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Consumers' perceptions of products made by people with
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Abstract

Consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that promote inclusivity and social responsibility. While much research has focused on race, gender, or environmental sustainability, little is known about how producers with disabilities are perceived in the marketplace. This study examines how products associated with disabled producers influence consumer perceptions of product quality and purchase intention. I hypothesized that consumers would evaluate these products less favorably due to competence-related stereotypes, but that this effect could be moderated by the production method (handmade vs. no production information). In a 2x2 between-subjects experimental study (N = 304), I found that products linked to producers with a disability were perceived as higher in quality and generated stronger purchase intentions compared to those without such an association – contradicting initial expectations. The anticipated moderating effect of handmade production was not supported. These results challenge common assumptions about disability and competence in consumer contexts and suggest that inclusive practices may be positively received by consumers. I contribute to the literature on inclusivity and consumer behavior by showing that products associated with disability can enhance perceived quality and purchase intention, and I offer important practical recommendations for how brands can effectively communicate inclusive practices without risking negative consumer perceptions.

Zusammenfassung

VerbraucherInnen entscheiden sich zunehmend für Marken, die Inklusion und soziale Verantwortung fördern. Während sich ein Großteil der bisherigen Forschung auf Themen wie Ethnie, Geschlecht oder ökologische Nachhaltigkeit konzentriert hat, ist wenig darüber bekannt, wie Produzent:innen mit Behinderung am Markt wahrgenommen werden. Diese Studie untersucht, wie sich die Assoziation eines Produkts mit Produzent:innen mit Behinderung auf die wahrgenommene Produktqualität und die Kaufabsicht auswirkt. Es wurde angenommen, dass diese Produkte aufgrund kompetenzbezogener Stereotype weniger positiv bewertet werden – wobei erwartet wurde, dass die Produktionsart (handgefertigt vs. keine Produktionsinformation) diesen Effekt moderiert. In einer 2x2 Between-Subjects-Studie mit 304 Teilnehmer:innen zeigte sich jedoch, dass Produkte, die mit Produzent:innen mit Behinderung in Verbindung gebracht wurden, als qualitativ hochwertiger wahrgenommen wurden und eine höhere Kaufabsicht auslösten als Produkte ohne diese Assoziation, im Widerspruch zu den ursprünglichen Erwartungen. Der erwartete moderierende Effekt der handgefertigten Produktion konnte nicht bestätigt werden. Diese Ergebnisse stellen gängige Annahmen über Behinderung und Kompetenz im Konsumkontext infrage und deuten darauf hin, dass inklusive Praktiken von Konsument:innen durchaus positiv aufgenommen werden. Die Studie leistet einen Beitrag zur Forschung im Bereich Inklusion und Konsumentenverhalten, indem sie zeigt, dass Produkte, die mit Menschen mit Behinderung assoziiert werden, die wahrgenommene Qualität und Kaufabsicht steigern können. Darüber hinaus liefert sie praxisrelevante Empfehlungen, wie Marken inklusive Botschaften wirkungsvoll kommunizieren können, ohne negative Konsumentenreaktionen befürchten zu müssen.

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List of Abbreviations

DEI	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
WHO	Worlds Health Organisation
SCM	Stereotype Content Model
KPI	Key Performance Indicator

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1 Introduction

An estimated 16% of people worldwide live with a disability, making it a significant dimension of global diversity. That translates into 1.3 billion people and the number is increasing (World Health Organization, 2023). Despite increasing awareness and legal protections, people with disabilities remain one of the most socially marginalized groups (Yaghmaian et al., 2019). Their exclusion is particularly evident in the labor market, where employment rates of people with disabilities are lower than those of the general population. For example, in the United States in 2023, only 22.5% of people with disabilities were employed (US Department of Labor, 2023). In Austria, the proportion of people with disabilities in employment in 2024 is considerably higher at 55.6% (Victoria, n.d.) these disparities persist despite research indicating that the motivation to work is generally very high for people with disability (Aichner, 2021). Especially because work is an important part of modern life and provides social legitimacy (Fryers, 2006).

Negative stereotypes and stigma are seen as key causes of reluctance to employ people with disabilities (Bezyak et al., 2021). Many employers hesitate to hire people with disabilities due to perceptions of lower productivity, higher accommodation costs, and potential integration challenges in the workplace (Aichner, 2021; Jasper & Walldhart, 2013; Kaye et al., 2011).

Furthermore, research suggests that peoples' perceptions of competence and quality are influenced by implicit stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002). At the same time, consumers are increasingly attracted to brands that prioritize social responsibility and inclusion as part of their CSR (Corporate. Social Responsibility) strategies (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Companies respond to these expectations by integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) measures, such as inclusive hiring, into their corporate identity (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). As a result, businesses that employ people with disabilities are often seen as more ethical and trustworthy, and may benefit from increased customer loyalty (Miethlich, 2020; Siperstein et al., 2006). Microsoft is a well-known example of a company that has already mastered disability inclusion. The company launched its disability inclusion program as part of its DEI strategy. Microsoft actively recruited people with disabilities, provided workplace accommodations, and used its Diversity and Inclusion Report to publish progress in this area (McIntyre, 2020). Despite its initial commitment, however, Microsoft later discontinued the program, raising questions about the long-term viability of disability employment initiatives in large corporations. the decision to end its

Inclusion program suggests that even companies that are initially committed to disability-inclusion may reassess their approach due to strategic, financial, or reputational considerations. Maybe the biases that employers have extend beyond the workplace and into consumer behavior.

Most studies in this area have focused on brand-level evaluations, such as ethical perception and employer reputation. Much less is known about how products themselves are evaluated when they are associated with disabled producers. This raises an important and underexplored question: How does consumer perception change when disability inclusion is explicitly linked to the product, not just to the brand or company?

On the one hand, consumers often favor ethically responsible companies (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Mohr & Webb, 2005), but on the other hand, deep-seated stereotypes about people with disabilities may interfere with positive evaluations of the products they are associated with (Fiske et al., 2002). For example, while consumers may forgive more service errors from employees with disabilities (Latif et al., 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2017), it remains unclear whether similar tolerance extends to product evaluations, particularly in the absence of direct human interaction. Consumer judgments are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes (Brown & Dacin, 1997). One powerful extrinsic cue is the method of production. Handmade products, for instance, are often perceived as higher in quality and authenticity (Frizzo et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2015). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that an emphasis on handmade production could mitigate negative stereotypes triggered by disability-related information. Building on these insights, this study examines whether informing consumers that a product was made by people with disabilities affects their perception of product quality and purchase intention negatively. Additionally, it tests whether the mode of production (handmade vs. no production information) moderates these effects. In an experimental study with over 300 participants, I investigate how consumers evaluate products in this context.

This study contributes to the literature by shifting the focus from general brand evaluations to product-specific consumer responses, more specifically perceived product quality and purchase intention, and provides empirical evidence on how disability-related production cues influence consumer behavior. The findings provide both theoretical insights and practical implications for businesses aiming to implement and communicate inclusive, disability related, practices effectively. Understanding how such signals regarding a stigmatized producer are received can help companies optimize their marketing strategies,

reduce bias-driven skepticism, and support more inclusive branding approaches. The next chapter presents a review of the literature on CSR, disability inclusion, stereotypes, and consumer behavior, and outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study's hypotheses.

2 Literature Review

In this study the literature review is crucial in examining disability and how it affects consumers' perceptions of product quality and their purchase intention. According to Denscombe, 2010 a summary of existing research is important to show how new studies relate to previous work. This section reviews the relevant literature to identify the key contributions and gaps in the research while highlighting the importance and relevance of the study in the wider academic context. To provide a theoretical foundation, this section reviews the broader impact of CSR on consumer behavior, discusses stereotypes and biases toward people with disabilities, and examines the role of production methods in consumer decision-making.

2.1 Corporate social responsibility and diversity, equality and inclusion

2.1.1 The role of CSR in business and consumer behavior

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has developed from an ethical obligation into a strategic asset for many companies (Campbell, 2007; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). CSR encompasses efforts to integrate social and environmental concerns into business practices beyond financial objectives (Davis, 1973). Stakeholder theory reinforces this perspective, emphasizing that firms should create value not only for shareholders but for all stakeholders affected by their actions (Parmar et al., 2010).

More recently, CSR strategies have expanded to include Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). DEI encompasses efforts to ensure representation, fairness, and belonging for marginalized and underrepresented groups (Arsel et al., 2022). These concepts have gained relevance beyond internal HR policies, extending into marketing and brand positioning strategies (Ferraro et al., 2022; U. Khan et al., 2024). Inclusive marketing practices target diverse audiences and aim to reflect their values in brand communication.

Empirical research supports the idea that CSR can positively influence consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior. Consumers are more likely to support and remain loyal to brands perceived as socially responsible (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Mohr & Webb, 2005), particularly when CSR initiatives align with personal values (Öberseder et al., 2013). CSR also fosters brand identification (Oghazi et al., 2016) and differentiation in competitive markets (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

However, findings on CSR effectiveness are not unequivocal. While many studies report positive consumer responses, others show neutral or even negative reactions, depending on how CSR is communicated and perceived (Campbell, 2007; Chen & Huang, 2018). These mixed outcomes highlight the importance of considering CSR effects in specific contexts and examining which elements are most effective. One such context is the inclusion of people with disabilities, a growing but underexplored dimension of CSR. To better understand its relevance in corporate and consumer environments, it is first necessary to clarify what *'disability'* encompasses and how it is conceptualized.

2.1.2 Definition and Conceptualization of Disability

Disability is a complex and multifaceted concept with no single universally accepted definition (Grue, 2016). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), disability refers to a limitation or impairment that restricts an individual's ability to carry out activities in a way that is typically expected for a person without such constraints (World Health Organization, 2023). Globally, 16% of the population, or around 1.3 billion people, have a significant disability, and that number continues to rise as the population ages and diagnoses increase (World Health Organization, 2023). Individuals with disabilities constitute one of the most marginalized groups in society, facing systemic barriers in education, employment, and social participation (Yaghmaian et al., 2019). Their exclusion is particularly evident in the labor market, where employment rates are lower. The definition and understanding of disability have evolved significantly over time. Historically, disability was framed primarily through a medical model, which viewed it as an individual deficit requiring treatment or correction (Hogan, 2019). Nevertheless, contemporary perspectives are increasingly aligning with a social model, which emphasises that disability is shaped by environmental, societal, and structural barriers rather than inherent impairments (Grue, 2016). This shift is reflected in international conventions, e.g., United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007, and national legislations that advocate for equal rights and

accessibility rather than merely medical interventions (Grue, 2016). Disability can be conceptualised as a spectrum that encompasses a range of different impairments. These impairments can be broadly categorised as physical, sensory, intellectual and mental disabilities. Common visual representations of disability in the public domain include symbols such as wheelchairs and hearing aids (Grue, 2016). The distinction between physical and mental disabilities is particularly relevant in consumer research, as individuals may associate different levels of capability, effort, and quality with these categories (Sim, Mattea, 2022). While legal frameworks and disability rights movements have improved accessibility and inclusion, societal attitudes and implicit biases continue to shape the treatment of individuals with disabilities (Gill et al., 2016). These biases contribute to stereotypes and stigma, which in turn affect employment opportunities, social integration, and consumer perceptions of products associated with disability.

2.1.3 Disability inclusion in businesses

Among the many forms of CSR, the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce has gained growing attention. Companies that actively employ individuals with disabilities not only fulfill social and legal expectations but are also perceived as more ethical, inclusive, and socially conscious (Siperstein et al., 2006; Perkins & Wiley, 2014; Qayyum et al., 2023). These perceptions can enhance brand trust and customer loyalty, especially among consumers who value social responsibility (Trudel & Cotte, 2009). Research shows that disability-inclusive businesses are often seen as more moral, community-oriented, and credible. Overall, there is a general tendency for consumers to associate disability-inclusive companies with stronger social values and ethical commitment. Notably, companies using disabled models in advertising—such as Cossu et al. (2019), who examined campaigns in Amsterdam—have also been positively perceived, further highlighting the reputational benefits of visible inclusion.

Disability inclusion can also yield internal benefits for companies. Diverse workplaces may experience greater innovation and improved morale, as both disabled and non-disabled employees report higher engagement when working in inclusive environments (Aichner, 2021). Moreover, such companies often develop better insights into the needs of disabled consumers, resulting in more accessible and inclusive product offerings (Aichner & Shaltoni, 2018).

Governments also promote inclusion through legal frameworks and incentives. Multiple stakeholders, governments through legislation, companies through strategic CSR, and consumers through ethical expectations, have adopted disability inclusion as a measurable and integral part of social responsibility. For instance, in Germany, companies must meet minimum employment quotas for people with disabilities (§154 SGB IX), with financial penalties for non-compliance. Austria enforces similar regulations (§1 para. 1, Disability Employment Act, 2024). Some governments also offer incentives to businesses hiring disabled workers (Aichner, 2021).

While many studies emphasize the strategic and reputational benefits of disability inclusion, some research suggests that consumer stereotypes may still influence perceptions, particularly when the disability is explicitly associated with product outcomes. For instance, inclusive hiring has been shown to enhance brand image (Aichner, 2021), though competence-related doubts can persist (Fiske et al., 2002). Negative stereotypes play a key role in limiting employment opportunities, reinforcing misconceptions about workplace competence (Bonaccio et al., 2020). The following section explores how such stereotypes manifest and their implications for consumer behavior.

2.2 Stereotypes and stigmatization

Understanding the difference between stereotypes and stigma is essential to contextualize how consumers interpret disability in commercial contexts. Stereotypes are cognitive generalizations about the characteristics of social groups, often based on oversimplification or assumptions (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Stigma, by contrast, is a broader social process. It encompasses the labeling of individuals, the application of stereotypes, and their use as a basis for separation, discrimination, and social exclusion, especially within power structures that reinforce inequality (Link & Phelan, 2001; Goffman, 2009). Together, stereotypes and stigma function as interconnected yet distinct mechanisms that influence both interpersonal judgments and institutional practices.

A widely accepted framework for understanding disability stereotypes is Fiske et al.'s (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which categorizes stereotypes along two fundamental dimensions. Warmth: The extent to which a group is perceived as friendly, trustworthy, and well-intentioned. The second dimension is competence: The extent to which a group is

perceived as capable, intelligent, and effective. According to Fiske et al. (2002), people with disabilities are typically perceived as high in warmth but low in competence. This combination leads to paternalistic stereotypes, where disabled individuals are viewed as deserving of help and sympathy but not necessarily capable of professional or independent success (Fiske et al., 2002). Stereotypes contribute to stigma, which goes beyond individual perception and influences structural and social inequalities.

Disability stigma manifests in various ways. Firstly, there is employment discrimination, whereby individuals with disabilities are often perceived as being less productive, dependent, or costly to accommodate. Despite legal frameworks and the rising awareness, as described in the chapter above, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in employment. Negative stereotypes and stigmata about their productivity, reliability, and workplace competence persist, making it more difficult for them to secure meaningful job opportunities (Bezyak et al., 2021). Research consistently shows that employment rates for people with disabilities remain lower than those of the general population, even though many express a strong desire to work (Boardman et al., 2003). In many cases, companies publicly emphasize CSR initiatives promoting disability inclusion, but their actual hiring practices do not always align with their stated commitments (Aichner, 2021; Mullin et al., 2024). Another structural barrier is the segregation of disabled workers into sheltered workshops. In many countries, people with disabilities are employed in specialized workshops, where they often receive below-minimum wages and have limited career advancement opportunities (Aichner, 2021; Avellone et al., 2023).

Secondly, there is social exclusion, whereby people with disabilities frequently face limited accessibility, negative societal attitudes, and fewer opportunities for full participation. Implicit and explicit biases further complicate the experience of people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2017). Whilst some stereotypes may appear to have a positive connotation, for example, the idea that disabled people are brave, resilient, or inspiring, these can still contribute to paternalistic discrimination by reinforcing the perception that they are incapable of competing on equal terms (Pelleboer-Gunnink et al., 2021).

Previous studies suggest that stereotypes influence how consumers judge businesses and products associated with disability (Cuddy, Amy et al., 2024; Fiske et al., 2002). The stereotype of low competence could lower consumer confidence in the quality of products (Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, understanding the role of stereotypes and stigma is essential in predicting how consumers might react to react toward products made by disabled. This study

seeks to bridge the gap by examining whether the disability label negatively affects perceived product quality and purchase intention.

2.3 Consumer perceptions of perceived product quality and purchase intention

Building on the previous discussion of disability stereotypes and stigma, it is essential to examine how these perceptions influence consumer behavior regarding products. While various organizations employ individuals with disabilities in the production of goods, there is little transparency regarding the prevalence of such products in the market. While some companies explicitly emphasize their commitment to disability inclusion in their communication and branding strategies, others adopt more reserved approaches, refraining from prominently disclosing such initiatives. Certain businesses even specialize in selling products exclusively produced by people with disabilities, e.g. VOI fesch, a company in Vienna that produces clothes (Fischer, 2018).

Consumers play a central role in this system, as their purchasing choices directly impact the success and sustainability of inclusive business models. Their attitudes, stereotypes and potential stigmatization of people with disabilities are therefore crucial factors in understanding purchase behavior. Inclusivity is becoming an increasingly important aspect of consumer decision-making. This aligns with broader trends in CSR, where consumers exhibit a preference for brands that demonstrate ethical responsibility (Singla, 2024). To better understand this dynamic, this section explores two critical aspects of consumer decision making: perceived product quality and purchase intention in relation to disability-related product labeling.

