

Research Paper

From Artificial Inclusion to Social Innovation: Reimagining Marketing Strategies for Neurodivergent Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To critically analyze inclusive marketing strategies directed at the ASD community to evaluate their authenticity regarding real social integration and strategic viability within the Mexican context.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative exploratory case study was implemented, triangulating data from a face-to-face in-depth interview with a neurodevelopmental public health expert and in-person lived-experience questionnaires administered to consumers formally diagnosed with ASD.

Findings: Hyper-stimulating retail spaces and abstract advertising trigger commercial exclusion. Implementing sensory-friendly environments and literal communication tools mitigate cognitive friction and directly stimulate purchasing decisions.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that brands would benefit from implementing structural sensory adaptations and literal visual aids (e.g., pictograms) at points of sale, treating neurodivergent accessibility as a tangible competitive advantage rather than a mere philanthropic endeavor.

Originality/value: By intersecting consumer neuroscience and inclusive innovation, this study demonstrates that transitioning to accessible commercial practices protects brands from perceived inauthenticity (*woke washing*) and fosters true market equity.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the marketing discipline has undergone fundamental reconfigurations by adopting narratives centered on equity, diversity, and social justice. This shift responds to a consumer profile that, beyond seeking product excellence, demands consistency with visible corporate values. In this scenario, companies have integrated elements of social inclusion into their communication plans, aiming to consolidate their market position and strengthen ties with their audiences. Vredenburg et al. (2020) categorize this trend as “brand activism,” highlighting that inclusive marketing has transcended being an optional strategy to establish itself as a guiding principle in contemporary commercial planning.

Furthermore, the transition toward these narratives is underpinned by the growing relevance of digital equity, which is essential for ensuring equal opportunities and empowering underrepresented communities through technological solutions that foster inclusive innovation (Olawale, 2024). This paradigm shift aligns with the broader framework of inclusive innovation, which moves away from traditional, asymmetric commercial strategies to prioritize the co-creation of ideas, practices, and technologies that address local societal challenges and ensure an equitable distribution of benefits (Morales et al., 2025).

However, the implementation of such discourses entails an ethical challenge: the almost invisible boundary between genuine conviction and the use of values as mere rhetorical tools for branding. From this perspective, many tactics run the risk of being perceived not as engines of change, but as exercises in cosmetic inclusion, where the inclusive discourse is not reflected in concrete transformations within the actual customer experience.

The increasing global prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has generated growing social and commercial interest in this population (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Yet, despite the strengthening of the discourse on inclusion and diversity in contemporary marketing, many advertising campaigns continue to be designed from a predominantly neurotypical perspective. ASD is described as a neurodevelopmental condition linked to challenges in social interaction, repetitive behaviors, and particularities

in sensory integration (Alcalá & Madrigal, 2023). These characteristics fundamentally condition how these individuals process their environment, including both physical retail spaces and advertising stimuli. Consequently, the prevailing neurotypical approach in marketing creates barriers to accessing information, interpreting messages, and fully engaging in the consumption experience, posing a technical challenge for designing market strategies that are authentically accessible.

Against this backdrop, it is essential to investigate whether efforts appealing to the inclusion of the ASD community stem from a desire for genuine integration or if they obey a logic of symbolic visibility that fails to dismantle structural barriers to consumption. This question gains particular relevance in Mexico, where the lack of marketing research hinders the understanding of consumers with ASD and prevents the creation of data-driven strategic proposals. According to the “Dirección General de Crónica y Gaceta Parlamentaria de la Cámara de Diputados (2023)”, which cites a 2016 study by Autism Speaks and the “Clínica Mexicana de Autismo (CLIMA)”, 1 in 115 children in Mexico is diagnosed with autism. The condition presents predominantly in males, identifying that for every five cases, four are boys and one is a girl. Consequently, nearly 1% of all children in Mexico—approximately 400,000—have ASD, rendering it a significant public health issue.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to critically examine marketing actions linked to ASD, based on global initiatives and their viability within the Mexican territory, particularly in the city of Zapopan. Far from a mere description, this research aims to determine whether these practices foster real participation or if, paradoxically, they maintain schemes of exclusion wrapped in seemingly integrative language. Specifically, the general objective of this research is to critically analyze inclusive marketing strategies directed at or related to people with ASD, in order to evaluate their level of authenticity, measured explicitly through their structural accessibility and sensory adaptations—in terms of real inclusion and their possible adaptation to the Mexican context. As a specific objective, this study seeks to evaluate whether these inclusive marketing strategies promote actual integration by dismantling physical and communication barriers, or if they merely respond to practices of symbolic representation and superficial inclusion.

