensures that advertising in the UK media abide to the rules for advertising in the form of the Advertising Codes (About the ASA and CAP, n.d.). The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) is the sister organization of ASA that writes the codes. There are two sets of codes written by CAP: advertising codes for non-broadcast and broadcast advertisements. The first is the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing (CAP Code) that mentions the following under the rules Section No. 30.5:

Advertising must not include or promote any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (Committee of Advertising Practice UK, n.d.).

The broadcast version of the advertising codes applies to all advertisements that encompass teleshopping, self-promotional messages on television channels, television texts, interactive television advertisements and programme sponsorship credits on radio and television services that are licensed by Ofcom. Ofcom is an independent organisation in the UK that regulates television, radio and video on demand industries, fixed telecommunication lines, mobiles, postal services and airwaves that support the operation of wireless devices. It shifted the responsibility of the advertising codes to ASA in 2004 but practices a co-regulatory scheme with Ofcom in retaining the final responsibility for all television advertising standards as the backstop regulator in relation to the Communications Act 2003 (Ofcom, 2019).

The UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (n.d.) by CAP mentions:

c) audiovisual commercial communications shall not:

ii. include or promote any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;

Both sets of codes underline the idea that broadcast and non-broadcast advertising in the UK should not discriminate PWDs. Further advice for advertising production in conjunction with UN's International Day of PWDs has been provided by CAP so that depictions of PWDs are not offensively conducted: firstly, do not mock disability, or people with a disability; secondly, do not present negative stereotypes about PWDs; and thirdly, do not trivialise or make light of disability (Committee of Advertising Practice UK, 2018). There has to be much care given to portrayals of PWDs in advertisements so as not to create offense and to ensure that other people treat them with respect without being discriminatory.

### **The Way of The Future**

The UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development 2018 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, 2018, pp. 324-328) sheds light on the predicament that discriminatory laws are still apparent in several countries and for the SDGs to be met by 2030 where international and national development programmes are required to give priority to development that is inclusive through policy-making. The way forward according to the report encompasses four facets:

1. Addressing fundamental barriers causing exclusion of PWDs.
2. Mainstreaming disability in the implementation of the SDGs.

3. Investing in monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the SDGs for PWDs.
4. Strengthening the means of implementation of the SDGs for PWDs.

The first facet involves addressing fundamental barriers that result in excluding PWDs. This is in the form of discriminatory laws and policies, the lack of accessibility to assistive technology, rehabilitation, and in physical and virtual environments, the negative attitudes and stigma and lack of promotions of independent living for the disabled. The second facet ponders on the importance of imbuing the implementation of SDGs by considering all PWDs in terms of education, employment, access to basic services (healthcare services and water and energy) and infrastructural development in urban and rural environments, public spaces, facilities and services. The third facet is the importance of conducting research studies so that PWDs have their needs met in view of the SDG framework, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The fourth facet involves adequate financing, access to technology (assistive technology) and capacity building (stakeholders for the implementation of policies) in assisting PWDs and strengthening the implementation of the SDGs. The report continues by highlighting that financial resources should be allocated to support the enforcement and implementation of laws protecting PWDs, national disability policies and plans and the delivery of important services to PWDs.

The report also mentions Article 21 of CRPD which encourages private organisations and the mass media to ensure access to services and information through the Internet for PWDs. Unaffordable access to ICT could be a barrier to information for PWDs in some countries. Recommendations mentioned in the report include adopting guidelines on accessibility for information providers to ensure accessibility, raising awareness of accessibility for PWDs for the public and the media and monitoring and evaluating accessibility of information to PWDs.

This paper recommends that better focus should be given to the content of mass media messages and advertising, in particular, so as to educate the public on ideal ways to treat PWDs in terms of the SDGs and CRPD. There should be better representation in terms of having an increased volume of advertisements featuring ideal ways to treat PWDs. Issues of the media's exaggerated portrayals (Applebaum, 2016), medicalised, objectified and sensationalised representations of PWDs (Beacom et al., 2016) should be raised with stakeholders (scholars of research on disability and PWDs themselves) who could determine the most apt ways of promoting and educating people in their ideal treatments to PWDs for inclusion.