2.3.1 Perceived product quality

The concept of perceived product quality places a crucial role in consumer decision-making processes, as it influences purchasing behaviors, brand perceptions, and overall consumer satisfaction (Rihayana et al., 2022). In consumer research, perceived product quality is defined as ‘the consumer’s judgment about a product’s overall excellence or superiority’ (Zeithaml, 1988), based on both intrinsic and extrinsic cues (Zeithaml, 1988). Unlike objective quality, which can be measured through technical specifications and standardized performance metrics (Mitra & Golder, 2006), perceived quality is subjective, shaped by individual experiences, expectations, and external factors (Aaker, David A., 1996). As consumer choices often rely on perceptions rather than actual product performance,

understanding the factors that influence perceived quality is critical for businesses and marketers (Santoso et al., 2023).

Zeithaml's (1988) framework on perceived quality highlights two primary dimensions that shape consumer quality assessments. Intrinsic quality cues are physical product attributes, such as durability, material composition, and functionality. Intrinsic cues are typically evaluated through direct experience with the product, allowing consumers to assess tangible aspects such as texture, craftsmanship, and structural integrity (Bhuan, 1998). Extrinsic quality cues are defined as non-physical product characteristics that consumers utilise as proxies for the purpose of assessing quality. These include brand reputation, price, country of origin, advertising, packaging, and labeling (Dodds et al., 1991; Samu et al., 2023; Zeithaml, 1988). It is particularly relevant for consumers when the attributes of a product are not immediately verifiable (Schiffmann, Leon & Kanuk, Leslie L., 2000).

Among these cues, producer-related information plays a key role in shaping quality perceptions. Research has shown that consumers often associate the type of producer with different quality expectations. For example, luxury and artisan products made by specialized producers or craftsmen are often perceived as higher in quality, authenticity, and uniqueness (Ghazali et al., 2024). The information about the producer plays a role in shaping consumers' attitudes and purchase behavior. Labels or detailed information serve as signals of product attributes, often conveying social, ethical, or environmental messages that influence consumer evaluations of a brand's authenticity, trustworthiness, and commitment to social responsibility (Bodur et al., 2016). Also labels like 'organic' or 'fair trade' have been shown to enhance perceived product quality and increase purchase intentions, as they align with consumer values and reinforce positive brand associations (Bauer et al., 2013; Berry & Romero, 2021). Nonetheless, it has also been demonstrated that not all labels or not all information attached, engender uniformly positive effects on consumer perceptions. Research suggests that while ethical and sustainability certifications are generally perceived favourably, labels that explicitly associate a product with marginalised groups may trigger implicit biases (Fiske et al., 2002).

This phenomenon is of particular relevance in the context of the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market. A substantial body of research in social psychology and marketing suggests that the information linked to disability inclusion may activate stereotypes and stigmatization of lower competence and reduced work

efficiency (Clément-Guillotin, Corentin et al., 2024; Fiske et al., 2002; Rohmer & Louvet, 2012). Building on this literature, consumers may also associate 'made by a person with a disability' labels or information about the disabled producer in a negative way (consciously or unconsciously), due to stereotypes of lower competence, and may unconsciously assume that the product is less reliable, less well made or technically inferior, even if its actual quality is identical to that of other products. This could present a paradox wherein companies that engage in disability-inclusive employment practices with the intention of enhancing corporate reputation may inadvertently face consumer skepticism regarding the perceived product quality. Given that extrinsic quality cues, such as cause-related labels, can shape consumer expectations and biases, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1a: Consumers perceive products labeled as ‘*made by people with a disability*’ to be of lower quality compared to products without such a label.

2.3.2 Purchase intention

While perceived product quality plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes, it does not directly translate into purchase behavior meaning a product may be perceived as high in quality, but that does not necessarily mean that consumers will buy it. Purchase intention is influenced by additional factors beyond quality alone (Ajzen, 1991; Tsotsou, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to extend the analysis beyond quality perceptions and examine whether products made by people with a disability impact consumers' willingness to purchase a product. In consumer behavior research, purchase intention is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of actual purchasing behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977; Spears & Singh, 2004). It refers to a consumer's conscious willingness to buy a specific product or service, shaped by a combination of cognitive evaluations e.g., quality perception, social influences like ethical considerations, and situational constraints like price and availability (Ajzen, 1991). Although quality perception is a major determinant of consumer choice, a consumer's final purchase decision is often influenced by additional psychological, social, and economic factors (Dodds et al., 1991; Tsotsou, 2006).

Among the factors that shape purchase intention, the type of producer has received increasing attention in the literature. For instance, research shows that consumers are more willing to buy products made by trusted or expert producers (e.g. local, premium brands), as these carry associations of authenticity (Beverland, 2005). However, this positive effect does not necessarily extend to all producers. When the producer belongs to a stigmatized or

marginalized group, such as people with disabilities, implicit stereotypes may influence consumer attitudes in more complex ways.

This is particularly relevant in the context of products labeled as being produced by people with disabilities, as such labels evoke ethical considerations alongside quality judgments, potentially creating a conflict between moral values and perceived product reliability. While some individuals view disability inclusive employment as a sign of corporate integrity, others may question whether ethical business practices come at the expense of product quality (Aichner, 2021). This skepticism is particularly relevant when a disability label is attached to a product, as stereotypes regarding competence and reliability could negatively influence purchase intention, despite positive attitudes toward inclusivity. Despite consumers' increased interest in brands that employ people with disabilities as part of their CSR strategy (González & Luis Fernández, 2016), prejudice and stereotypes are still very prevalent, with research showing that displaying the information 'made by people with disabilities' can lead to doubts about the reliability and craftsmanship of products (Fiske et al., 2002). Research on consumer responses to social labels suggests that when ethical motivations conflict with quality concerns, consumers may hesitate to make a purchase, or they may justify their decision not to buy by prioritizing objective product attributes (e.g., durability, price, or brand reputation) over CSR considerations (Trudel & Cotte, 2009). This tension highlights the need to investigate whether a disability-related label also impacts consumers' purchase intention of the product. To examine the extent to which disability-related labels affect consumer decision-making, this study investigates whether the potential negative effect of the label on quality perception translates into lower purchase intentions. Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1b: Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as ‘*made by people with a disability*’ compared to products without such a label.

2.4 The role of handmade production

The previous section has outlined how disability-related information can influence perceived product quality and purchase intention. However, consumer evaluations are rarely based on a single cue. In addition to social information, contextual cues such as production type can significantly influence product judgments. Prior literature suggests that the way a product is manufactured, particularly whether it is handmade or mass-produced, plays an important

role in shaping key performance indicators (KPIs), including quality perception and purchase intention (Fuchs et al., 2015; Frizzo et al., 2020).

This effect may be particularly pronounced when evaluating products made by marginalized producers, such as people with disabilities. Handmade products are defined as goods crafted with significant human labor, effort, and skill, often emphasizing traditional craftsmanship, authenticity, and exclusivity (Droege, 2022; Frizzo et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2015). The distinction between handmade and machine-made products is one of the most prominent differentiators in consumer product evaluations (Frizzo et al., 2020). Handmade products are often perceived as unique, high-quality, and emotionally valuable, whereas machine-made products are typically associated with precision, efficiency, and standardization (Fuchs et al., 2015). They are perceived as warmer, more personal, and superior in quality compared to mass-produced alternatives. Handmade products are also believed to carry an emotional component, as consumers associate them with human creativity, dedication, and passion (Fuchs et al., 2015). As already mentioned above, intrinsic product attributes are critical components of quality perception and are often judged more favorably for handmade products. This is due to the belief that a product being handmade results in greater attention to detail, precision, and care (Schiffmann, Leon & Kanuk, Leslie L., 2000). Machine-made products, in contrast, are associated with automation, standardization, and efficiency. While they may offer cost advantages, consistency, and scalability, they often lack the perceived individuality, effort, and artistry of handmade goods (Kruger et al., 2004). Prior research has established that consumers respond differently to handmade vs. mass-produced goods, with handmade products being associated with superior craftsmanship, uniqueness, and authenticity (Droege, 2022; Fuchs et al., 2015). These positive associations create strong expectations about product quality (Kruger et al., 2004), which may have important implications when evaluating products labeled as ‘made by people with disabilities’.

One mechanism is the effort heuristic, which posits that perceived effort invested in a product’s creation signals higher quality (Kruger et al., 2004). The assumption is: the more time and care required to create a product, the more likely it is to be high-quality. Accordingly, handmade goods, often seen as the result of time-intensive, skilled work, are assumed to have greater attention to detail, creativity, and emotional depth (Fuchs et al., 2015). These attributes reinforce trust in the craftsmanship and authenticity of handmade items. When this scenario is added to the information about disability inclusion, the

production mode may play an important moderating role. Conversely, the absence of emotional and artisan connotations when no information about production is given may potentially reinforce existing biases.

In earlier sections, I hypothesized that disability-related product information may evoke competence-related stereotypes, potentially leading to lower quality perception and purchase intention. However, if a product is simultaneously labeled as handmade, I am proposing that handmade production can be more than a quality signal, it becomes a narrative of personal investment and moral value and may serve as a compensatory factor that mitigates the negative competence related stereotypes linked to the information about producers with a disability. When a handmade product is labeled with ‘made by people with a disability’ consumers may experience less skepticism about the quality because the perceived effort associated with craftsmanship compensates for the negative capability stereotypes. In contrast, if no information is given about the production-mode, consumers are going to be more likely to rely on default stereotypes about competence (Fiske et al., 2002). These arguments suggest that consumers will perceive handmade products labeled as ‘*made by people with disabilities*’ to be of higher quality than machine-made equivalents or than there is no info about the production mode at all. Machine-made production does not inherently convey effort, warmth, or uniqueness, and is often perceived as cold, impersonal, and standardized (Kruger et al., 2004). In the absence of the information about the production mode, consumers may rely more heavily on competence-related stereotypes when evaluating products. Based on the theoretical insights outlined above, this study proposes the following moderator hypotheses.

Warmth stereotypes associated with both disability and handmade goods may also align in consumers’ minds, enhancing overall product perceptions. Handmade products evoke emotional engagement and authenticity, while consumers often associate people with disabilities with sincerity, kindness, and moral value (Fiske et al., 2002). This congruence may lead to more favorable evaluations compared to when no production information is provided.

In summary, this section proposes that the interaction between disability-related product information and the production mode may influence consumer evaluations. Specifically, handmade production may mitigate negative competence stereotypes associated with

disability, leading to more favorable perceptions of product quality and stronger purchase intention.

H2a: Consumers perceive products “made by people with disabilities” (vs. no label) to be of higher quality when the product is handmade.

This effect is driven by the positive associations linked to craftsmanship, attention to detail, and emotional investment in handmade products, which may offset any competence-related concerns.

H2b: Consumers’ purchase intentions for products labeled as “made by people with disabilities” (vs. no label) are stronger when the product is handmade.

The emotional value of handmade products, combined with associations of care, authenticity, and effort, may enhance consumer trust and willingness to purchase despite potential stereotypes.

This theoretical framework lays the foundation for testing whether a disability label has influence on the perceived quality of a production and the purchase intention and if production mode can serve as a key moderator in consumer evaluations of disability-labeled products, ultimately influencing both perceived quality and purchase intention.

3 Methodology

This study examines the effects of product labelling (*‘made by people with disabilities’*) and the moderating effect of production mode (handmade) on the two dependent variables perceived product quality and purchase intention. To explore the research question, an online survey with an experimental setting has been appointed as the essential empirical method, which enables group comparisons following the display of an experiment and access to a larger number of participants. Participation in the experimental survey was on a voluntary and anonymous basis. A between-subjects design was determined as crucial for the hypotheses, enabling random assignments to one of the stimuli groups. This method makes it possible to analyse causal relationships between the variables under investigation and at the same time minimise potential confounding effects. The methodology will be explained in greater detail in the following chapters. Starting with the research design, this chapter

provides a detailed explanation of the stimuli and conditions of the experimental survey, the measurements and finally the exact course of the experiment.

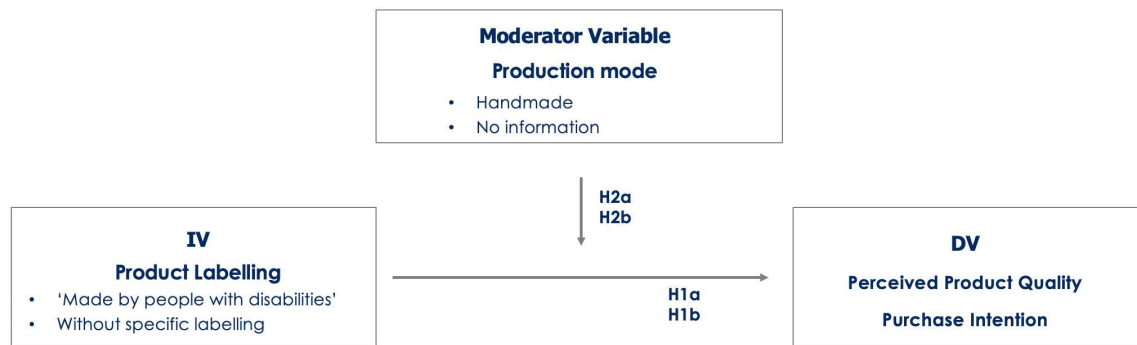
3.1 Research design

This thesis examines the effects of product labelling ('made by people with a disability vs. no label') on perceived product quality and purchase intention. In addition, the moderating role of the type of production (handmade vs. no information about the production mode) is analysed.

A quantitative approach was chosen as it allows a precise measurement of the relationships between independent and dependent variables as this approach is a more reliable predictor of actual behavior compared to qualitative self-assessments (M. Bauer et al., 2019). To explore the research question a digital survey with an experimental setting was conducted via Qualtrics as an online experiment (<http://www.qualtrics.com>). The online implementation allowed access to a more diverse sample and was a practical choice given the limited time and resources. While online surveys offer logistical advantages, they also come with methodological limitations, such as reduced control over participants' attention and understanding (Bell et al., 2022). In addition, they emphasise that online surveys allow researchers to reach a larger proportion of their target sample and obtain responses more quickly (Bell et al., 2022). A between-subjects design with a 2x2 layout was determined as crucial for the hypotheses, enabling random assignments to one of the four condition groups that will be further explained in the next chapters. The between-subjects design helps to avoid carryover effects. The experimental design and randomisation of questions was chosen to reduce spillover effects. This means that previous questions do not influence participants' answers to subsequent questions (Field, Andy & Graham, Hole, 2024). Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental groups using Qualtrics' built-in randomization feature, ensuring an even distribution across all conditions. The sample was collected through convenience sampling, with the survey link shared on the SurveyCircle platform and further distributed via social media. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to increase participation. In order to draw valid conclusions from research results, it is essential to define an appropriate sample size (Memon et al., 2020). A minimum sample size of approximately 250 participants was targeted, following general recommendation in experimental research (Brysbaert, 2019). Eventually 304 respondents took part in the survey over a period of two weeks (21.12.2024 – 04.01.2025). The independent variable is product

labelling, which was varied in two conditions: ‘*made by people with disabilities*’ and no specific info about the producer. The moderating variable is the mode of production, which was presented as either ‘*handmade*’ or no information about the production mode. The dependent variables include perceived product quality and purchase intention.

Figure 1: Research Model and Hypotheses



Main Effect

H1a: Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of lower quality.

H1b: Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" compared to products without such a label.

Moderator

H2a: Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of higher quality for handmade products.

H2b: Consumers' purchase intentions for products labeled as 'made by people with disabilities' are stronger for handmade products.

3.2 Conditions and stimuli

The experimental conditions were designed to investigate the effects of product labelling (‘*made by people with a disability*’) and the mode of production (*handmade*) on perceived product quality and purchase intention. This study employed a 2x2 between-subject design, resulting in four experimental groups that combined the independent variable (product labelling) and the moderating variable (type of production). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: ‘*Made by people with disabilities*’ with handmade products, ‘*made by people with a disability*’ with no additional information, no label with handmade products, and no label with no additional information. Depending on the assigned condition, participants viewed identical product images accompanied by one of four standardized product descriptions. For the first group, the text stated: ‘Please look at this product carefully, this is a handmade [product], produced **by a person with a**

disability.' The second group read: 'Please look at this product carefully. This product is a [product], produced **by a person with a disability.**' The third group received: 'Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade [product].' Finally, the fourth group's description read: 'Please look at this product carefully. This product is a [product].'

The stimuli consisted of four products, these products were soap, a mug, a jam and a keychain, selected to represent a mix of hedonic and utilitarian items. Hedonic products, such as jam and toys, appeal to emotional and pleasure-driven consumer, while utilitarian products, like soap and mugs, are valued for their functionality and practical utility. This classification ensured coverage of different consumer decision-making contexts, drawing on established theories of consumer behavior (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). The selection of stimuli followed the principles outlined by Simonsohn et al. (2024), which emphasize internal validity by systematically addressing potential confounds and ensuring meaningful diversity across product categories. Adhering to the *Mix-and-Match* framework, the products were varied systematically along relevant dimensions, such as category (e.g., food, personal care, home decor) and appeal type (hedonic versus utilitarian). Efforts were made to ensure that the manipulation (e.g., handmade versus no info, CSR labelling) was the primary distinguishing attribute across conditions, minimizing unintended variations. In this rigorous selection process, a balance between theoretical considerations, practical relevance and methodological rigour was sought and tested in a pre-test. To ensure ecological validity, the products were selected based on their real-world association with production by people with disabilities. For example, the soap was sourced from Werky Von Menschen gemacht!, n.d., the mug from Parafaktum, n.d. the jam from SEMEAR, n.d. and the keychain from Entia Gutes aus Manufakturen, n.d. These choices enhance the study's relevance by reflecting real-world scenarios, providing a stronger foundation for the generalizability of findings. All stimuli were presented to participants in random order to mitigate sequence effects. Each product was displayed individually, followed by questions measuring perceived product quality and purchase intention. Standardization was prioritized in the design of the stimuli to control for potential biases. Text length, image quality, and overall design were uniform across all conditions. Additionally, the aesthetic appeal of the stimuli was ensured to foster participant engagement and simulate realistic purchasing decisions.