To guide this study, the following research questions have been formulated. The main research question is: To what extent do marketing campaigns directed at people with Autism Spectrum Disorder promote real inclusion within the market, or do they generate consumption strategies exclusively oriented towards this sector? Furthermore, to deepen this analysis, the specific research question asks: What communication elements and sensory adaptations do marketing campaigns directed at people with ASD utilize to construct inclusive consumption experiences?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, the Literature Review explores the theoretical background of inclusive marketing, brand activism, and the intersection of ASD with consumer behavior. Subsequently, the Methodology section details the research design and data collection procedures utilized to address the formulated questions. The Results section then presents the empirical findings derived from the analysis. Finally, the Discussion and Conclusions sections interpret these findings in contrast with existing literature, highlight their academic and practical implications, and outline avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: From Symbolic Representation to Social Transformation

The analysis of inclusion within marketing strategies has gained significant traction due to social shifts regarding diversity, human rights, and the representation of marginalized groups in media. Inclusive advertising represents a transformation in how brands construct their identity, seeking to transmit ethical values that resonate with new generations (Casale, 2024). However, current research suggests a gap between discourse and practice; while inclusion is a recurring theme, the representation of disability often remains limited or symbolic, failing to reflect the daily reality of these individuals (Casale, 2024).

This disjunction between conceptual design and actual social outcomes is further criticized within the literature on inclusive innovation. Morales et al. (2025) argue that authentic inclusive innovation cannot rely on 'fuzzy' or generalized rhetorical frameworks; instead, it must be deeply rooted in the local context. True inclusion requires the deliberate co-creation

of new practices or technologies directly with local communities, businesses, and organizations to address specific societal challenges, actively engaging disadvantaged groups to shape priorities and guaranteeing that the benefits are equitably distributed (Morales et al., 2025).

From a broader perspective, inclusive marketing can serve as a tool to highlight structural social, cultural, and economic barriers that limit full social participation (Cabra-García, 2017). Furthermore, communication campaigns can modify social perceptions of disability when developed through participatory creative processes that include the represented groups, leading to more responsible and less stereotyped messaging.

2.2. Sensory Marketing and Consumer Neuroscience

Understanding how consumers perceive advertising stimuli is fundamental to evaluating inclusive strategies. Sensory marketing utilizes stimuli to engage the human senses, influencing perception, judgment, and purchasing decisions through subconscious associations (Krishna, 2012). In the digital realm, while visual and auditory stimuli predominate, there remains an unexplored opportunity to integrate multi-sensory experiences in social media (Grisales Castro & Hernández Torres, 2023). This sensory branding is key to strengthening the emotional connection between consumers and brands in competitive markets (Labers Team, 2024).

To deepen this understanding, consumer neuroscience offers an interdisciplinary approach that identifies emotional and cognitive responses—such as attention and memory—that traditional methods like surveys might miss (Plassmann et al., 2015). This neuroscientific lens is particularly relevant for inclusion, as it allows for the design of communication strategies adapted to different cognitive profiles.

Furthermore, the exclusionary impact of traditional retail design is particularly pronounced for consumers with "hidden" conditions, such as sensory or auditory processing disorders. Research indicates that when exposed to sensory overload within physical servicescapes, these consumers frequently adopt avoidance coping strategies, such as abandoning the physical store in favor of e-commerce platforms or delegating their shopping tasks entirely to relatives (Beudaert et al., 2017). This evidence suggests that service providers can

significantly enhance inclusivity by modifying environmental cues, either temporarily or permanently to prevent sensory saturation, thereby ensuring that physical retail spaces remain functional and accessible for diverse cognitive profiles.

2.3. Digital Accessibility and Structural Barriers

A critical challenge for inclusion lies in access to digital and commercial environments. Many individuals with disabilities face significant barriers in e-commerce due to a lack of accessible digital design, which places them in a position of vulnerability (Santillán Santa Cruz, 2022). Conversely, developing accessible digital content benefits all users by improving the overall experience and increasing interaction (Lasa Goiri & Risso Rodríguez, 2023).