As social cognitive theory suggests, we model other people's behaviour even from the media and this should, if effectively done, get rid of the stigma associated with PWDs and the negative attitudes of the public to these special people. It is hoped that with the focus on educating others on normative behaviour around PWDs and by transforming negative attitudes to those who support inclusion, there would be change in behaviour. This is also espoused by the AIDA model that recommends attracting people to the message, inculcating their interest, forming their desire and moving them to action.

## Conclusion

The power of the media should not be underestimated with regard to aiming for transformations of attitudes and behaviours. Advertising is repetitive and influential. They ought to feature messages that educate others on how to treat PWDs. The SDGs and the CRPD are lacking in terms of emphasis on the role of the media, preferring instead to focus on access to ICT. There are advertising codes in Malaysia and the UK guiding us to the right way in including the disabled in advertising messages but not in terms of encouraging more rightful inclusion of PWDs in media messages in the effort of normalising them in mainstream society. There are several limitations to the paper's examination that compares and contrasts between the Malaysian and UK scenes with regard to PWDs, advertising and inclusion as it is intended to create awareness of each country's efforts than provide a profound study of them. Future research studies should be conducted to examine the depictions of PWDs in advertisements and determine their appropriateness with the SDGs and CRPD in the background.

## References

- Abdul Rahim, A., Samad, A., Amirah, N., Said, I., Seman, W., & Amin, W. (2017). *Malaysian Plan of Action for People with Disabilities 2016-2022: Way Forward*. Paper presented at the UIA Seoul World Architects Congress, Seoul, Korea.
- Abdullah, N., Hanafi, H., & Hamdi, N. (2017). The rights of persons with disabilities in Malaysia: the underlying reasons for ineffectiveness of Persons with Disabilities Act 2008. *International Journal for Studies on Children, Women, Elderly and Disabled*, 1 (January), 127-134.
- About the ASA and CAP. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.asa.org.uk/about-asa-and-cap/about-regulation/about-the-asa-and-cap.html>
- Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia. (2006). *Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.asa.org.my/code.php>
- Applebaum, M. (2016). *Tales from the Crip: The Relationship between Stories about Learning Disabilities in Mass Media and Teacher Perceptions and Expectations of Learning Disabled Students*. (Master of Teaching), University of Toronto, Canada. Retrieved from [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/72145/1/Applebaum\\_Max\\_M\\_201606\\_MT\\_MTRP.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/72145/1/Applebaum_Max_M_201606_MT_MTRP.pdf)
- Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2, pp. 21-41.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Mediapsychology*, 3, 110-140.
- Beacom, A., French, L., & Kendall, S. (2016). Reframing impairment? Continuity and change in media representations of disability through the Paralympic Games. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 9(1), 42-62.