3.3 Measurement

The variables were operationalized and measured using scales and additional exploratory and control measures. This section outlines the operationalization of the independent variable, the moderating variable, and the dependent variables, as well as the attention checks and social desirability questions included in the study.

The independent variable, the product information, was manipulated into two experimental conditions (see chapter 3.2) This manipulation was implemented by inserting or omitting the information in the product description shown to participants. The choice to use this kind of manipulation follows established experimental design practices to examine consumer responses to socially salient information (adapted from adapted from Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The moderating variable, production type, was also manipulated into two conditions: handmade and no information about the production mode. In the handmade condition, product descriptions explicitly included the phrase, '*This product is handmade*'. In the no-information condition, no mention of the production mode was made. By including this variable, the study examines whether production type moderates the relationship between product labeling and the dependent variables.

Prior studies emphasize that quality perception is a multidimensional construct. Perceived product quality refers to a consumer's subjective assessment of a product's craftsmanship, reliability, and overall quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore the items for perceived product quality were adapted from established consumer research scales, which have been shown to provide reliable and valid measurements of perceived product quality (Zeithaml, 1988; Fuchs et al., 2015). The dependent variable was measured using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = Totally disagree and 7 = Totally agree. Based on those critical dimensions of perceived product quality three items were included in the survey to measure this construct as using multiple items improves measurement reliability, reducing potential biases linked to single-item evaluations (Loo, 2002). 'This product is reliable.', 'This product is well made' and 'This product has quality'. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement.

The measurement of purchase intention in this study is also based on established consumer behavior research that defines it as the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product when certain conditions, such as affordability and need, are met (Ajzen, 1991). Prior research

suggests that single-item measures can effectively capture purchase intention when the construct is concrete and well understood by participants (Bergkvist, 2015). The statement ‘To what extent do you agree with the following statement: If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it’ aligns with this approach by incorporating key decision-making factors that influence purchasing behavior. This dependent variable was also measured using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = totally disagree and 7 = totally agree.

To assess potential response biases, participants answered two questions designed to measure their sensitivity to social desirability as it is standard practice to ensure validity of self-reported measures (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960): ‘How concerned will a person be with what others are thinking of him/her when they state a high likelihood of not liking products made by people with disabilities?’ and ‘A person will be [] concerned with what others are thinking of him/her when they believe a product made by a person with a disability has lower quality.’ Participants responded to both questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 indicated ‘not at all concerned’ and 7 indicated ‘extremely concerned’. The social desirability scale was adapted from Stefano Puntonis. Given the ethical and social nature of the research topic, participants may have been inclined to provide responses that align with socially accepted norms rather than their true opinions. By incorporating indirect questions (Fisher, 1993), this study aimed to account for potential biases and ensure a more accurate assessment of participants' genuine attitudes toward products labeled as *‘made by people with disabilities’*.

Additionally, one exploratory question was included to examine participants' associations with the disability label: ‘When you see a product labeled as ‘produced by a person with a disability,’ what type of disability do you most associate with the producer?’ Participants could choose either ‘physical disability’ or ‘mental disability’. This question was designed to generate further insights into how the label is cognitively processed by respondents and may inform future research. It is plausible that participants disproportionately associate disability with one type, particularly physical disability, due to their greater visibility in public discourse (Sim & Hugenberg, 2022).

To ensure that participants carefully read and processed the information provided in the experimental conditions, two attention check questions were included in the survey for all groups (Oppenheimer et al., 2009): ‘Who was indicated as the producer of the products you

rated?’ with the response options: People with a disability, No information about the producer, I don’t know/I don’t remember. The second question was ‘What mode of production was specified for the products you rated?’ with the response options: Handmade, No information about the production mode, I don’t know/I don’t remember.

3.4 Experimental survey procedure

The experimental survey (see Appendix A) was designed using closed-ended questions to systematically assess participants' responses to the different experimental conditions. At the beginning of the survey, participants were provided with a brief introduction and informing them that they would evaluate four different products under specific conditions. Additionally, participants were informed that the survey would take approximately three minutes to complete. Following this introduction, participants were presented with a data protection declaration that emphasized confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Only those who provided explicit consent and confirmed they were at least 18 years old were permitted to proceed. Respondents who did not meet these criteria were automatically excluded from the study.

To enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the survey, multiple pre-tests were conducted before data collection. These pre-tests aimed to identify and rectify any potential ambiguities in question wording and to address technical issues related to the survey interface (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Based on the insights gained from the pre-tests, necessary refinements were made to optimize the survey for the final data collection phase. Following the introduction and consent process, participants were randomly assigned one of the four experimental groups using Qualtrics' randomization feature. Each group was exposed to the same four products soap, toy, jam, and mug but with different product descriptions that varied according to the experimental condition (see chapter 3.3). As already mentioned above, the manipulation followed a 2x2 between-subjects design, where both product labeling (*made by people with a disability vs. no label*) and production type (*handmade vs. no production information*) were systematically varied (see chapter 3.1). After being presented with the product descriptions, participants evaluated each of the four products by responding to three perceived product quality items and one purchase intention question per product. All responses were recorded on 7-point Likert scales, allowing for a nuanced

assessment of participants' perceptions and behavioral intentions. Upon completing the product evaluations, participants answered additional measures, including social desirability questions. The survey also contained an exploratory question asking participants to specify the type of disability they most associated with the label '*produced by a person with a disability*', followed by the two attention checks questions. Finally, the survey concluded with demographic questions, in which participants reported their age, gender, and highest level of education. These demographic variables provided insight into the sample characteristics and allowed for potential control measures in subsequent analyses. By structuring the survey in this way, the study ensured that responses were systematically collected while maintaining methodological rigor and minimizing potential biases. This experimental design enabled a systematic investigation of the relationships between product labeling, production mode, and consumer perceptions, while controlling for potential biases and confounding variables.

4 Results

The survey was conducted between December 21, 2024, and January 4, 2025, and initially included 304 participants. To ensure data quality, only valid responses from genuine participants who completed the survey were included in the analysis, i.e. incomplete responses and test cases were excluded through a combination of filters in SPSS, resulting in a dataset of 258 participants ($n = 258$).

The sample's complete demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1 to 3. The demographic data of the study sample provides insights into the participants' age, gender and educational background, which are critical for understanding the context of the findings. As shown in Table 1, the age of the participants ranged from 18 to 62 years, with a mean age of 28.18 years ($SD = 8.51$).

Table 1: Descriptive Age

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DemoAge_	258	18.00	62.00	28.1860	8.50751
Valid N (listwise)	258				

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the gender distribution of the sample. The majority of participants identified as female (59.3%), followed by male participants (40.3%), and 0.4% as diverse. This gender distribution highlights a slight imbalance, which should be considered when interpreting the results, especially in cases where gender could influence perceptions or decision-making.

Table 2: Descriptive Gender

DemoGender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	104	40.3	40.3	40.3
	Female	153	59.3	59.3	99.6
	Diverse	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	258	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2: Descriptive Gender

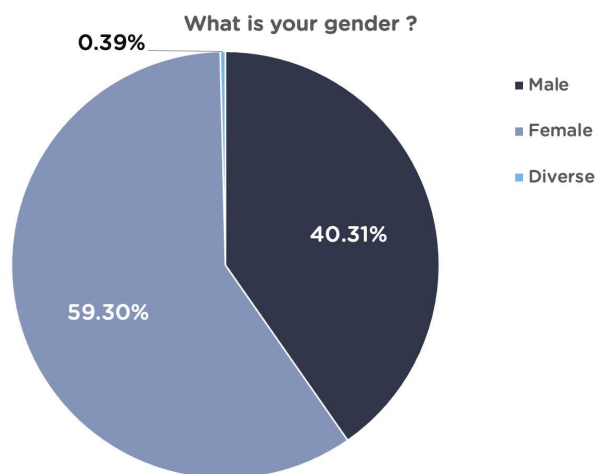
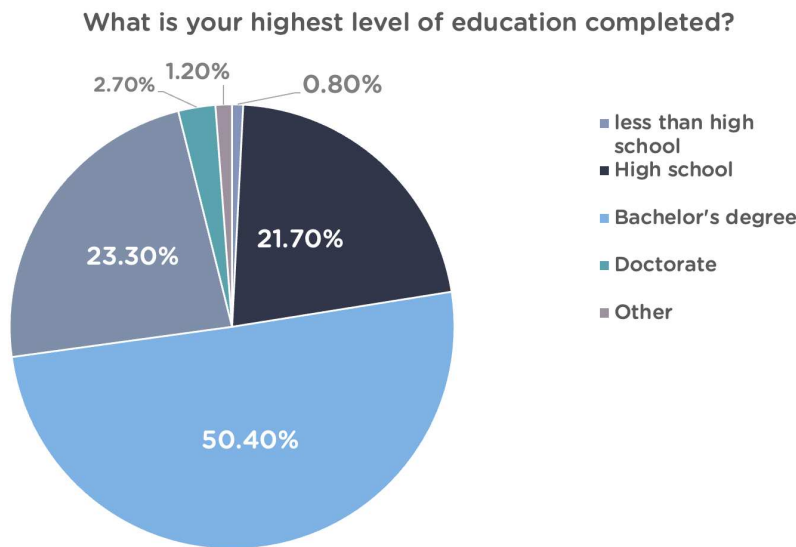


Table 3 and Figure 3 provide an overview of the participants' educational levels. Over half of the participants (50.4%) reported having a bachelor's degree, while 23.3% held a master's degree, and 21.7% completed high school. Smaller proportions of participants had a doctorate (2.7%) or other forms of education (1.2%). This indicates that the sample is highly educated, which may influence their awareness of CSR practices and ethical consumption.

Table 3: Descriptive Highest Education

		DemoEducation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than high school	2	.8	.8	.8
	High school	56	21.7	21.7	22.5
	Bachelor's degree	130	50.4	50.4	72.9
	Master's degree	60	23.3	23.3	96.1
	Doctorate	7	2.7	2.7	98.8
	Other	3	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	258	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3: Descriptive Highest Education



These demographic insights form a foundation for interpreting the study results and ensure the context of the sample is appropriately considered. Following this demographic analysis, the study's experimental design and participant distribution are described. The study employed a 2x2 between-subjects design, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of the four groups. The final distribution of participants across the conditions was as follows: Disability Label + Handmade (N = 62), Disability Label + No Info (N = 65), No Label + Handmade (N = 67), and No Label + No Info (N = 64).

Before delving into the detailed analysis of the study's hypotheses, the following section presents the descriptive statistics for the key dependent variables. This provides an initial overview of how perceived product quality and purchase intention varied across the different experimental conditions. Descriptive statistics for the two dependent variables, perceived product quality and purchase intention, indicate that products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" received higher ratings compared to those without the label. Specifically,

for perceived product quality, the highest mean rating was observed in the Disability + Handmade group ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 0.91$), closely followed by the Disability + No Info group ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.07$). Lower ratings were seen in the No Label conditions, with the Handmade version rated at $M = 4.91$ ($SD = 0.88$), and No Info rated lowest at $M = 4.73$ ($SD = 0.87$). (Table 4 and Figure 4)

Similarly, purchase intention was highest in the Disability + Handmade group ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.29$), followed by Disability + No Info ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.26$). Again, the No Label conditions received lower ratings, with Handmade at $M = 4.37$ ($SD = 1.25$) and No Info at $M = 4.28$ ($SD = 1.28$). (Shown in Table 5 and Figure 5) These patterns suggest that both the disability and handmade cue had a positive effect on how participants perceived product quality and their intention to purchase. The combined effect of these cues resulted in the most favorable evaluations. A visual comparison of these findings is presented in figure 4 and 5 below, highlighting the clear contrast between labeled and unlabeled conditions.

Table 4: Descriptive DV Perceived Product Quality

Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable Perceived Product Quality: PQ_Av				
DisGroup	MoGroup	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
"Disability"	1 Handmade	5.4207	.90629	62
	2 No info	5.3462	1.07178	65
	Total	5.3825	.99122	127
"No Label"	1 Handmade	4.9104	.88410	67
	2 No info	4.7344	.87475	64
	Total	4.8244	.88060	131
Total	1 Handmade	5.1557	.92734	129
	2 No info	5.0426	1.02238	129
	Total	5.0992	.97576	258

Figure 4: Descriptive DV Perceived Product Quality

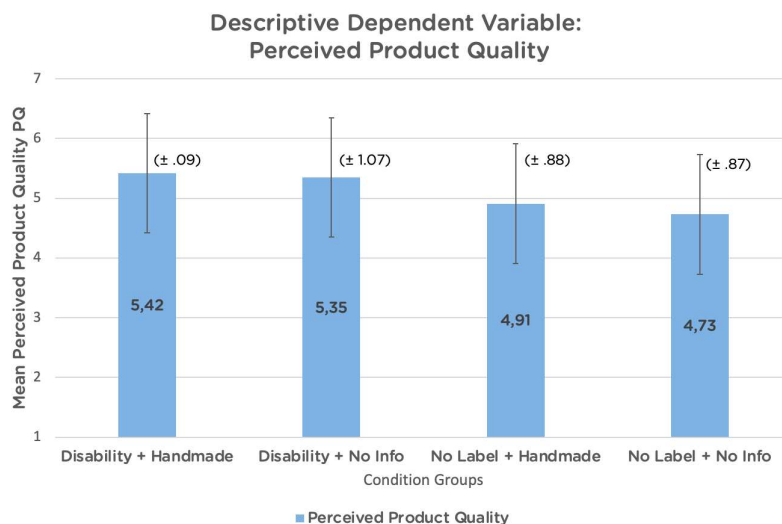
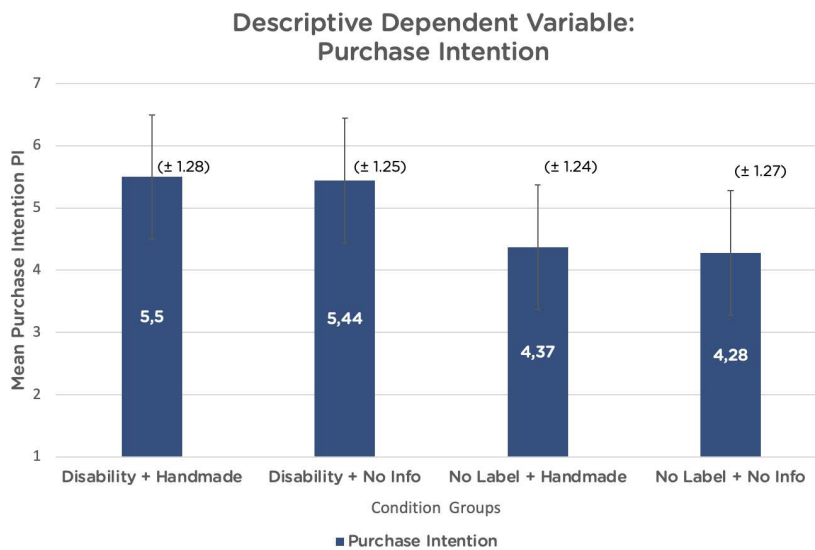


Table 5: Descriptive DV Purchase Intention

Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable Purchase Intention: PI_Ave				
DisGroup	MoGroup	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
"Disability"	1 Handmade	5.4960	1.28715	62
	2 No info	5.4423	1.25839	65
	Total	5.4685	1.26773	127
"No Label"	1 Handmade	4.3731	1.24725	67
	2 No info	4.2773	1.27640	64
	Total	4.3263	1.25763	131
Total	1 Handmade	4.9128	1.38161	129
	2 No info	4.8643	1.39124	129
	Total	4.8886	1.38395	258

Figure 5: Descriptive DV Purchase Intention



To ensure the validity of the analysis, Levene's test for equality of variances was conducted. The results showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for both dependent variables (Perceived Product Quality: $p = 0.174$; Purchase Intention: $p = 0.979$; $p > 0.05$ Homogeneity of variances is not violated, meaning the ANOVA results are valid), confirming that the data met the necessary assumptions for conducting an ANOVA. Therefore, a two-way ANOVA was performed to examine the main effects and interaction effects of the Disability Label and Handmade variables on both perceived product quality and purchase intention.

The two-way ANOVA for perceived product quality showed a significant main effect of the Disability Label ($F(1, 254) = 23.062$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.083$), indicating that products labeled as '*made by people with disabilities*' were perceived as having significantly higher quality than those without this label. However, there was no significant main effect for

production type ($F(1, 254) = 1.151, p = 0.284, \eta^2 = 0.005$), suggesting that whether a product was handmade or not did not significantly influence perceived quality. Furthermore, the interaction effect between Disability Label and Handmade was also not significant ($F(1, 254) = 0.189, p = 0.664, \eta^2 = 0.001$), meaning that the presence of the handmade label did not alter the effect of the disability label on product quality perceptions. Consequently, **H1a** (Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities as lower quality) was not supported, as the opposite effect was observed products with a disability label were perceived as having higher quality. Similarly, **H2a** (Handmade moderates the effect of Disability Label on quality perceptions) was not supported, as the handmade label did not influence how the Disability Label was perceived in terms of quality (see Table 6 and Figure 6).