In this regard, the role of technological resources and well-defined strategies becomes paramount. As Olawale (2024) argues, digital equity and inclusion are crucial for revolutionizing organizational practices and closing the gap in technology access. The failure to provide adequate digital infrastructure can exacerbate existing disparities, creating exclusionary behaviors that hinder the progress of disadvantaged groups, including those with neurodevelopmental conditions who rely on digital tools for social and commercial participation.

Inclusive design should also account for physical and sensory interactions. For instance, visual disability directly influences how individuals interact with commercial spaces and advertising messages, necessitating additional sensory stimuli to facilitate information access at the point of sale (Mejía Bohórquez et al., 2014). This demonstrates that inclusion depends not only on representation but on the elimination of structural barriers to products and services.

In this context, the physical retail environment, conceptualized as the "servicescape"—plays a critical role in determining true inclusion. Consumers with disabilities actively evaluate whether a commercial space is "enabling" or "disabling," a judgment that directly dictates their behavioral intentions to stay, leave, or return (Baker et al., 2007). Consequently, authentic inclusive marketing requires acknowledging that a condition often becomes a restrictive barrier only when the customer-firm interface is poorly designed. Strategically

designing accessible servicescapes is therefore not just an ethical mandate, but a fundamental business imperative that mitigates commercial exclusion.

2.4. Current State of Inclusive Marketing: Challenges and Risks

Despite its growth, inclusive marketing specifically oriented towards disability remains in a developmental stage. Sensory inclusion is often limited and fragmented, with adaptations like closed captions or sign language interpreters added as afterthoughts rather than being integrated into the initial design (Díaz, 2025). This reflects a lack of systematic universal design in marketing (Díaz, 2025). Furthermore, while consumers value accessible products, there is often a lack of coordination across the marketing mix—advertising, distribution, and price—which hinders a truly integrated inclusive experience (Finocchiaro, 2024).

Additionally, brands face the risk of "backfire." Inclusive initiatives can trigger negative reactions if perceived as inauthentic or as a threat to the identity of the brand's traditional audience (Hassan et al., 2025). Therefore, coherence and authenticity are paramount to avoiding counterproductive effects.

In contrast, H&M's 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' controversy demonstrates the severe risks of ignoring cultural sensitivities. The intense backlash over the racially insensitive depiction of a Black child underscores that inclusive marketing requires profound contextual awareness to avoid harmful stereotypes and achieve genuine resonance (Tuli et al, 2025).

To fully understand the impact of inclusive campaigns, it is essential to establish a conceptualization of brand authenticity. Research indicates that perceived brand authenticity is a multidimensional construct driven by a brand's credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity (Morhart et al., 2015). When consumers perceive high levels of authenticity, it significantly increases emotional brand attachment and positively influences overall brand choice likelihood. In the context of inclusive marketing, this theoretical framework suggests that initiatives should demonstrate structural integrity and operational continuity rather than relying on isolated symbolic messaging.

Building upon this framework, recent empirical research emphasizes the critical role of brand authenticity in shaping consumer evaluations, particularly in scenarios where corporate

claims are difficult to verify superficially. Studies demonstrate that perceived authenticity significantly enhances consumer trust, which subsequently functions as a strong predictor of long-term brand loyalty (Lyu et al., 2026). This relationship is fully mediated by cognitive and affective mechanisms, such as perceived sincerity and emotional attachment. Consequently, to build sustainable consumer relationships and navigate the complexities of social or health-related branding, organizations are encouraged to approach their corporate storytelling through verifiable, structural actions rather than isolated rhetoric.

The growing scrutiny from modern consumers has transformed the landscape of corporate social responsibility, forcing brands to navigate the complex dichotomy between authentic brand activism and performative allyship. When corporations adopt progressive socio-political stances merely as a marketing facade—without implementing structural changes in their operational models, they engage in a phenomenon widely categorized as "woke washing" (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In the context of disability and neurodivergence, this performative inclusion becomes particularly harmful. It creates a deceptive illusion of progress while leaving the actual physical and digital barriers to consumption entirely intact, thereby marginalizing the community they claim to support.