- Boukala, S. (2019). *European Identity and the Representation of Islam in the Mainstream Press*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice. (n.d.). UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP Code). Retrieved from <https://www.asa.org.uk/codes-and-rulings/advertising-codes/broadcast-code.html>
- Chin, C. (2018, 26 August). Laws for the Disabled Lack Bite. *The Star Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/08/26/laws-for-the-disabled-lack-bite-act-provides-equal-access-but-falls-short-on-action-for-noncompliance/>
- Committee of Advertising Practice UK. (2018, 7 December). Referring to persons with disabilities in ads. *CAP News*. Retrieved from <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/referring-to-persons-with-disabilities-in-ads.html>
- Committee of Advertising Practice UK. (n.d.). UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing. Retrieved from <https://www.asa.org.uk/codes-and-rulings/advertising-codes/non-broadcast-code.html>
- Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations. (2018). *Realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities: UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development 2018*. Retrieved from New York: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2018/12/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability.pdf>
- Department of Social Welfare Ministry of Women Community and Family Development Malaysia. (2016). Registration of Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved from <http://www.jkm.gov.my/jkm/index.php?r=portal/left&id=UnN2U3dtUHHacVN4aHNPbUIPayt2QT09>
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2017). Social Statistics Bulletin Malaysia. Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=152&bul\\_id=NU5hZTRkOSs0RVZwRytTRE5zSitLUT09&menu\\_id=U3VPMldoYUxzVzFaYmNkWXZteGduZz09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=152&bul_id=NU5hZTRkOSs0RVZwRytTRE5zSitLUT09&menu_id=U3VPMldoYUxzVzFaYmNkWXZteGduZz09)
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2018). Population & Demography Retrieved from [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/ctwoByCat&parent\\_id=115&menu\\_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWV5Zk1WdzQ4ThUUT09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/ctwoByCat&parent_id=115&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWV5Zk1WdzQ4ThUUT09)
- Film Censorship Control and Enforcement Division. (2011). *Guidelines on Film Censorship*. Malaysia: Film Censorship Control and Enforcement Division Retrieved from <http://www.moha.gov.my/index.php/en/penapisan-bahan-publisiti-filem>.
- Foreign Commonwealth Office and The Rt Hon Mark Field MP. (2019). UK and ASEAN agree importance of future relationship [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-asean-agree-importance-of-future-relationship>
- Government of the UK. (n.d.). Disability Rights Commission has closed. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disability-rights-commission>
- Government of the United Kingdom. (2018). Portraying Disability. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/portraying-disability#casting-disabled-actors-and-models>
- Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM). (2017, 12 March). Fix shortcomings in Person With Disabilities Act immediately. *Malaysiakini*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/404198>
- Islam, M. R. (2015). Rights of the people with disabilities and social exclusion in Malaysia. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 5(2), 171.
- Lauder, M. (2018, 14 March). 'There are fewer People with disabilities in ads because they may people uncomfortable', study finds. *Indy100*. Retrieved from <https://www.indy100.com/article/disability-adverts-tv-uncomfortable-study-maltesers-wheelchair-8253546>
- Lindemann, K., Cherney, J. L., & Ahumada, J. I. (2017). Disability. *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*, 1-8.
- Magee, K. (9 September 2016). The invisibles: why are portrayals of disability so rare in advertising? Retrieved from <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/invisibles-why-portrayals-disability-so-rare-advertising/1407945>
- Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia. (2019). Pelan Tindakan OKU (2016-2022). Retrieved from <https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/index.php?r=portal/about&id=TGw1cFhDaTlOekkwaDIzeDRsclB4dz09>
- Oakes, O. (2018). 'Put more disabled people in ads', UM survey told. Retrieved from <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/put-disabled-people-ads-um-survey-told/1459243>
- Ofcom. (2019). Television Advertising of Food and Drink Products to Children. Retrieved from [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/foodads\\_new](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/foodads_new)
- Office for Disability Issues HM Government. (n.d.). *Equality Act 2010 Guidance*. UK: Office for Disability Issues HM Government Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/570382/Equality\\_Act\\_2010-disability\\_definition.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/570382/Equality_Act_2010-disability_definition.pdf).
- Olson, A., Leko, M. M., & Roberts, C. A. (2016). Providing students with severe disabilities access to the general education curriculum. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 41(3), 143-157.
- Painter, C. (2016). The Complexity of Disability. *Communication Faculty Publications*, 42, 227-248.
- Paperworth Trust. (2019). *Facts and Figures*. Retrieved from United Kingdom: <http://online.flipbuilder.com/afjd/uvad/#p=10>
- Persons with Disabilities Act 2008. (2014, Act 685). Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/86297/117930/F139356912/MYS86297.pdf>
- Population Estimates. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>
- Silverman, H. (1994). Social Exclusion and Social solidarity: Three paradigms. *International Labour Review*, 133(5-6).
- Teng, L. H. (2019). Making education for special needs children inclusive, not integrative. *Malaysiakini*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/458869>

- The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia. (2004). The Malaysian Communications & Multimedia Content Code (Version 6). In. Selangor, Malaysia: The Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia.
- UK Government. (n.d.). Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>
- United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). Disability and the Media. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/disability-and-the-media.html>
- United Nations. (2019). *World Economic Situation and Prospects*. Retrieved from [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2019\\_BOOK-web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2019_BOOK-web.pdf)
- United Nations. (n.d.-a). About the Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- United Nations. (n.d.-b). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2017). *CHILDHOOD DISABILITY IN MALAYSIA: A Study of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices*. Retrieved from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: [https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/Final\\_File\\_Childhood\\_Disability\\_in\\_Malaysia\\_Book\\_\(Interactive\\_PDF\).compressed\\_3\\_Oct\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/Final_File_Childhood_Disability_in_Malaysia_Book_(Interactive_PDF).compressed_3_Oct_2017.pdf)