Table 6: Results of the Two Way ANOVA on DV Product Quality

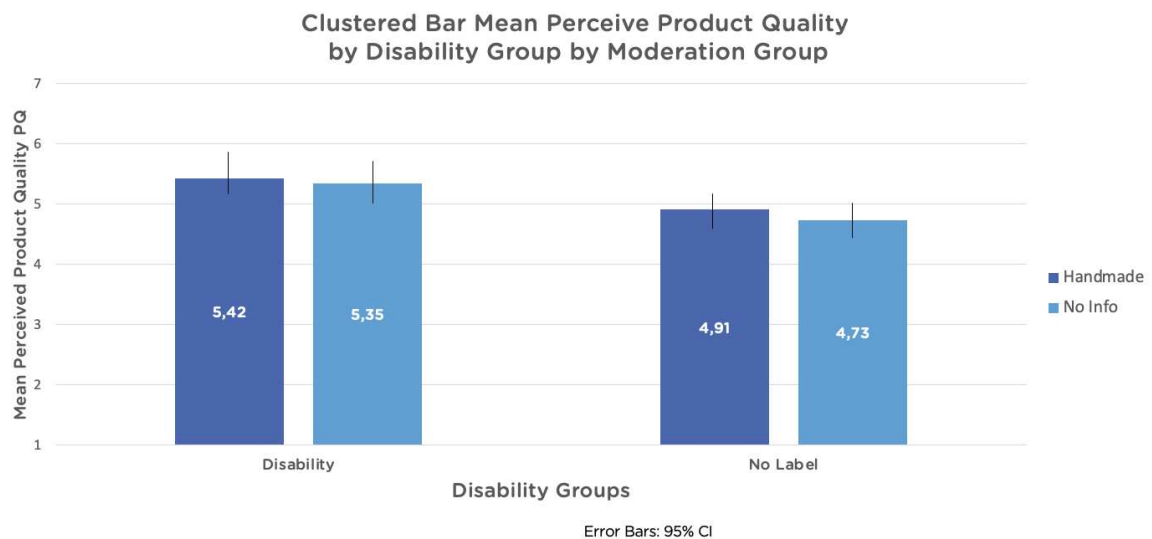
Dependent Variable: PQ_Av

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	21.278 ^a	3	7.093	8.064	<.001	.087	24.191	.991
Intercept	6713.012	1	6713.012	7632.023	<.001	.968	7632.023	1.000
DisGroup	20.285	1	20.285	23.062	<.001	.083	23.062	.998
MoGroup	1.012	1	1.012	1.151	.284	.005	1.151	.188
DisGroup * MoGroup	.166	1	.166	.189	.664	.001	.189	.072
Error	223.415	254	.880					
Total	6953.062	258						
Corrected Total	244.692	257						

a. R Squared = .087 (Adjusted R Squared = .076)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Figure 6: Two Way ANOVA DV Perceived Product Quality



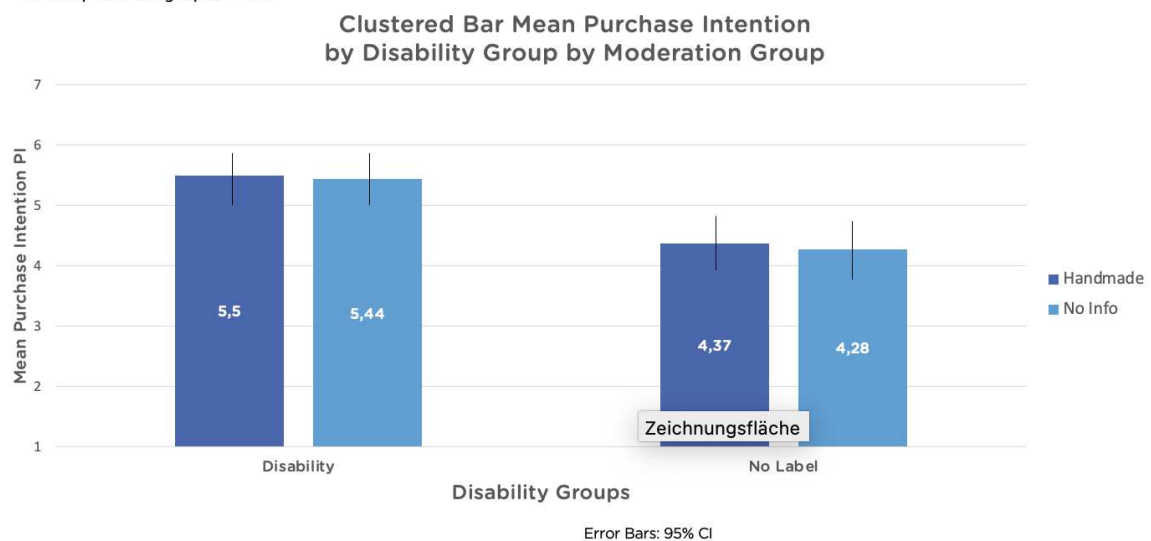
A two-way ANOVA for purchase intention showed similar results. The Disability Label had a significant main effect on purchase intention ($F(1, 254) = 52.537, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.171$), meaning that participants reported higher purchase intentions for products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" compared to those without the label. However, production type again had no significant main effect ($F(1, 254) = 0.224, p = 0.636, \eta^2 = 0.001$), indicating that whether the product was handmade or not did not influence purchase intention. The interaction effect between Disability Label and Handmade was not significant ($F(1, 254) = 0.018, p = 0.894, \eta^2 = 0.000$), showing that the effect of the Disability Label on purchase intention remained consistent across handmade and non-handmade conditions. As a result, **H1b** (Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as 'made by people with disabilities') was not supported, as products with a Disability Label had higher purchase intentions. Similarly, **H2b** (Handmade moderates the effect of Disability Label on purchase intention) was not supported, as the presence of a handmade label did not alter the effect of the Disability Label on purchase intention (Table 7 and Figure 7).

Table 7: Results of the Two Way ANOVA on DV Purchase Intention

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects								
Dependent Variable: PI_Ave								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	84.515 ^a	3	28.172	17.550	<.001	.172	52.651	1.000
Intercept	6182.636	1	6182.636	3851.647	<.001	.938	3851.647	1.000
DisGroup	84.333	1	84.333	52.537	<.001	.171	52.537	1.000
MoGroup	.360	1	.360	.224	.636	.001	.224	.076
DisGroup * MoGroup	.029	1	.029	.018	.894	.000	.018	.052
Error	407.719	254	1.605					
Total	6657.938	258						
Corrected Total	492.234	257						

a. R Squared = .172 (Adjusted R Squared = .162)

b. Computed using alpha = .05



To ensure the robustness of the findings, additional analyses were conducted to control for potential social desirability bias and the influence of type of disability associated with the product label. First, a t-test was performed to assess whether social desirability scores differed between participants in the Disability Label and No Label conditions. The results indicated that there were no significant differences in social desirability between these groups ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that response patterns were not systematically influenced by a tendency to provide socially desirable answers (Table 8).

Table 8: Social Desirability T-Test

T-Test

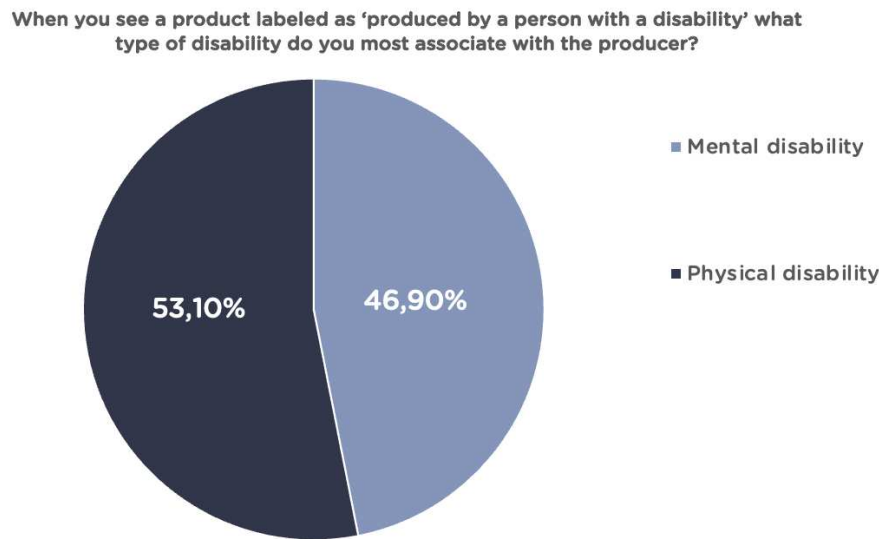
Group Statistics					
	DisGroup	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SocDes_Av	"Disability"	127	4.3031	1.51861	.13475
	"No Label"	131	4.5076	1.49741	.13083

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance One-Sided p	Significance Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
SocDes_Av	Equal variances assumed	.355	.552	-1.089	256	.139	.277	-.20448	.18778	-.57427 .16530
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.089	255.478	.139	.277	-.20448	.18782	-.57435 .16538

To further verify this result, a three-way ANOVA was conducted including Social Desirability as a third fixed factor alongside Product label and Production mode. The analysis showed that Social Desirability did not significantly affect perceived product quality ($(F(12, 207) = 1.453, p = .152, \eta^2 = .072)$) or purchase intention ($(F(11, 207) = 0.979, p = .467, \eta^2 = .049)$), nor were there significant interaction effects with the main experimental variables. These results confirm that social desirability concerns did not meaningfully influence the observed effects and strengthen the internal validity of the findings. However, it is important to acknowledge that the measure used for social desirability may not have fully captured all aspects of socially motivated response behavior, which remains a potential limitation of the study.

Additionally, participants were asked an exploratory question regarding the type of disability they associated with the "made by people with disabilities" label. Responses were categorized as either mental disability or physical disability. As shown in Figure 8, 53.1% of participants associated the label with physical disability, while 46.9% associated it with mental disability. The balanced distribution indicates that participants interpreted the label in a relatively heterogeneous manner, suggesting that the observed effects are not primarily attributable to associations with a specific type of disability.

Figure 8: Frequency Type of Disability



To examine whether the perceived type of disability (mental vs. physical) moderates the effect of product labeling and production mode on consumer evaluations, two additional two-way ANOVAs were conducted – one for each dependent variable. For perceived product quality, the analysis revealed no significant main effect of disability type ($F(1, 250) = 1.642, p = .201$), and no significant interaction effects with the disability label ($F(1, 250) = 1.125, p = .290$) or the production type ($F(1, 250) = 0.002, p = .964$). Furthermore, the three-way interaction (Label $\times$ Production $\times$ Disability Type) was also not significant ($F(1, 250) = 0.579, p = .447$). Similarly, for purchase intention, the type of disability showed no significant main effect ($F(1, 250) = 2.411, p = .122$). There were no significant interactions with product labeling ($F(1, 250) = 0.538, p = .464$), production type ($F(1, 250) = 0.145, p = .704$), or in the three-way interaction ($F(1, 250) = 1.012, p = .315$). These results indicate that the perceived type of disability does not significantly influence how consumers evaluate product quality or purchase intention. Thus, it does not function as a moderator in this context (Table 9).

Table 9: Moderation by Type of Disability Perceived Product Quality

Test of Between-Subject Effects Perceived Product Quality					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	24.263	7	3.466	3.931	<.001
Intercept	6599.097	1	6599.097	7484.378	<.001
DisGroup (Label: Disability vs. No Label)	20.435	1	20.435	23.176	<.001
MoGroup (Production: Handmade vs. None)	0.781	1	0.781	0.885	.348
DisGroup * MoGroup	0.183	1	0.183	0.208	.649
TypeDisability (Mental vs. Physical)	1.447	1	1.447	1.642	.201
DisGroup * TypeDisability	0.992	1	0.992	1.125	.290
MoGroup * TypeDisability	0.002	1	0.002	0.002	.964
DisGroup * MoGroup * TypeDisability	0.510	1	0.510	0.579	.447
Error	220.429	250	0.882		
Total	6953.062	258			
Corrected Total	244.692	257			

Table 10: Moderation by Type of Disability Purchase Intention

Test of Between-Subject Effects Purchase Intention					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	91.074	7	13.011	8.108	<.001
Intercept	6606.056	1	6606.056	3776.856	<.001
DisGroup (Label: Disability vs. No Label)	83.248	1	83.248	51.880	<.001
MoGroup (Production: Handmade vs. None)	0.152	1	0.152	0.094	.759
DisGroup * MoGroup	0.006	1	0.006	0.004	.949
TypeDisability (Mental vs. Physical)	3.869	1	3.869	2.411	.122
DisGroup * TypeDisability	0.863	1	0.863	0.538	.464
MoGroup * TypeDisability	0.232	1	0.232	0.145	.704
DisGroup * MoGroup * TypeDisability	1.624	1	1.624	1.012	.315
Error	401.160	250	1.605		
Total	6657.938	258			
Corrected Total	492.234	257			

In summary, the results of the two-way ANOVA indicate that the Disability Label had a significant positive effect on both perceived product quality and purchase intention, contradicting the initial hypotheses. The Handmade label, however, had no significant impact on either dependent variable, and no interaction effects were found between product

labeling and production type, meaning that the presence of the handmade label did not strengthen or weaken the effect of the disability label on consumer perceptions. These findings suggest that consumers do not devalue products labeled as ‘*made by people with disabilities*’. Instead, they might associate these products with higher social or ethical value, which positively influences their purchase decisions.

Table 11: Overview Results

Hypothesis	Description	Supported?	Observed Effect
H1a (Main Effect)	Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of lower quality.	Not supported	The opposite was found: Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of lower quality.
H1b (Main Effect)	Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" compared to products without such a label.	Not supported	The opposite was true: Products with a Disability Label had higher purchase intentions.
H2a (Moderator)	Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of higher quality for handmade products.	Not supported	Handmade products did not influence the perception of products with a Disability Label.
H2b (Moderator)	Consumers' purchase intentions for products labeled as 'made by people with disabilities' are stronger for handmade products.	Not supported	Handmade products did not influence purchase intentions for products with a Disability Label.

5 Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the effects of product labeling and production type on perceived product quality and purchase intention. The results show that the information ‘made by people with a disability’ positively impacted both perceived quality and purchase intention. This refuses H1a and H1b. Furthermore the information about a handmade production did not have a significant effect on both dependent variables. This also contradicts H2a and H2b.

5.1 Interpretation of results and implications

5.1.1 Main effects of disability labeling

A possible explanation for this outcome lies in in the stereotype content model, which suggests that individuals with disabilities are stereotypically perceived as high in warmth but low in competence (Fiske et al., 2002). While this partially aligns with the hypothesis,

the findings suggest that warmth may foster trust and a sense of goodwill in consumption contexts, which in turn can enhance purchase intention (Aaker, 1996). In this case, participants may have responded favorably to the label due to the *perceived warmth* and social value associated with supporting a marginalized group.

Additionally one possible explanation for these results lies in the concept of *warm glow*, wherein consumers derive positive emotional satisfaction from engaging in prosocial behavior, such as supporting marginalized groups. This warm glow effect may override or counterbalance any negative biases associated with perceptions of lower quality. In this context, the label '*made by people with disabilities*' likely triggers an emotional response, enhancing purchase intentions despite potential concerns about product performance. Research in economics and psychology suggests that individuals derive intrinsic pleasure from acts of generosity, a phenomenon known as the warm glow feeling (Bianchi et al., 2023). Economists view this as a motivator for altruistic behavior, while psychologists highlight its link to happiness, showing that prosocial spending increases emotional well-being. This may obfuscate the predicted effect. In this study, consumers may have responded positively to the disability label because purchasing these products created a sense of altruistic satisfaction. Rather than solely evaluating functional attributes, emotional gratification from supporting individuals with disabilities likely played a role in their purchase decisions.

Another contributing factor might be prosocial motivations. Behaviour that benefits others is called prosociality (Jensen, 2016; Pfattheicher et al., 2022), which is a central concern in behavioral studies (Baumsteiger & Siegel, 2018). Supporting individuals with disabilities could invoke a sense of moral obligation, encouraging consumers to favor products with the disability label. These prosocial tendencies may overshadow objective product evaluations, as they are driven by ethical and emotional considerations rather than pure functionality. Furthermore, the recruitment process for this study, which involved sharing the survey through personal networks and social media, may have introduced a potential bias. Thus, the combination of *warm glow*, *prosocial motivation*, and *warmth-based stereotyping* offers a compelling explanation for why the disability label resulted in positive evaluations contrary to the initially hypothesation.

Moreover, social desirability bias could have contributed to this pattern. Even though indirect measurement techniques were used (Paulhus, 1991), participants may have felt a

moral obligation to express favorable attitudes toward products associated with people with disabilities. Such effects are well-documented in CSR and ethical consumption research, where consumers often claim higher purchase intention for socially responsible products than they exhibit in actual behavior (Auger et al., 2008).