Consequently, modern consumer behavior is increasingly driven by a demand for corporate accountability. Consumers are highly adept at identifying discrepancies between a brand's external advertising and its internal policies. However, when inclusive marketing is deployed authentically and backed by genuine structural accessibility, it ceases to be a mere philanthropic endeavor and becomes a powerful strategic tool for corporate development. Recent empirical research supports this economic reality. According to Liulchak et al. (2025), perceptions of brand inclusivity and authenticity significantly influence a company's financial performance by enhancing customer loyalty and bolstering market confidence. Their study demonstrates that inclusive marketing directly impacts core financial metrics, positively driving revenue, earnings, and the Price-to-Earnings (P/E) ratio through the validation of multiple stakeholder groups.

This systemic financial impact underscores the strategic value for companies to transition from symbolic representation to actionable social innovation. By moving beyond superficial campaigns, evidence suggests that brands can optimize their approach by restructuring

their physical retail environments and digital interfaces. Ultimately, mitigating the risks of “woke washing” requires a paradigm shift where inclusive marketing is validated by measurable improvements in the everyday consumer experience, which in turn directly aligns social equity with sustainable financial growth.

2.5. Specificity in Neurodivergence: ASD and Advertising

Recent research has begun to explore the specific relationship between advertising and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Neuromarketing studies indicate that individuals with Asperger’s syndrome (within the autism spectrum) process advertising stimuli differently than neurotypical populations, showing varying levels of attention and emotion (Núñez-Gómez et al., 2020). Specifically, advertisements with lower visual complexity tend to capture more attention, suggesting that clearer, more accessible messaging is necessary for this group (Núñez-Gómez et al., 2020).

Successful social marketing cases, such as IKEA’s “ThisAbles” campaign, demonstrate the potential of inclusive strategies. By developing 3D-printed accessories to make furniture more accessible, the campaign provided functional solutions while strengthening the brand’s social impact (Team Lewis, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

To comprehensively address the complex dynamics of inclusive marketing and its impact on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) community, this research adopts a qualitative exploratory case study. Investigating neurodivergent consumer experiences requires data collection instruments that approach the phenomenon from multiple angles, balancing technical, institutional expertise with direct, first-person lived experiences and face to face interviews. Consequently, this methodology relies on a dual-perspective qualitative framework designed to extract rich, contextualized data to provide empirical support for the theoretical foundations established in the literature review.

3.2. Participants and Informants

The empirical sample was strategically selected to achieve data triangulation through two primary sources:

- **Technical-Clinical Expert:** A face- to- face in-depth interview was conducted with a specialized professional from the National System for Integral Family Development in Jalisco (DIF Jalisco), whose practice focuses specifically on pediatric ASD and childhood neurodevelopmental interventions.
- **Neurodivergent Consumers:** A face-to-face interview with a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to two individuals diagnosed with ASD to capture the direct voice, perceptions, and consumer habits of the primary demographic under study.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

3.3.1. Professional In-Depth Interview

The in-depth interview was chosen as an ideal mechanism to access specialized analysis derived from clinical and educational practice in public health and social support sectors. This technique allowed for a meticulous exploration of the sensory, cognitive, and behavioral particularities inherent to individuals on the autism spectrum. Furthermore, it served to identify the most recurring structural and environmental obstacles these individuals encounter within commercial and retail spaces. This dialogic approach captured qualitative nuances regarding sensory overload and institutional gaps that standard documentary studies frequently overlook.

3.3.2. Consumer Lived-Experience Questionnaire

Simultaneously, integrating the first-person perspective of two people with ASD via a semi structured- questionnaire represents an ethical and technical necessity for authentic inclusive marketing research. Rather than relying solely on a medicalized or purely clinical viewpoint, this instrument centers the consumer's voice—focusing on their personal perceptions, purchasing needs, and the specific cognitive or sensory frictions they experience when interacting with contemporary advertising campaigns and retail environments. This prevents

an exclusive external evaluation and prioritizes an empathetic approach that places the neurodivergent user at the center of strategic commercial design.

3.3.3. Recruitment and Data Analysis Procedures

Participants for this study, including both the technical-clinical expert and the consumers diagnosed with ASD, were selected utilizing a purposive sampling technique. Recruitment was facilitated through professional networking and collaboration with medical staff at a public health hospital located in Zapopan, Jalisco. This institutional connection allowed for the precise identification of highly qualified clinical informants as well as consumers with a formal ASD diagnosis. To ensure absolute clarity in communication, build rapport, and accommodate any immediate need for clarification, all data collection instruments, both the expert in-depth interview and the consumer questionnaires were administered in person (face-to-face).