5.1.2 Moderator effects of handmade production

The findings of this study contradict prior research suggesting that handmade products are generally associated with higher perceived quality and craftsmanship (Fuchs et al., 2015). The expectation that handmade production would positively moderate the effects of the information about producers with a disability was not supported. Several potential explanations may account for this unexpected result. The handmade manipulation may not have been prominent enough to impact consumer perceptions. Unlike studies where visual or descriptive elements highlight craftsmanship, this study relied solely on a brief textual mention of ‘handmade’. If participants did not fully process or prioritize this detail, it would not significantly influence their evaluations. The disability label may have overshadowed the effect of handmade production in the Disability + Handmade Group. Research suggests that emotionally and ethically charged attributes can dominate consumer decision-making (Smith & Langford, 2009). Given that participants likely focused on the socially meaningful disability label, the comparatively neutral handmade attribute may have had little impact. Furthermore handmade production may not be equally relevant for all product categories. Prior studies on handmade effects often focus on luxury, artisanal, or decorative goods (Fuchs et al., 2015). In contrast, the products used in this study (e.g., soap, jam, mugs, keychain) are more everyday, utilitarian items, where handmade attributes may not be as strongly associated with perceived quality benefits.

5.1.3 Managerial and theoretical implications

Although the initial hypotheses regarding the perceived product quality and purchase intention of products made by people with disabilities were not supported in the expected direction, the results offer valuable managerial and theoretical implications. The findings challenge the assumption that consumers associate disability-related production with lower product quality or reduced desirability. Instead, the CSR-related labeling had a positive effect, demonstrating that ethical and prosocial considerations can enhance consumer evaluations and drive purchase behavior. Since consumers did not perceive a drop in quality due to the disability label, firms do not need to fear reputational risks in highlighting

their commitment to inclusivity. However, companies should ensure that CSR messaging is framed in an empowering way. Beyond marketing, these findings support the argument that hiring individuals with disabilities can contribute to positive brand differentiation. Showcasing real employees and their skills can enhance credibility and foster consumer trust in CSR initiatives, including hiring people with a disability. While the study highlights the potential benefits of communicating inclusivity, firms should be mindful of how they position their messaging to avoid skepticism regarding their motivations. Ethical consumerism is increasingly subject to public scrutiny and firms should demonstrate genuine long-term commitment rather than using disability employment as a short-term marketing tool and ensure transparency by communicating actual impact stories rather than broad, generic statements and educate consumers about the skills and expertise of employees with disabilities to challenge existing stereotypes. For brands emphasizing handmade production, additional emphasis on artisanal craftsmanship and uniqueness may be necessary to differentiate products effectively.

5.2 Limitations and outlook

While the study provides meaningful insights into producers with a disability and purchase intention and the perception of quality, several limitations should be acknowledged.

One primary limitation is the potential lack of salience in the handmade manipulation. While the disability label was highlighted in bold font, the handmade information was presented in plain text. It is therefore possible that participants overlooked or did not sufficiently register the handmade attribute, limiting its impact on product evaluations. This study relied solely on text-based labeling. Future research should explore stronger experimental manipulations, incorporating visual and physical cues to test whether a more pronounced handmade attribute influences consumer perceptions. Furthermore the findings may be product-specific. Handmade attributes might carry more weight in high-involvement product categories (e.g., luxury fashion, handcrafted furniture) than in everyday consumer goods (e.g., soap, jam, mugs). And future studies should examine whether product type moderates the effect of handmade and CSR-related attributes.

A further limitation lies in the operationalization of disability. The study used a generalized label, 'made by people with disabilities' without specifying the type of disability. However, disability is a heterogeneous category encompassing a wide range of conditions, from

physical impairments (e.g., mobility limitations) to cognitive or invisible disabilities (e.g., diabetes or mental illness). Stereotypes may differ significantly depending on the type of disability (Coleman et al., 2015). For instance, visible or cognitive impairments may elicit different assumptions about competence and reliability compared to less visible or physical disabilities. Future research should differentiate between types of disabilities and investigate whether consumer evaluations vary accordingly.

Like many consumer studies, this research relied on self-reported purchase intention, which does not always correlate with actual purchasing behavior (Jamieson & Bass, 1989). Prior work has shown that consumers often express greater willingness to purchase socially responsible products than they actually follow through on (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Future studies should incorporate behavioral experiments, such as real-world purchasing decisions or choice-based conjoint analysis, to assess the actual impact of the disability label.

Despite attempts to control for social desirability, participants may still have been influenced by perceived social norms regarding disability and ethical consumption. However, it is important to acknowledge that the measure used for social desirability may not have fully captured all aspects of socially motivated response behavior, which remains a potential limitation of the study. Future studies could further refine social desirability measures by employing implicit association tests or response latency techniques to capture subconscious biases.

Participants familiar with the researcher may have felt a desire to support the study, consciously or unconsciously providing more favorable evaluations. This phenomenon aligns with impression management theory, where individuals adjust their responses to meet perceived social expectations (Paulhus, 1984). While this possibility does not detract from the observed effects of the disability label, it highlights the importance of future studies ensuring a neutral recruitment process to mitigate such biases. Consumer responses to CSR labels and handmade production may vary based on demographic factors. The sample in this study consisted primarily of younger participants, who may place greater emphasis on ethical considerations than older consumers (Auger et al., 2008). Future research should explore cross-cultural differences to assess whether CSR-related perceptions generalize across different consumer segments and international markets. Finally, this study primarily focused on social perception stereotypes. However, additional theoretical perspectives could provide further insights into consumer responses. For instance, self-concept theory suggests that consumers may be drawn to CSR-labeled products as a means of expressing their values

and identity (Aaker, 1999). Future studies could examine how self-congruence with ethical branding influences purchase behavior.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of labelling products as 'made by people with disabilities' on consumers' perceptions of product quality and purchase intention. It also examined whether the production method (handmade vs. machine-made) moderates these effects. The findings contribute to the growing literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and consumer choice by providing empirical evidence on how disability labels influence product evaluations.

Contrary to initial expectations, the results suggest that consumers perceive products labelled as 'made by disabled people' as having higher - not lower - quality than those not labelled as 'made by disabled people'. This challenges the common assumption that disability stereotypes negatively influence consumer perceptions of quality. Instead, the study suggests that consumers may evaluate products associated with inclusive employment positively due to ethical considerations, social responsibility motives and prosocial behaviour. Similarly, purchase intention was found to be higher for products with the disability label. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that consumers are increasingly prioritising ethical consumption and are willing to support brands that promote DEI initiatives. It suggests that companies that actively communicate their commitment to disability inclusion may benefit from increased consumer trust and brand loyalty. However, these findings also raise an important question about the potential gap between the stated preferences of consumers and their actual behaviour in the marketplace. While consumers express a willingness to purchase ethically labelled products in survey settings, real-world purchasing behaviour may be influenced by additional factors such as price sensitivity, brand reputation and competitive alternatives. With regard to the moderating role of production method, the hypothesis that handmade production would increase perceived product quality and purchase intention for products with a disability label was not supported. These results suggest that consumers' perceptions of quality are not influenced by their belief that handmade products are of higher quality. From a managerial point of view, these findings provide valuable insights for businesses that incorporate disability-inclusive employment policies. Contrary

to concerns that disability-related labels may deter consumers due to competence stereotypes, the study suggests that inclusive hiring practices can function as a competitive advantage. It is suggested that companies consider transparently communicating their commitment to hiring people with disabilities, as this can enhance perceived brand authenticity and foster positive consumer sentiment. Nevertheless, effective communication of Corporate Social Responsibility must be carefully considered; rather than emphasising charity or sympathy, it is recommended that brands highlight the skills, dedication and contributions of employees with disabilities to reinforce positive quality associations. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior by demonstrating that ethical considerations play a significant role in shaping product evaluations. While previous studies have shown that CSR initiatives generally enhance corporate reputation, this study specifically sheds light on the underexplored domain of disability-inclusive labeling. The results indicate that businesses can successfully integrate DEI initiatives into their branding strategies without facing negative quality perceptions. Future research should continue to examine how disability-related labels interact with other product attributes, market conditions, and cultural differences to gain a more comprehensive understanding of consumer responses to inclusive business practices.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Experimental Survey

Introduction / Informed Consent

Purpose of the study: We are interested in your opinion concerning several products.

Task: You will read a scenario and answer questions about 4 products.

Duration: 3 minutes

Voluntary participation and anonymity: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the survey at any time and for any reason without penalty. We collect all your responses to the questions in this questionnaire anonymously; they will be analyzed in aggregate and exclusively used for research purposes. Your answers will never be judged.

Anonymity and GDPR information: The data controller is Sophia Paul (a12207339@unet.univie.ac.at). The personal data we collect includes your answers to the survey topic, age, gender and level of education. We do not foresee that data collection and analysis pose any risk to participants. The data controller will store and analyze data on password-protected computers accessible only by the researchers. The data controller will also share anonymous data online on public data repositories indefinitely and at least for 10 years after the publication of this study's results, in line with current research transparency guidelines. The purpose of this is to guarantee open science practices in the public interest and the advancement of a transparent scientific process.

Please read everything very carefully and answer honestly so you can help us to get good-quality data for our study! If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research, please contact Sophia Paul (a12207339@unet.univie.ac.at).

- ☐ I've read all of the above. I confirm that I am 18 years or older and I want to take part in this study.
- ☐ I've read all of the above. I do not want to participate or I am not eligible.

Condition Group 1: Disability + Handmade

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade soap, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Soap_1

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade mug, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Mug_1



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade jam, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Jam_1



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade key chain, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Key chain_1



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Condition Group 2: Disability + No Info

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a soap, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Soap_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a mug, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Mug_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a jam, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Jam_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a key chain, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Key chain_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Condition Group 3: No label + Handmade

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade soap.



Soap_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade mug.



Mug_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade jam.



Jam_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade key chain.



Key chain_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Condition Group 4: No label + No info

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a soap.



Soap_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a mug.



Mug_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a jam.



Jam_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a key chain.



Key chain_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Social Desirability I

How concerned will a person be with what others are thinking of him/her when s/he states a high likelihood of not liking products made by disabled people?

- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Slightly concerned
- ☐ Somewhat concerned
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderately concerned
- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Extremely concerned

Social Desirability II

Please fill in the blank below according to your opinion:

A person will be [] concerned with what others are thinking of him/her when s/he believes a product made by a disabled person has lower quality.

- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Slightly concerned
- ☐ Somewhat concerned
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderately concerned
- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Extremely concerned

Exploratory Question: Type of Disability

When you see a product labeled as 'produced by a person with a disability,' what type of disability do you most associate with the producer?

- ☐ Mental disability
- ☐ Physical disability

Attention Check I

Who was indicated as the producer of the products you rated?

- ☐ People with a disability
- ☐ I do not have information about the producer
- ☐ I don't remember

Attention Check II

What mode of production was specified for the products you rated?

- ☐ Handmade
- ☐ I do not have information about the production mode
- ☐ I don't remember

Demographics – Age

What is your age?

Demographics – Gender

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Diverse

Demographics – Level of education

What is your highest level of education completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other

Thank you for participating in this survey!

I appreciate your time and effort in helping me with this research.

Your responses have been recorded and will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about this study, please feel free to contact me at al2207339@unet.univie.ac.at

Have a great day!

Appendix B: Declaration of Use of AI Tools

This thesis employed ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI and DeepL, as supplementary tools for language refinement, idea structuring, and enhancing clarity in writing. Additionally, it assisted in formulating SPSS prompts to improve the efficiency of data analysis. The AI not used for generating research results, conducting core analyses, or formulating original arguments. All intellectual contributions, theoretical frameworks, and data interpretations are solely the author's own work.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sophia Paul". The script is cursive and fluid.

Vienna, 11.04.2025

Appendix C: Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently and without the use of any other resources than those stated. All passages taken verbatim or in spirit from published and unpublished publications are labeled as such. The thesis has not been submitted in the same or a similar form as an examination paper either in Austria or abroad (to an assessor for review).

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sophia Paul". The script is cursive and fluid.

Vienna, 11.04.2025

Abstract

Consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that promote inclusivity and social responsibility. While much research has focused on race, gender, or environmental sustainability, little is known about how producers with disabilities are perceived in the marketplace. This study examines how products associated with disabled producers influence consumer perceptions of product quality and purchase intention. I hypothesized that consumers would evaluate these products less favorably due to competence-related stereotypes, but that this effect could be moderated by the production method (handmade vs. no production information). In a 2x2 between-subjects experimental study (N = 304), I found that products linked to producers with a disability were perceived as higher in quality and generated stronger purchase intentions compared to those without such an association – contradicting initial expectations. The anticipated moderating effect of handmade production was not supported. These results challenge common assumptions about disability and competence in consumer contexts and suggest that inclusive practices may be positively received by consumers. I contribute to the literature on inclusivity and consumer behavior by showing that products associated with disability can enhance perceived quality and purchase intention, and I offer important practical recommendations for how brands can effectively communicate inclusive practices without risking negative consumer perceptions.

Zusammenfassung

VerbraucherInnen entscheiden sich zunehmend für Marken, die Inklusion und soziale Verantwortung fördern. Während sich ein Großteil der bisherigen Forschung auf Themen wie Ethnie, Geschlecht oder ökologische Nachhaltigkeit konzentriert hat, ist wenig darüber bekannt, wie Produzent:innen mit Behinderung am Markt wahrgenommen werden. Diese Studie untersucht, wie sich die Assoziation eines Produkts mit Produzent:innen mit Behinderung auf die wahrgenommene Produktqualität und die Kaufabsicht auswirkt. Es wurde angenommen, dass diese Produkte aufgrund kompetenzbezogener Stereotype weniger positiv bewertet werden – wobei erwartet wurde, dass die Produktionsart (handgefertigt vs. keine Produktionsinformation) diesen Effekt moderiert. In einer 2x2 Between-Subjects-Studie mit 304 Teilnehmer:innen zeigte sich jedoch, dass Produkte, die mit Produzent:innen mit Behinderung in Verbindung gebracht wurden, als qualitativ hochwertiger wahrgenommen wurden und eine höhere Kaufabsicht auslösten als Produkte ohne diese Assoziation, im Widerspruch zu den ursprünglichen Erwartungen. Der erwartete moderierende Effekt der handgefertigten Produktion konnte nicht bestätigt werden. Diese Ergebnisse stellen gängige Annahmen über Behinderung und Kompetenz im Konsumkontext infrage und deuten darauf hin, dass inklusive Praktiken von Konsument:innen durchaus positiv aufgenommen werden. Die Studie leistet einen Beitrag zur Forschung im Bereich Inklusion und Konsumentenverhalten, indem sie zeigt, dass Produkte, die mit Menschen mit Behinderung assoziiert werden, die wahrgenommene Qualität und Kaufabsicht steigern können. Darüber hinaus liefert sie praxisrelevante Empfehlungen, wie Marken inklusive Botschaften wirkungsvoll kommunizieren können, ohne negative Konsumentenreaktionen befürchten zu müssen.

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List of Abbreviations

DEI	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
WHO	World Health Organisation
SCM	Stereotype Content Model
KPI	Key Performance Indicator

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1 Introduction

An estimated 16% of people worldwide live with a disability, making it a significant dimension of global diversity. That translates into 1.3 billion people and the number is increasing (World Health Organization, 2023). Despite increasing awareness and legal protections, people with disabilities remain one of the most socially marginalized groups (Yaghmaian et al., 2019). Their exclusion is particularly evident in the labor market, where employment rates of people with disabilities are lower than those of the general population. For example, in the United States in 2023, only 22.5% of people with disabilities were employed (US Department of Labor, 2023). In Austria, the proportion of people with disabilities in employment in 2024 is considerably higher at 55.6% (Victoria, n.d.) these disparities persist despite research indicating that the motivation to work is generally very high for people with disability (Aichner, 2021). Especially because work is an important part of modern life and provides social legitimacy (Fryers, 2006).

Negative stereotypes and stigma are seen as key causes of reluctance to employ people with disabilities (Bezyak et al., 2021). Many employers hesitate to hire people with disabilities due to perceptions of lower productivity, higher accommodation costs, and potential integration challenges in the workplace (Aichner, 2021; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Kaye et al., 2011).

Furthermore, research suggests that peoples' perceptions of competence and quality are influenced by implicit stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002). At the same time, consumers are increasingly attracted to brands that prioritize social responsibility and inclusion as part of their CSR (Corporate. Social Responsibility) strategies (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Companies respond to these expectations by integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) measures, such as inclusive hiring, into their corporate identity (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). As a result, businesses that employ people with disabilities are often seen as more ethical and trustworthy, and may benefit from increased customer loyalty (Miethlich, 2020; Siperstein et al., 2006). Microsoft is a well-known example of a company that has already mastered disability inclusion. The company launched its disability inclusion program as part of its DEI strategy. Microsoft actively recruited people with disabilities, provided workplace accommodations, and used its Diversity and Inclusion Report to publish progress in this area (McIntyre, 2020). Despite its initial commitment, however, Microsoft later discontinued the program, raising questions about the long-term viability of disability employment initiatives in large corporations. the decision to end its

Inclusion program suggests that even companies that are initially committed to disability-inclusion may reassess their approach due to strategic, financial, or reputational considerations. Maybe the biases that employers have extend beyond the workplace and into consumer behavior.

Most studies in this area have focused on brand-level evaluations, such as ethical perception and employer reputation. Much less is known about how products themselves are evaluated when they are associated with disabled producers. This raises an important and underexplored question: How does consumer perception change when disability inclusion is explicitly linked to the product, not just to the brand or company?

On the one hand, consumers often favor ethically responsible companies (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Mohr & Webb, 2005), but on the other hand, deep-seated stereotypes about people with disabilities may interfere with positive evaluations of the products they are associated with (Fiske et al., 2002). For example, while consumers may forgive more service errors from employees with disabilities (Latif et al., 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2017), it remains unclear whether similar tolerance extends to product evaluations, particularly in the absence of direct human interaction. Consumer judgments are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes (Brown & Dacin, 1997). One powerful extrinsic cue is the method of production. Handmade products, for instance, are often perceived as higher in quality and authenticity (Frizzo et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2015). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that an emphasis on handmade production could mitigate negative stereotypes triggered by disability-related information. Building on these insights, this study examines whether informing consumers that a product was made by people with disabilities affects their perception of product quality and purchase intention negatively. Additionally, it tests whether the mode of production (handmade vs. no production information) moderates these effects. In an experimental study with over 300 participants, I investigate how consumers evaluate products in this context.

This study contributes to the literature by shifting the focus from general brand evaluations to product-specific consumer responses, more specifically perceived product quality and purchase intention, and provides empirical evidence on how disability-related production cues influence consumer behavior. The findings provide both theoretical insights and practical implications for businesses aiming to implement and communicate inclusive, disability related, practices effectively. Understanding how such signals regarding a stigmatized producer are received can help companies optimize their marketing strategies,

reduce bias-driven skepticism, and support more inclusive branding approaches. The next chapter presents a review of the literature on CSR, disability inclusion, stereotypes, and consumer behavior, and outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study's hypotheses.

2 Literature Review

In this study the literature review is crucial in examining disability and how it affects consumers' perceptions of product quality and their purchase intention. According to Denscombe, 2010 a summary of existing research is important to show how new studies relate to previous work. This section reviews the relevant literature to identify the key contributions and gaps in the research while highlighting the importance and relevance of the study in the wider academic context. To provide a theoretical foundation, this section reviews the broader impact of CSR on consumer behavior, discusses stereotypes and biases toward people with disabilities, and examines the role of production methods in consumer decision-making.

2.1 Corporate social responsibility and diversity, equality and inclusion

2.1.1 The role of CSR in business and consumer behavior

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has developed from an ethical obligation into a strategic asset for many companies (Campbell, 2007; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). CSR encompasses efforts to integrate social and environmental concerns into business practices beyond financial objectives (Davis, 1973). Stakeholder theory reinforces this perspective, emphasizing that firms should create value not only for shareholders but for all stakeholders affected by their actions (Parmar et al., 2010).

More recently, CSR strategies have expanded to include Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). DEI encompasses efforts to ensure representation, fairness, and belonging for marginalized and underrepresented groups (Arsel et al., 2022). These concepts have gained relevance beyond internal HR policies, extending into marketing and brand positioning strategies (Ferraro et al., 2022; U. Khan et al., 2024). Inclusive marketing practices target diverse audiences and aim to reflect their values in brand communication.

Empirical research supports the idea that CSR can positively influence consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior. Consumers are more likely to support and remain loyal to brands perceived as socially responsible (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Mohr & Webb, 2005), particularly when CSR initiatives align with personal values (Öberseder et al., 2013). CSR also fosters brand identification (Oghazi et al., 2016) and differentiation in competitive markets (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

However, findings on CSR effectiveness are not unequivocal. While many studies report positive consumer responses, others show neutral or even negative reactions, depending on how CSR is communicated and perceived (Campbell, 2007; Chen & Huang, 2018). These mixed outcomes highlight the importance of considering CSR effects in specific contexts and examining which elements are most effective. One such context is the inclusion of people with disabilities, a growing but underexplored dimension of CSR. To better understand its relevance in corporate and consumer environments, it is first necessary to clarify what '*disability*' encompasses and how it is conceptualized.

2.1.2 Definition and Conceptualization of Disability

Disability is a complex and multifaceted concept with no single universally accepted definition (Grue, 2016). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), disability refers to a limitation or impairment that restricts an individual's ability to carry out activities in a way that is typically expected for a person without such constraints (World Health Organization, 2023). Globally, 16% of the population, or around 1.3 billion people, have a significant disability, and that number continues to rise as the population ages and diagnoses increase (World Health Organization, 2023). Individuals with disabilities constitute one of the most marginalized groups in society, facing systemic barriers in education, employment, and social participation (Yaghmaian et al., 2019). Their exclusion is particularly evident in the labor market, where employment rates are lower. The definition and understanding of disability have evolved significantly over time. Historically, disability was framed primarily through a medical model, which viewed it as an individual deficit requiring treatment or correction (Hogan, 2019). Nevertheless, contemporary perspectives are increasingly aligning with a social model, which emphasises that disability is shaped by environmental, societal, and structural barriers rather than inherent impairments (Grue, 2016). This shift is reflected in international conventions, e.g., United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007, and national legislations that advocate for equal rights and

accessibility rather than merely medical interventions (Grue, 2016). Disability can be conceptualised as a spectrum that encompasses a range of different impairments. These impairments can be broadly categorised as physical, sensory, intellectual and mental disabilities. Common visual representations of disability in the public domain include symbols such as wheelchairs and hearing aids (Grue, 2016). The distinction between physical and mental disabilities is particularly relevant in consumer research, as individuals may associate different levels of capability, effort, and quality with these categories (Sim, Mattea, 2022). While legal frameworks and disability rights movements have improved accessibility and inclusion, societal attitudes and implicit biases continue to shape the treatment of individuals with disabilities (Gill et al., 2016). These biases contribute to stereotypes and stigma, which in turn affect employment opportunities, social integration, and consumer perceptions of products associated with disability.

2.1.3 Disability inclusion in businesses

Among the many forms of CSR, the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce has gained growing attention. Companies that actively employ individuals with disabilities not only fulfill social and legal expectations but are also perceived as more ethical, inclusive, and socially conscious (Siperstein et al., 2006; Perkins & Wiley, 2014; Qayyum et al., 2023). These perceptions can enhance brand trust and customer loyalty, especially among consumers who value social responsibility (Trudel & Cotte, 2009). Research shows that disability-inclusive businesses are often seen as more moral, community-oriented, and credible. Overall, there is a general tendency for consumers to associate disability-inclusive companies with stronger social values and ethical commitment. Notably, companies using disabled models in advertising—such as Cossu et al. (2019), who examined campaigns in Amsterdam—have also been positively perceived, further highlighting the reputational benefits of visible inclusion.

Disability inclusion can also yield internal benefits for companies. Diverse workplaces may experience greater innovation and improved morale, as both disabled and non-disabled employees report higher engagement when working in inclusive environments (Aichner, 2021). Moreover, such companies often develop better insights into the needs of disabled consumers, resulting in more accessible and inclusive product offerings (Aichner & Shaltoni, 2018).

Governments also promote inclusion through legal frameworks and incentives. Multiple stakeholders, governments through legislation, companies through strategic CSR, and consumers through ethical expectations, have adopted disability inclusion as a measurable and integral part of social responsibility. For instance, in Germany, companies must meet minimum employment quotas for people with disabilities (§154 SGB IX), with financial penalties for non-compliance. Austria enforces similar regulations (§1 para. 1, Disability Employment Act, 2024). Some governments also offer incentives to businesses hiring disabled workers (Aichner, 2021).

While many studies emphasize the strategic and reputational benefits of disability inclusion, some research suggests that consumer stereotypes may still influence perceptions, particularly when the disability is explicitly associated with product outcomes. For instance, inclusive hiring has been shown to enhance brand image (Aichner, 2021), though competence-related doubts can persist (Fiske et al., 2002). Negative stereotypes play a key role in limiting employment opportunities, reinforcing misconceptions about workplace competence (Bonaccio et al., 2020). The following section explores how such stereotypes manifest and their implications for consumer behavior.

2.2 Stereotypes and stigmatization

Understanding the difference between stereotypes and stigma is essential to contextualize how consumers interpret disability in commercial contexts. Stereotypes are cognitive generalizations about the characteristics of social groups, often based on oversimplification or assumptions (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Stigma, by contrast, is a broader social process. It encompasses the labeling of individuals, the application of stereotypes, and their use as a basis for separation, discrimination, and social exclusion, especially within power structures that reinforce inequality (Link & Phelan, 2001; Goffman, 2009). Together, stereotypes and stigma function as interconnected yet distinct mechanisms that influence both interpersonal judgments and institutional practices.

A widely accepted framework for understanding disability stereotypes is Fiske et al.'s (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which categorizes stereotypes along two fundamental dimensions. Warmth: The extent to which a group is perceived as friendly, trustworthy, and well-intentioned. The second dimension is competence: The extent to which a group is

perceived as capable, intelligent, and effective. According to Fiske et al. (2002), people with disabilities are typically perceived as high in warmth but low in competence. This combination leads to paternalistic stereotypes, where disabled individuals are viewed as deserving of help and sympathy but not necessarily capable of professional or independent success (Fiske et al., 2002). Stereotypes contribute to stigma, which goes beyond individual perception and influences structural and social inequalities.

Disability stigma manifests in various ways. Firstly, there is employment discrimination, whereby individuals with disabilities are often perceived as being less productive, dependent, or costly to accommodate. Despite legal frameworks and the rising awareness, as described in the chapter above, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in employment. Negative stereotypes and stigmata about their productivity, reliability, and workplace competence persist, making it more difficult for them to secure meaningful job opportunities (Bezyak et al., 2021). Research consistently shows that employment rates for people with disabilities remain lower than those of the general population, even though many express a strong desire to work (Boardman et al., 2003). In many cases, companies publicly emphasize CSR initiatives promoting disability inclusion, but their actual hiring practices do not always align with their stated commitments (Aichner, 2021; Mullin et al., 2024). Another structural barrier is the segregation of disabled workers into sheltered workshops. In many countries, people with disabilities are employed in specialized workshops, where they often receive below-minimum wages and have limited career advancement opportunities (Aichner, 2021; Avellone et al., 2023).

Secondly, there is social exclusion, whereby people with disabilities frequently face limited accessibility, negative societal attitudes, and fewer opportunities for full participation. Implicit and explicit biases further complicate the experience of people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2017). Whilst some stereotypes may appear to have a positive connotation, for example, the idea that disabled people are brave, resilient, or inspiring, these can still contribute to paternalistic discrimination by reinforcing the perception that they are incapable of competing on equal terms (Pelleboer-Gunnink et al., 2021).

Previous studies suggest that stereotypes influence how consumers judge businesses and products associated with disability (Cuddy, Amy et al., 2024; Fiske et al., 2002). The stereotype of low competence could lower consumer confidence in the quality of products (Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, understanding the role of stereotypes and stigma is essential in predicting how consumers might react to react toward products made by disabled. This study

seeks to bridge the gap by examining whether the disability label negatively affects perceived product quality and purchase intention.

2.3 Consumer perceptions of perceived product quality and purchase intention

Building on the previous discussion of disability stereotypes and stigma, it is essential to examine how these perceptions influence consumer behavior regarding products. While various organizations employ individuals with disabilities in the production of goods, there is little transparency regarding the prevalence of such products in the market. While some companies explicitly emphasize their commitment to disability inclusion in their communication and branding strategies, others adopt more reserved approaches, refraining from prominently disclosing such initiatives. Certain businesses even specialize in selling products exclusively produced by people with disabilities, e.g. VOI fesch, a company in Vienna that produces clothes (Fischer, 2018).

Consumers play a central role in this system, as their purchasing choices directly impact the success and sustainability of inclusive business models. Their attitudes, stereotypes and potential stigmatization of people with disabilities are therefore crucial factors in understanding purchase behavior. Inclusivity is becoming an increasingly important aspect of consumer decision-making. This aligns with broader trends in CSR, where consumers exhibit a preference for brands that demonstrate ethical responsibility (Singla, 2024). To better understand this dynamic, this section explores two critical aspects of consumer decision making: perceived product quality and purchase intention in relation to disability-related product labeling.

2.3.1 Perceived product quality

The concept of perceived product quality places a crucial role in consumer decision-making processes, as it influences purchasing behaviors, brand perceptions, and overall consumer satisfaction (Rihayana et al., 2022). In consumer research, perceived product quality is defined as ‘the consumer’s judgment about a product’s overall excellence or superiority’ (Zeithaml, 1988), based on both intrinsic and extrinsic cues (Zeithaml, 1988). Unlike objective quality, which can be measured through technical specifications and standardized performance metrics (Mitra & Golder, 2006), perceived quality is subjective, shaped by individual experiences, expectations, and external factors (Aaker, David A., 1996). As consumer choices often rely on perceptions rather than actual product performance,

understanding the factors that influence perceived quality is critical for businesses and marketers (Santoso et al., 2023).

Zeithaml's (1988) framework on perceived quality highlights two primary dimensions that shape consumer quality assessments. Intrinsic quality cues are physical product attributes, such as durability, material composition, and functionality. Intrinsic cues are typically evaluated through direct experience with the product, allowing consumers to assess tangible aspects such as texture, craftsmanship, and structural integrity (Bhuiyan, 1998). Extrinsic quality cues are defined as non-physical product characteristics that consumers utilise as proxies for the purpose of assessing quality. These include brand reputation, price, country of origin, advertising, packaging, and labeling (Dodds et al., 1991; Samu et al., 2023; Zeithaml, 1988). It is particularly relevant for consumers when the attributes of a product are not immediately verifiable (Schiffmann, Leon & Kanuk, Leslie L., 2000).

Among these cues, producer-related information plays a key role in shaping quality perceptions. Research has shown that consumers often associate the type of producer with different quality expectations. For example, luxury and artisan products made by specialized producers or craftsmen are often perceived as higher in quality, authenticity, and uniqueness (Ghazali et al., 2024). The information about the producer plays a role in shaping consumers' attitudes and purchase behavior. Labels or detailed information serve as signals of product attributes, often conveying social, ethical, or environmental messages that influence consumer evaluations of a brand's authenticity, trustworthiness, and commitment to social responsibility (Bodur et al., 2016). Also labels like 'organic' or 'fair trade' have been shown to enhance perceived product quality and increase purchase intentions, as they align with consumer values and reinforce positive brand associations (Bauer et al., 2013; Berry & Romero, 2021). Nonetheless, it has also been demonstrated that not all labels or not all information attached, engender uniformly positive effects on consumer perceptions. Research suggests that while ethical and sustainability certifications are generally perceived favourably, labels that explicitly associate a product with marginalised groups may trigger implicit biases (Fiske et al., 2002).

This phenomenon is of particular relevance in the context of the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market. A substantial body of research in social psychology and marketing suggests that the information linked to disability inclusion may activate stereotypes and stigmatization of lower competence and reduced work

efficiency (Clément-Guillotin, Corentin et al., 2024; Fiske et al., 2002; Rohmer & Louvet, 2012). Building on this literature, consumers may also associate 'made by a person with a disability' labels or information about the disabled producer in a negative way (consciously or unconsciously), due to stereotypes of lower competence, and may unconsciously assume that the product is less reliable, less well made or technically inferior, even if its actual quality is identical to that of other products. This could present a paradox wherein companies that engage in disability-inclusive employment practices with the intention of enhancing corporate reputation may inadvertently face consumer skepticism regarding the perceived product quality. Given that extrinsic quality cues, such as cause-related labels, can shape consumer expectations and biases, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1a: Consumers perceive products labeled as ‘*made by people with a disability*’ to be of lower quality compared to products without such a label.

2.3.2 Purchase intention

While perceived product quality plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes, it does not directly translate into purchase behavior meaning a product may be perceived as high in quality, but that does not necessarily mean that consumers will buy it. Purchase intention is influenced by additional factors beyond quality alone (Ajzen, 1991; Tsotsou, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to extend the analysis beyond quality perceptions and examine whether products made by people with a disability impact consumers' willingness to purchase a product. In consumer behavior research, purchase intention is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of actual purchasing behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977; Spears & Singh, 2004). It refers to a consumer's conscious willingness to buy a specific product or service, shaped by a combination of cognitive evaluations e.g., quality perception, social influences like ethical considerations, and situational constraints like price and availability (Ajzen, 1991). Although quality perception is a major determinant of consumer choice, a consumer's final purchase decision is often influenced by additional psychological, social, and economic factors (Dodds et al., 1991; Tsotsou, 2006).

Among the factors that shape purchase intention, the type of producer has received increasing attention in the literature. For instance, research shows that consumers are more willing to buy products made by trusted or expert producers (e.g. local, premium brands), as these carry associations of authenticity (Beverland, 2005). However, this positive effect does not necessarily extend to all producers. When the producer belongs to a stigmatized or

marginalized group, such as people with disabilities, implicit stereotypes may influence consumer attitudes in more complex ways.

This is particularly relevant in the context of products labeled as being produced by people with disabilities, as such labels evoke ethical considerations alongside quality judgments, potentially creating a conflict between moral values and perceived product reliability. While some individuals view disability inclusive employment as a sign of corporate integrity, others may question whether ethical business practices come at the expense of product quality (Aichner, 2021). This skepticism is particularly relevant when a disability label is attached to a product, as stereotypes regarding competence and reliability could negatively influence purchase intention, despite positive attitudes toward inclusivity. Despite consumers' increased interest in brands that employ people with disabilities as part of their CSR strategy (González & Luis Fernández, 2016), prejudice and stereotypes are still very prevalent, with research showing that displaying the information 'made by people with disabilities' can lead to doubts about the reliability and craftsmanship of products (Fiske et al., 2002). Research on consumer responses to social labels suggests that when ethical motivations conflict with quality concerns, consumers may hesitate to make a purchase, or they may justify their decision not to buy by prioritizing objective product attributes (e.g., durability, price, or brand reputation) over CSR considerations (Trudel & Cotte, 2009). This tension highlights the need to investigate whether a disability-related label also impacts consumers' purchase intention of the product. To examine the extent to which disability-related labels affect consumer decision-making, this study investigates whether the potential negative effect of the label on quality perception translates into lower purchase intentions. Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1b: Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as ‘*made by people with a disability*’ compared to products without such a label.