Following the data collection phase, a thematic analysis framework was applied to evaluate the qualitative data. This methodological approach involved systematically reviewing the responses, coding the data, and identifying recurring core themes. Categories and themes were developed through a hybrid approach: deductively, utilizing predefined concepts from the literature review (such as sensory marketing barriers and woke washing), and inductively, allowing new practical categories to emerge directly from the raw lived-experiences of the informants. The qualitative analysis specifically focused on categorizing the participants' experiences regarding sensory processing barriers, the exclusionary impact of abstract neurotypical advertising, and the concrete elements required to build authentically inclusive commercial environments.

3.4. Data Analysis and Triangulation Procedure

The core analytical value of this methodology relies on the systematic contrast between specialized clinical knowledge and everyday consumer experiences. While the DIF Jalisco (Zapopan) expert provides a structural, developmental, and technical foundation regarding sensory processing and vulnerability, the consumer questionnaire grounds the study within concrete, real-world retail interactions.

This methodological triangulation enhances the validity and robustness of the findings. By mapping points of convergence and divergence between institutional discourse and actual consumer reception, the analysis identifies critical windows of opportunity for designing inclusive marketing strategies that transcend superficial representation and foster genuine commercial accessibility.

4. Results

4.1. Summary of Results: In-Depth Interview with DIF Jalisco Expert

Table 1. Qualitative Findings from the Expert Interview on ASD and Inclusive Marketing

Thematic Category	Key Findings from Expert Interview	Implications for Inclusive Marketing
Sensory Overload in Retail Spaces	Traditional commercial environments (supermarkets, malls) are hyper-stimulating (excessive noise, lights, colors), causing sensory overload. Meltdowns are often misjudged socially as "bad behavior."	Findings indicate that implementing sensory-friendly physical adaptations (e.g., reduced lighting/volume hours, simplified layouts) to reduce environmental hostility.
Awareness vs. Active Participation	Most campaigns focus solely on superficial "awareness" rather than structural change. The only recognized inclusive adaptation in the local context is the Cinemex sensory-friendly screenings.	True inclusion requires moving beyond corporate discourse to facilitate "active social participation" and consumer autonomy in everyday activities.
Communication & Accessibility Barriers	Standard advertising relies on abstract language and metaphors (neurotypical communication), which fail to connect with neurodivergent consumers who require concrete messaging.	Marketing materials and spatial signage should incorporate highly literal visual aids, such as Pictograms, to ensure clear and accessible communication.
Strategic Brand Innovation	Brands often make the mistake of stereotyping ASD (e.g., assuming all autistic individuals have auditory hypersensitivity). True inclusion is treated as a secondary thought rather than a core design principle.	Inclusive strategies should ideally be co-created with multidisciplinary teams (specialists, families) and treat accessibility as an urgent public health innovation, not just a marketing tactic.

4.2. Consumer Perspectives: Lived Experiences of Autistic Individuals

Table 2. Qualitative Findings from Consumers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Thematic Category	Respondent 1 (Summary of Lived Experience)	Respondent 2 (Summary of Lived Experience)	Key Implication for Inclusive Marketing
Perception of Inclusive Campaigns	Has not seen specific ASD campaigns but feels positive knowing that marketing is becoming more inclusive.	Appreciates when campaigns make neurodivergent individuals feel seen and active participants.	Consumers value the intent of inclusion, but the actual visibility of ASD-specific campaigns remains extremely low.
Elements Fostering Real Inclusion	Emphasizes that campaigns must be "real" and authentic rather than purely performative.	Highlights the need for functional adaptations (e.g., shoes designed for specific comfort needs during long shifts).	Inclusion is perceived as a mix of authentic representation and tangible product/service utility.
Sensory & Communication Preferences	Prefers brands to communicate from a standpoint that is genuinely inclusive and grounded in reality.	Stresses the elimination of hyper-stimulating elements (fluorescent lights, loud noises, fireworks) and calls for engaging materials.	Traditional marketing's sensory overload is a direct barrier; sensory-friendly design is a core demand from the community.
Addressing Social Misunderstandings	Notes that organizations lack the complete and necessary information to truly understand the diagnosis.	Criticizes the harmful assumption that autistic individuals cannot learn or possess "inferior capacities".	Brands have a responsibility to combat ableist stereotypes and avoid patronizing tones in their communications.
Impact on Consumer Behavior	Reports that non-adapted spaces do not significantly affect them personally.	States that adapted spaces/messages directly stimulate purchasing decisions and validate their choices.	Authentic inclusion is not just a social cause; it directly influences brand loyalty and purchasing intent.
Recommendations for Brands	Recommends that organizations educate themselves deeply to become genuinely inclusive.	Urges brands to research the spectrum's diversity (tactile needs vs. cognitive challenges) rather than generalizing.	Market research should recognize the heterogeneity of the autism spectrum; one-size-fits-all strategies will fail.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings derived from both the in-depth interview with the institutional specialist and the questionnaires administered to individuals on the spectrum provide a solid

foundation for critically discussing the theoretical tensions of contemporary inclusive marketing. The convergence of these qualitative data reveals a profound gap between the corporate rhetoric of brand activism and tangible social transformation within the Mexican commercial environment.

Specifically, the empirical findings demonstrate that in the context of neurodivergence, brand authenticity cannot be evaluated merely by diverse representation in advertising; it requires tangible accessibility. When brands claim inclusivity in their marketing discourse but fail to implement the necessary sensory adaptations and concrete communication tools demanded by the community, they fall directly into performative representation. In this sense, the lack of structural accessibility is the primary indicator of woke washing.

While specialized literature suggests that current commercial strategies seek to reflect consumers' ethical values to strengthen meaningful bonds, local evidence indicates that inclusion efforts oriented toward the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) community suffer from critical fragmentation. The observation by the DIF Jalisco expert that most campaigns are limited to superficial "awareness" schemes that do not alter actual access to consumption validates the stance of Casale (2024) regarding the imminent risk of "artificial inclusion". This phenomenon is further reinforced by the demands of the participating consumers with ASD themselves, who emphasize the urgency for brands to propose "real" initiatives grounded in contextual data, rather than relying on purely discursive or performative rhetoric.

Likewise, the analysis of traditional commercial environments (such as supermarkets or shopping centers) as intrinsically hostile spaces allows for the expansion of sensory marketing and consumer neuroscience theories from a structural equity approach. The specialist's clinical evaluation regarding sensory overload caused by the saturation of auditory and visual stimuli (vulnerability to noise, excessive lights, and hyper-stimulating commercial dynamics) aligns precisely with the experiences narrated by the surveyed consumers, who identified fluorescent lights, loud noises, and aggressive stimuli as determining physical barriers. This empirical cross-referencing supports the arguments of Díaz (2025), who maintains that sensory inclusion continues to be executed reactively and in isolation, being generally designed under a predominantly neurotypical paradigm. When brands ignore these environmental variables, they not only sabotage the shopping experience

of the neurodivergent consumer but also trigger dysregulation crises that society erroneously labels as "bad behavior." This exposes families to value judgments and exclusionary stigmas, ratifying Cabra-García's (2017) thesis that barriers to inclusion do not lie in the individual's condition, but rather in the deficient and exclusionary design of social and economic environments of production.

Furthermore, the discussion surrounding communicative accessibility forces a radical rethinking of the channels and codes utilized in mass commercial communication. The fundamental distinction established by the expert between *language* and *communication* evidence that traditional advertising efforts have sidelined those sectors whose form of information processing is not governed by conventional literacy. The methodological recommendation to implement pictograms and concise, literal visual aids at points of sale presents itself as an indispensable window of innovation to guarantee the autonomy of these consumers. This qualitative finding extends the neuroscientific results of Núñez-Gómez et al. (2020), reaffirming that compositions with lower visual complexity and direct messages decrease cognitive fatigue and optimize attention levels and emotional processing in individuals on the spectrum. By connecting this to the digital accessibility barriers discussed by Santillán Santa Cruz (2022) and Lasa Goiri & Risso Rodríguez (2023), it is demonstrated that the elimination of visual and structural abstraction is not a decorative luxury, but a component of universal design that increases successful interaction and benefits usability for all consumers within the market.

Finally, the strategic and brand management implications of this research challenge the traditional notion that the inclusion of people with disabilities is a purely philanthropic commitment or a passive branch of corporate social responsibility. Within the scope of this exploratory case study, preliminary empirical data from the participating consumers suggest that the presence of spaces, products, and messages adapted to their real needs directly stimulates their purchasing decisions, positively validates their commercial choices, and fosters a strong emotional connection toward the brand

This demonstrates that authentic inclusion represents a competitive advantage and a legitimate driver of economic performance in highly competitive markets. However, to capitalize on this potential and mitigate the risks of backlash or perceived lack of authenticity

(*woke washing*) detailed by Hassan et al. (2025), evidence indicates that corporations would benefit from abandoning homogenizing strategies that stereotype or generalize autism. The path toward truly transformative marketing aligns with the adoption of the inclusive innovation paradigm proposed by Morales et al. (2025), promoting digital equity (Olawale, 2024) through systematic co-creation frameworks that actively involve multidisciplinary teams, neurodevelopmental health professionals, and, crucially, the families and individuals with ASD themselves as central agents in designing consumption priorities.

Furthermore, while this study is geographically situated in Zapopan, Mexico, the empirical findings and strategic recommendations offer significant generalizability to other emerging markets across Latin America and the Global South. Urban centers in these regions frequently share analogous structural barriers, characterized by rapid commercial expansion and a proliferation of modern retail infrastructure, yet lacking stringent, state-enforced regulations for universal design. Within these contexts, where massive architectural remodeling might be economically prohibitive for local businesses, the inclusive marketing adaptations proposed in this study, such as establishing sensory-friendly "quiet hours" and integrating low-cost, literal visual aids like pictograms, prove to be highly scalable and economically viable. Consequently, brands operating in similar developing economies can implement these pragmatic, low-investment strategies to dismantle structural barriers, combat performative inclusion, and foster authentic commercial equity without compromising their financial sustainability.

5.1 Research Limits

Like any empirical study, this research presents certain methodological limitations that must be considered when interpreting its scope. First, the study's approach was strictly qualitative and relied on a limited sample size, grounded in the technical perspective of an institutional specialist and the direct lived experiences of two individuals diagnosed with ASD. Although this methodological design allowed for a deep, rich, and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon, the findings are not intended to be generalizable to the entire neurodivergent population nationwide. Therefore, for future research, it is suggested to expand the study's scope by implementing mixed or quantitative methodologies that include administering

surveys to a significantly larger sample of users on the autism spectrum, which will allow for the statistical validation of consumer behavior, sensory adaptation, and universal design variables identified in this work.

Consequently, the conclusions drawn from this specific sample should be interpreted cautiously as preliminary contextual insights rather than universal and generalized rules for neurodivergent consumer behavior.

6. Conclusions

This research demonstrates that developing inclusive marketing strategies oriented toward the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) community offers substantial and bidirectional benefits, positively impacting both the commercial management of organizations and the well-being and dignity of neurodivergent individuals.

For the field of marketing and brand management, the findings of this exploratory study indicate that authentic inclusion should not be interpreted as an economic burden or a merely philanthropic act of corporate social responsibility; on the contrary, designing adapted environments serves as a direct stimulus that optimizes purchasing decisions. Furthermore, transitioning toward truly accessible commercial practices protects enterprises from the risks associated with perceived inauthenticity, traditional audience backlash, or so-called *woke washing*.

On the other hand, for people with ASD and their families, this study provides value by highlighting the critical importance of reconfiguring to reconfigure mass commercial and advertising environments. By mitigating hostile environmental stimuli—such as loud noises, visual saturation, and fluorescent lights—and implementing clear communication tools like pictograms and literal visual aids, cognitive fatigue and the risk of sensory dysregulation are significantly reduced. The fundamental benefit for these patients lies in gaining autonomy within daily consumption and leisure activities, allowing them to interact with the market without relying exclusively on their caregivers.

Finally, this work underscores the imperative need to promote and finance a higher volume of research of this scientific caliber within the administrative and marketing sciences. Only

through empirical and multidisciplinary knowledge, which places the voice of the neurodivergent consumer at the center of strategic design, will it be possible for brands to transcend superficial discourses and apply this knowledge with a true social impact. In this sense, the transformation of consumption spaces under a neurodivergent lens is firmly consolidated as a form of social innovation. By co-creating practical and tangible solutions that resolve the access barriers of a population historically ignored by standard production models, companies not only optimize their competitive positioning but also become active agents of cultural change, contributing directly to public health, market equity, and a substantial improvement in society's quality of life.

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