2.4 The role of handmade production

The previous section has outlined how disability-related information can influence perceived product quality and purchase intention. However, consumer evaluations are rarely based on a single cue. In addition to social information, contextual cues such as production type can significantly influence product judgments. Prior literature suggests that the way a product is manufactured, particularly whether it is handmade or mass-produced, plays an important

role in shaping key performance indicators (KPIs), including quality perception and purchase intention (Fuchs et al., 2015; Frizzo et al., 2020).

This effect may be particularly pronounced when evaluating products made by marginalized producers, such as people with disabilities. Handmade products are defined as goods crafted with significant human labor, effort, and skill, often emphasizing traditional craftsmanship, authenticity, and exclusivity (Droege, 2022; Frizzo et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2015). The distinction between handmade and machine-made products is one of the most prominent differentiators in consumer product evaluations (Frizzo et al., 2020). Handmade products are often perceived as unique, high-quality, and emotionally valuable, whereas machine-made products are typically associated with precision, efficiency, and standardization (Fuchs et al., 2015). They are perceived as warmer, more personal, and superior in quality compared to mass-produced alternatives. Handmade products are also believed to carry an emotional component, as consumers associate them with human creativity, dedication, and passion (Fuchs et al., 2015). As already mentioned above, intrinsic product attributes are critical components of quality perception and are often judged more favorably for handmade products. This is due to the belief that a product being handmade results in greater attention to detail, precision, and care (Schiffmann, Leon & Kanuk, Leslie L., 2000). Machine-made products, in contrast, are associated with automation, standardization, and efficiency. While they may offer cost advantages, consistency, and scalability, they often lack the perceived individuality, effort, and artistry of handmade goods (Kruger et al., 2004). Prior research has established that consumers respond differently to handmade vs. mass-produced goods, with handmade products being associated with superior craftsmanship, uniqueness, and authenticity (Droege, 2022; Fuchs et al., 2015). These positive associations create strong expectations about product quality (Kruger et al., 2004), which may have important implications when evaluating products labeled as ‘made by people with disabilities’.

One mechanism is the effort heuristic, which posits that perceived effort invested in a product’s creation signals higher quality (Kruger et al., 2004). The assumption is: the more time and care required to create a product, the more likely it is to be high-quality. Accordingly, handmade goods, often seen as the result of time-intensive, skilled work, are assumed to have greater attention to detail, creativity, and emotional depth (Fuchs et al., 2015). These attributes reinforce trust in the craftsmanship and authenticity of handmade items. When this scenario is added to the information about disability inclusion, the

production mode may play an important moderating role. Conversely, the absence of emotional and artisan connotations when no information about production is given may potentially reinforce existing biases.

In earlier sections, I hypothesized that disability-related product information may evoke competence-related stereotypes, potentially leading to lower quality perception and purchase intention. However, if a product is simultaneously labeled as handmade, I am proposing that handmade production can be more than a quality signal, it becomes a narrative of personal investment and moral value and may serve as a compensatory factor that mitigates the negative competence related stereotypes linked to the information about producers with a disability. When a handmade product is labeled with ‘made by people with a disability’ consumers may experience less skepticism about the quality because the perceived effort associated with craftsmanship compensates for the negative capability stereotypes. In contrast, if no information is given about the production-mode, consumers are going to be more likely to rely on default stereotypes about competence (Fiske et al., 2002). These arguments suggest that consumers will perceive handmade products labeled as ‘*made by people with disabilities*’ to be of higher quality than machine-made equivalents or than there is no info about the production mode at all. Machine-made production does not inherently convey effort, warmth, or uniqueness, and is often perceived as cold, impersonal, and standardized (Kruger et al., 2004). In the absence of the information about the production mode, consumers may rely more heavily on competence-related stereotypes when evaluating products. Based on the theoretical insights outlined above, this study proposes the following moderator hypotheses.

Warmth stereotypes associated with both disability and handmade goods may also align in consumers’ minds, enhancing overall product perceptions. Handmade products evoke emotional engagement and authenticity, while consumers often associate people with disabilities with sincerity, kindness, and moral value (Fiske et al., 2002). This congruence may lead to more favorable evaluations compared to when no production information is provided.

In summary, this section proposes that the interaction between disability-related product information and the production mode may influence consumer evaluations. Specifically, handmade production may mitigate negative competence stereotypes associated with

disability, leading to more favorable perceptions of product quality and stronger purchase intention.

H2a: Consumers perceive products “made by people with disabilities” (vs. no label) to be of higher quality when the product is handmade.

This effect is driven by the positive associations linked to craftsmanship, attention to detail, and emotional investment in handmade products, which may offset any competence-related concerns.

H2b: Consumers’ purchase intentions for products labeled as “made by people with disabilities” (vs. no label) are stronger when the product is handmade.

The emotional value of handmade products, combined with associations of care, authenticity, and effort, may enhance consumer trust and willingness to purchase despite potential stereotypes.

This theoretical framework lays the foundation for testing whether a disability label has influence on the perceived quality of a production and the purchase intention and if production mode can serve as a key moderator in consumer evaluations of disability-labeled products, ultimately influencing both perceived quality and purchase intention.

3 Methodology

This study examines the effects of product labelling (*‘made by people with disabilities’*) and the moderating effect of production mode (handmade) on the two dependent variables perceived product quality and purchase intention. To explore the research question, an online survey with an experimental setting has been appointed as the essential empirical method, which enables group comparisons following the display of an experiment and access to a larger number of participants. Participation in the experimental survey was on a voluntary and anonymous basis. A between-subjects design was determined as crucial for the hypotheses, enabling random assignments to one of the stimuli groups. This method makes it possible to analyse causal relationships between the variables under investigation and at the same time minimise potential confounding effects. The methodology will be explained in greater detail in the following chapters. Starting with the research design, this chapter

provides a detailed explanation of the stimuli and conditions of the experimental survey, the measurements and finally the exact course of the experiment.

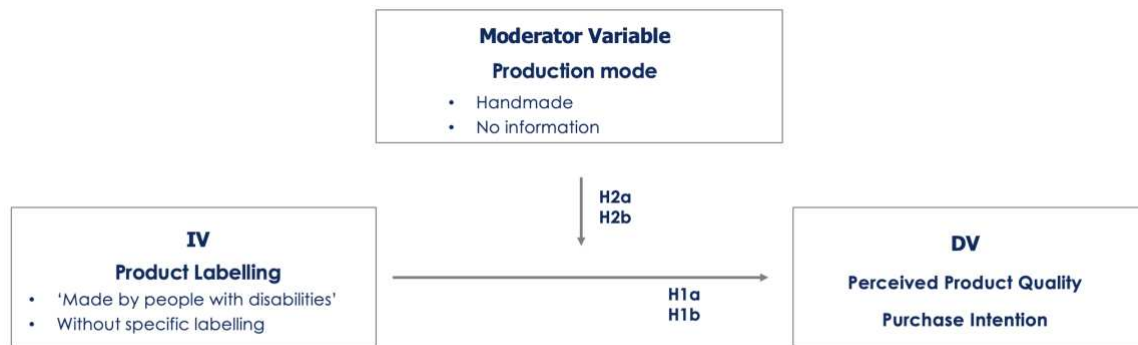
3.1 Research design

This thesis examines the effects of product labelling ('made by people with a disability vs. no label') on perceived product quality and purchase intention. In addition, the moderating role of the type of production (handmade vs. no information about the production mode) is analysed.

A quantitative approach was chosen as it allows a precise measurement of the relationships between independent and dependent variables as this approach is a more reliable predictor of actual behavior compared to qualitative self-assessments (M. Bauer et al., 2019). To explore the research question a digital survey with an experimental setting was conducted via Qualtrics as an online experiment (<http://www.qualtrics.com>). The online implementation allowed access to a more diverse sample and was a practical choice given the limited time and resources. While online surveys offer logistical advantages, they also come with methodological limitations, such as reduced control over participants' attention and understanding (Bell et al., 2022). In addition, they emphasise that online surveys allow researchers to reach a larger proportion of their target sample and obtain responses more quickly (Bell et al., 2022). A between-subjects design with a 2x2 layout was determined as crucial for the hypotheses, enabling random assignments to one of the four condition groups that will be further explained in the next chapters. The between-subjects design helps to avoid carryover effects. The experimental design and randomisation of questions was chosen to reduce spillover effects. This means that previous questions do not influence participants' answers to subsequent questions (Field, Andy & Graham, Hole, 2024). Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental groups using Qualtrics' built-in randomization feature, ensuring an even distribution across all conditions. The sample was collected through convenience sampling, with the survey link shared on the SurveyCircle platform and further distributed via social media. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to increase participation. In order to draw valid conclusions from research results, it is essential to define an appropriate sample size (Memon et al., 2020). A minimum sample size of approximately 250 participants was targeted, following general recommendation in experimental research (Brysbaert, 2019). Eventually 304 respondents took part in the survey over a period of two weeks (21.12.2024 – 04.01.2025). The independent variable is product

labelling, which was varied in two conditions: ‘*made by people with disabilities*’ and no specific info about the producer. The moderating variable is the mode of production, which was presented as either ‘*handmade*’ or no information about the production mode. The dependent variables include perceived product quality and purchase intention.

Figure 1: Research Model and Hypotheses



Main Effect

H1a: Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of lower quality.

H1b: Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" compared to products without such a label.

Moderator

H2a: Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of higher quality for handmade products.

H2b: Consumers' purchase intentions for products labeled as 'made by people with disabilities' are stronger for handmade products.

3.2 Conditions and stimuli

The experimental conditions were designed to investigate the effects of product labelling (‘*made by people with a disability*’) and the mode of production (*handmade*) on perceived product quality and purchase intention. This study employed a 2x2 between-subject design, resulting in four experimental groups that combined the independent variable (product labelling) and the moderating variable (type of production). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: ‘*Made by people with disabilities*’ with handmade products, ‘*made by people with a disability*’ with no additional information, no label with handmade products, and no label with no additional information. Depending on the assigned condition, participants viewed identical product images accompanied by one of four standardized product descriptions. For the first group, the text stated: ‘Please look at this product carefully, this is a handmade [product], produced **by a person with a**

disability.' The second group read: 'Please look at this product carefully. This product is a [product], produced **by a person with a disability.**' The third group received: 'Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade [product].' Finally, the fourth group's description read: 'Please look at this product carefully. This product is a [product].'

The stimuli consisted of four products, these products were soap, a mug, a jam and a keychain, selected to represent a mix of hedonic and utilitarian items. Hedonic products, such as jam and toys, appeal to emotional and pleasure-driven consumer, while utilitarian products, like soap and mugs, are valued for their functionality and practical utility. This classification ensured coverage of different consumer decision-making contexts, drawing on established theories of consumer behavior (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). The selection of stimuli followed the principles outlined by Simonsohn et al. (2024), which emphasize internal validity by systematically addressing potential confounds and ensuring meaningful diversity across product categories. Adhering to the *Mix-and-Match* framework, the products were varied systematically along relevant dimensions, such as category (e.g., food, personal care, home decor) and appeal type (hedonic versus utilitarian). Efforts were made to ensure that the manipulation (e.g., handmade versus no info, CSR labelling) was the primary distinguishing attribute across conditions, minimizing unintended variations. In this rigorous selection process, a balance between theoretical considerations, practical relevance and methodological rigour was sought and tested in a pre-test. To ensure ecological validity, the products were selected based on their real-world association with production by people with disabilities. For example, the soap was sourced from Werky Von Menschen gemacht!, n.d., the mug from Parafaktum, n.d. the jam from SEMEAR, n.d. and the keychain from Entia Gutes aus Manufakturen, n.d. These choices enhance the study's relevance by reflecting real-world scenarios, providing a stronger foundation for the generalizability of findings. All stimuli were presented to participants in random order to mitigate sequence effects. Each product was displayed individually, followed by questions measuring perceived product quality and purchase intention. Standardization was prioritized in the design of the stimuli to control for potential biases. Text length, image quality, and overall design were uniform across all conditions. Additionally, the aesthetic appeal of the stimuli was ensured to foster participant engagement and simulate realistic purchasing decisions.

3.3 Measurement

The variables were operationalized and measured using scales and additional exploratory and control measures. This section outlines the operationalization of the independent variable, the moderating variable, and the dependent variables, as well as the attention checks and social desirability questions included in the study.

The independent variable, the product information, was manipulated into two experimental conditions (see chapter 3.2) This manipulation was implemented by inserting or omitting the information in the product description shown to participants. The choice to use this kind of manipulation follows established experimental design practices to examine consumer responses to socially salient information (adapted from adapted from Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The moderating variable, production type, was also manipulated into two conditions: handmade and no information about the production mode. In the handmade condition, product descriptions explicitly included the phrase, '*This product is handmade*'. In the no-information condition, no mention of the production mode was made. By including this variable, the study examines whether production type moderates the relationship between product labeling and the dependent variables.

Prior studies emphasize that quality perception is a multidimensional construct. Perceived product quality refers to a consumer's subjective assessment of a product's craftsmanship, reliability, and overall quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore the items for perceived product quality were adapted from established consumer research scales, which have been shown to provide reliable and valid measurements of perceived product quality (Zeithaml, 1988; Fuchs et al., 2015). The dependent variable was measured using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = Totally disagree and 7 = Totally agree. Based on those critical dimensions of perceived product quality three items were included in the survey to measure this construct as using multiple items improves measurement reliability, reducing potential biases linked to single-item evaluations (Loo, 2002). 'This product is reliable.', 'This product is well made' and 'This product has quality'. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement.

The measurement of purchase intention in this study is also based on established consumer behavior research that defines it as the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product when certain conditions, such as affordability and need, are met (Ajzen, 1991). Prior research

suggests that single-item measures can effectively capture purchase intention when the construct is concrete and well understood by participants (Bergkvist, 2015). The statement ‘To what extent do you agree with the following statement: If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it’ aligns with this approach by incorporating key decision-making factors that influence purchasing behavior. This dependent variable was also measured using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = totally disagree and 7 = totally agree.

To assess potential response biases, participants answered two questions designed to measure their sensitivity to social desirability as it is standard practice to ensure validity of self-reported measures (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960): ‘How concerned will a person be with what others are thinking of him/her when they state a high likelihood of not liking products made by people with disabilities?’ and ‘A person will be [] concerned with what others are thinking of him/her when they believe a product made by a person with a disability has lower quality.’ Participants responded to both questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 indicated ‘not at all concerned’ and 7 indicated ‘extremely concerned’. The social desirability scale was adapted from Stefano Puntonis. Given the ethical and social nature of the research topic, participants may have been inclined to provide responses that align with socially accepted norms rather than their true opinions. By incorporating indirect questions (Fisher, 1993), this study aimed to account for potential biases and ensure a more accurate assessment of participants' genuine attitudes toward products labeled as *‘made by people with disabilities’*.

Additionally, one exploratory question was included to examine participants' associations with the disability label: ‘When you see a product labeled as ‘produced by a person with a disability,’ what type of disability do you most associate with the producer?’ Participants could choose either ‘physical disability’ or ‘mental disability’. This question was designed to generate further insights into how the label is cognitively processed by respondents and may inform future research. It is plausible that participants disproportionately associate disability with one type, particularly physical disability, due to their greater visibility in public discourse (Sim & Hugenberg, 2022).

To ensure that participants carefully read and processed the information provided in the experimental conditions, two attention check questions were included in the survey for all groups (Oppenheimer et al., 2009): ‘Who was indicated as the producer of the products you

rated?’ with the response options: People with a disability, No information about the producer, I don’t know/I don’t remember. The second question was ‘What mode of production was specified for the products you rated?’ with the response options: Handmade, No information about the production mode, I don’t know/I don’t remember.

3.4 Experimental survey procedure

The experimental survey (see Appendix A) was designed using closed-ended questions to systematically assess participants' responses to the different experimental conditions. At the beginning of the survey, participants were provided with a brief introduction and informing them that they would evaluate four different products under specific conditions. Additionally, participants were informed that the survey would take approximately three minutes to complete. Following this introduction, participants were presented with a data protection declaration that emphasized confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Only those who provided explicit consent and confirmed they were at least 18 years old were permitted to proceed. Respondents who did not meet these criteria were automatically excluded from the study.

To enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the survey, multiple pre-tests were conducted before data collection. These pre-tests aimed to identify and rectify any potential ambiguities in question wording and to address technical issues related to the survey interface (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Based on the insights gained from the pre-tests, necessary refinements were made to optimize the survey for the final data collection phase. Following the introduction and consent process, participants were randomly assigned one of the four experimental groups using Qualtrics' randomization feature. Each group was exposed to the same four products soap, toy, jam, and mug but with different product descriptions that varied according to the experimental condition (see chapter 3.3). As already mentioned above, the manipulation followed a 2x2 between-subjects design, where both product labeling (*made by people with a disability* vs. *no label*) and production type (*handmade* vs. *no production information*) were systematically varied (see chapter 3.1). After being presented with the product descriptions, participants evaluated each of the four products by responding to three perceived product quality items and one purchase intention question per product. All responses were recorded on 7-point Likert scales, allowing for a nuanced

assessment of participants' perceptions and behavioral intentions. Upon completing the product evaluations, participants answered additional measures, including social desirability questions. The survey also contained an exploratory question asking participants to specify the type of disability they most associated with the label '*produced by a person with a disability*', followed by the two attention checks questions. Finally, the survey concluded with demographic questions, in which participants reported their age, gender, and highest level of education. These demographic variables provided insight into the sample characteristics and allowed for potential control measures in subsequent analyses. By structuring the survey in this way, the study ensured that responses were systematically collected while maintaining methodological rigor and minimizing potential biases. This experimental design enabled a systematic investigation of the relationships between product labeling, production mode, and consumer perceptions, while controlling for potential biases and confounding variables.

4 Results

The survey was conducted between December 21, 2024, and January 4, 2025, and initially included 304 participants. To ensure data quality, only valid responses from genuine participants who completed the survey were included in the analysis, i.e. incomplete responses and test cases were excluded through a combination of filters in SPSS, resulting in a dataset of 258 participants ($n = 258$).

The sample's complete demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1 to 3. The demographic data of the study sample provides insights into the participants' age, gender and educational background, which are critical for understanding the context of the findings. As shown in Table 1, the age of the participants ranged from 18 to 62 years, with a mean age of 28.18 years ($SD = 8.51$).

Table 1: Descriptive Age

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DemoAge_	258	18.00	62.00	28.1860	8.50751
Valid N (listwise)	258				

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the gender distribution of the sample. The majority of participants identified as female (59.3%), followed by male participants (40.3%), and 0.4% as diverse. This gender distribution highlights a slight imbalance, which should be considered when interpreting the results, especially in cases where gender could influence perceptions or decision-making.

Table 2: Descriptive Gender

DemoGender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	104	40.3	40.3	40.3
	Female	153	59.3	59.3	99.6
	Diverse	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	258	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2: Descriptive Gender

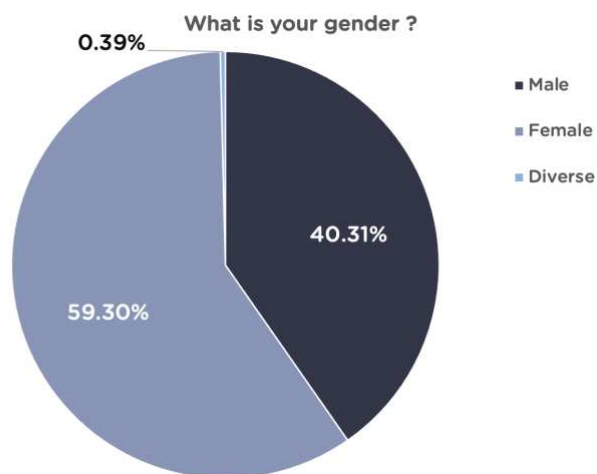
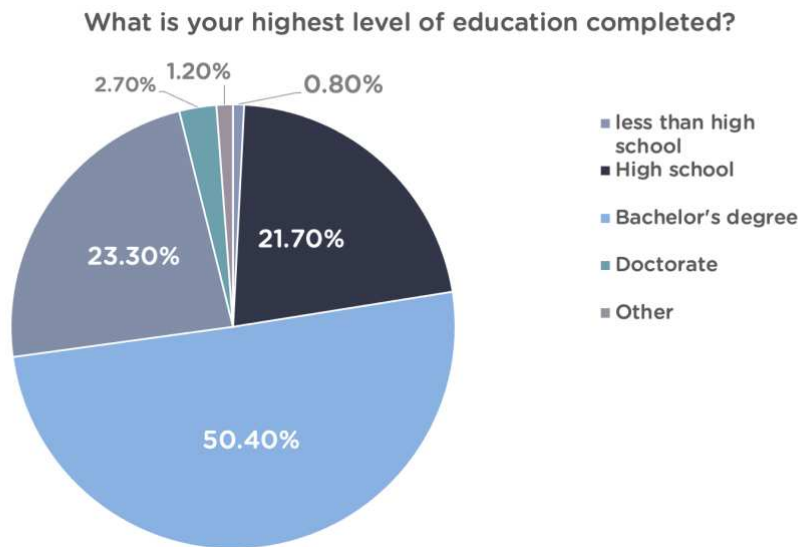


Table 3 and Figure 3 provide an overview of the participants' educational levels. Over half of the participants (50.4%) reported having a bachelor's degree, while 23.3% held a master's degree, and 21.7% completed high school. Smaller proportions of participants had a doctorate (2.7%) or other forms of education (1.2%). This indicates that the sample is highly educated, which may influence their awareness of CSR practices and ethical consumption.

Table 3: Descriptive Highest Education

		DemoEducation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than high school	2	.8	.8	.8
	High school	56	21.7	21.7	22.5
	Bachelor's degree	130	50.4	50.4	72.9
	Master's degree	60	23.3	23.3	96.1
	Doctorate	7	2.7	2.7	98.8
	Other	3	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	258	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3: Descriptive Highest Education



These demographic insights form a foundation for interpreting the study results and ensure the context of the sample is appropriately considered. Following this demographic analysis, the study's experimental design and participant distribution are described. The study employed a 2x2 between-subjects design, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of the four groups. The final distribution of participants across the conditions was as follows: Disability Label + Handmade (N = 62), Disability Label + No Info (N = 65), No Label + Handmade (N = 67), and No Label + No Info (N = 64).

Before delving into the detailed analysis of the study's hypotheses, the following section presents the descriptive statistics for the key dependent variables. This provides an initial overview of how perceived product quality and purchase intention varied across the different experimental conditions. Descriptive statistics for the two dependent variables, perceived product quality and purchase intention, indicate that products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" received higher ratings compared to those without the label. Specifically,

for perceived product quality, the highest mean rating was observed in the Disability + Handmade group ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 0.91$), closely followed by the Disability + No Info group ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.07$). Lower ratings were seen in the No Label conditions, with the Handmade version rated at $M = 4.91$ ($SD = 0.88$), and No Info rated lowest at $M = 4.73$ ($SD = 0.87$). (Table 4 and Figure 4)

Similarly, purchase intention was highest in the Disability + Handmade group ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.29$), followed by Disability + No Info ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.26$). Again, the No Label conditions received lower ratings, with Handmade at $M = 4.37$ ($SD = 1.25$) and No Info at $M = 4.28$ ($SD = 1.28$). (Shown in Table 5 and Figure 5) These patterns suggest that both the disability and handmade cue had a positive effect on how participants perceived product quality and their intention to purchase. The combined effect of these cues resulted in the most favorable evaluations. A visual comparison of these findings is presented in figure 4 and 5 below, highlighting the clear contrast between labeled and unlabeled conditions.

Table 4: Descriptive DV Perceived Product Quality

Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable Perceived Product Quality: PQ Av				
DisGroup	MoGroup	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
"Disability"	1 Handmade	5.4207	.90629	62
	2 No info	5.3462	1.07178	65
	Total	5.3825	.99122	127
"No Label"	1 Handmade	4.9104	.88410	67
	2 No info	4.7344	.87475	64
	Total	4.8244	.88060	131
Total	1 Handmade	5.1557	.92734	129
	2 No info	5.0426	1.02238	129
	Total	5.0992	.97576	258

Figure 4: Descriptive DV Perceived Product Quality

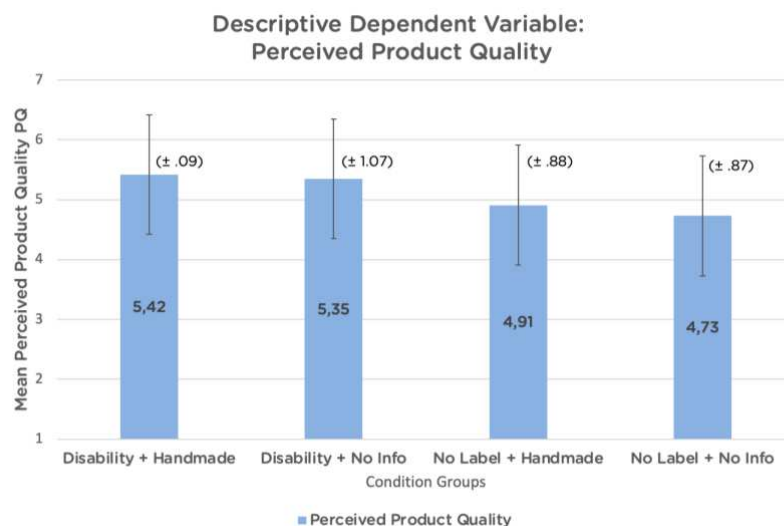
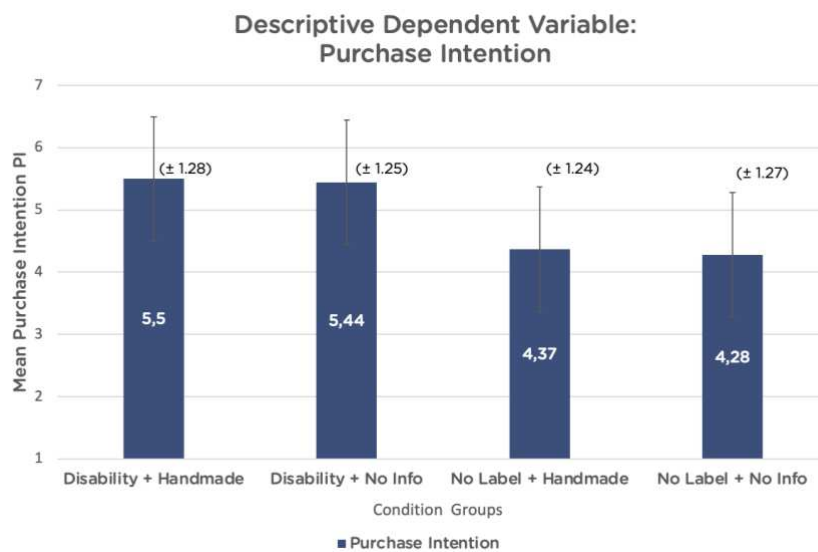


Table 5: Descriptive DV Purchase Intention

Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable Purchase Intention: PI_Ave				
DisGroup	MoGroup	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
"Disability"	1 Handmade	5.4960	1.28715	62
	2 No info	5.4423	1.25839	65
	Total	5.4685	1.26773	127
"No Label"	1 Handmade	4.3731	1.24725	67
	2 No info	4.2773	1.27640	64
	Total	4.3263	1.25763	131
Total	1 Handmade	4.9128	1.38161	129
	2 No info	4.8643	1.39124	129
	Total	4.8886	1.38395	258

Figure 5: Descriptive DV Purchase Intention



To ensure the validity of the analysis, Levene's test for equality of variances was conducted. The results showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for both dependent variables (Perceived Product Quality: $p = 0.174$; Purchase Intention: $p = 0.979$; $p > 0.05$ Homogeneity of variances is not violated, meaning the ANOVA results are valid), confirming that the data met the necessary assumptions for conducting an ANOVA. Therefore, a two-way ANOVA was performed to examine the main effects and interaction effects of the Disability Label and Handmade variables on both perceived product quality and purchase intention.

The two-way ANOVA for perceived product quality showed a significant main effect of the Disability Label ($F(1, 254) = 23.062$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.083$), indicating that products labeled as '*made by people with disabilities*' were perceived as having significantly higher quality than those without this label. However, there was no significant main effect for

production type ($F(1, 254) = 1.151, p = 0.284, \eta^2 = 0.005$), suggesting that whether a product was handmade or not did not significantly influence perceived quality. Furthermore, the interaction effect between Disability Label and Handmade was also not significant ($F(1, 254) = 0.189, p = 0.664, \eta^2 = 0.001$), meaning that the presence of the handmade label did not alter the effect of the disability label on product quality perceptions. Consequently, **H1a** (Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities as lower quality) was not supported, as the opposite effect was observed products with a disability label were perceived as having higher quality. Similarly, **H2a** (Handmade moderates the effect of Disability Label on quality perceptions) was not supported, as the handmade label did not influence how the Disability Label was perceived in terms of quality (see Table 6 and Figure 6).

Table 6: Results of the Two Way ANOVA on DV Product Quality

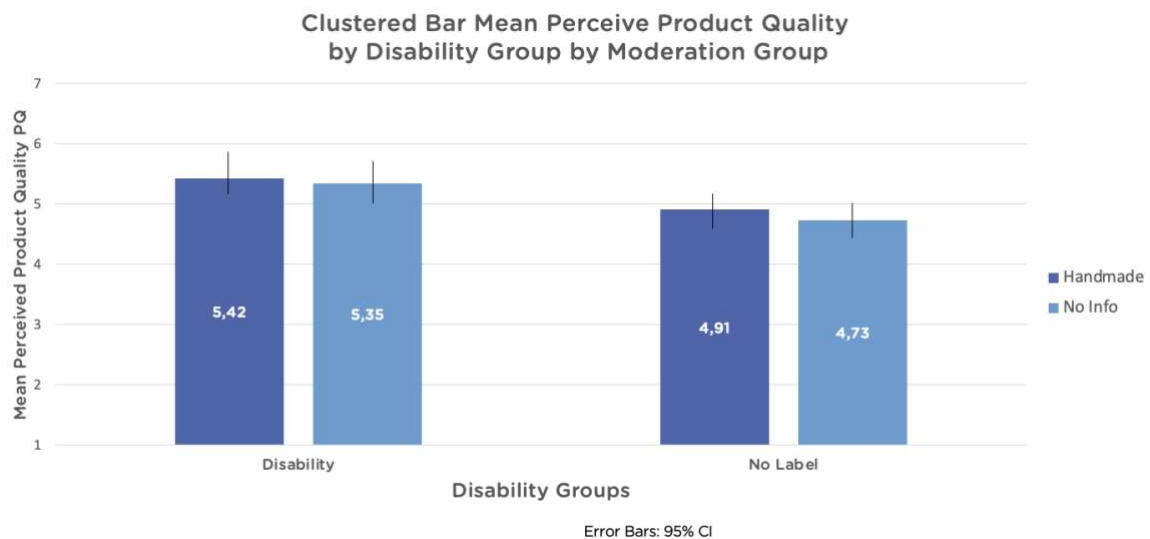
Dependent Variable: PQ_Av

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	21.278 ^a	3	7.093	8.064	<.001	.087	24.191	.991
Intercept	6713.012	1	6713.012	7632.023	<.001	.968	7632.023	1.000
DisGroup	20.285	1	20.285	23.062	<.001	.083	23.062	.998
MoGroup	1.012	1	1.012	1.151	.284	.005	1.151	.188
DisGroup * MoGroup	.166	1	.166	.189	.664	.001	.189	.072
Error	223.415	254	.880					
Total	6953.062	258						
Corrected Total	244.692	257						

a. R Squared = .087 (Adjusted R Squared = .076)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Figure 6: Two Way ANOVA DV Perceived Product Quality



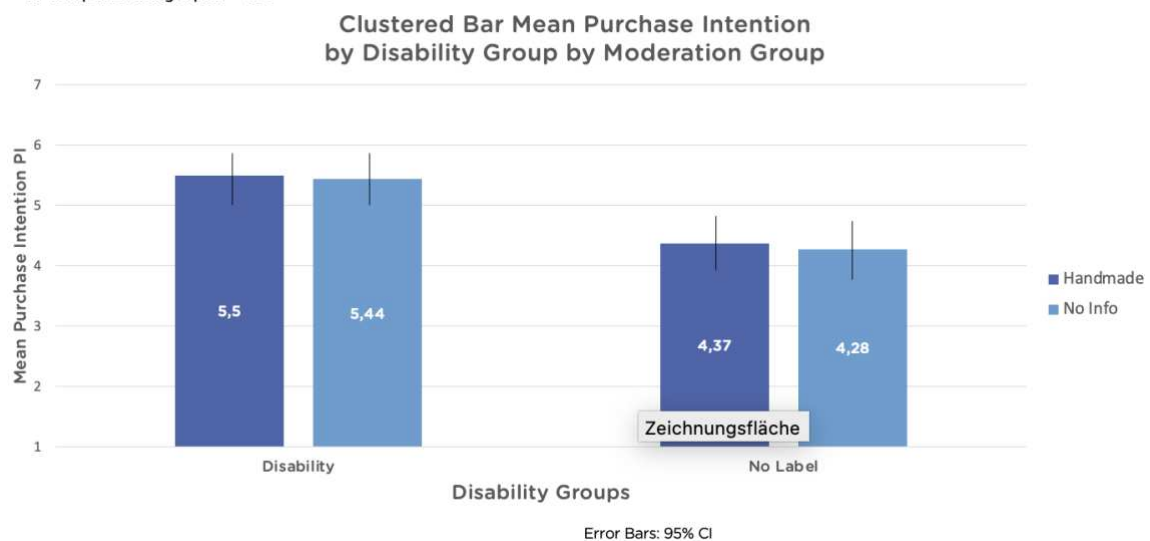
A two-way ANOVA for purchase intention showed similar results. The Disability Label had a significant main effect on purchase intention ($F(1, 254) = 52.537, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.171$), meaning that participants reported higher purchase intentions for products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" compared to those without the label. However, production type again had no significant main effect ($F(1, 254) = 0.224, p = 0.636, \eta^2 = 0.001$), indicating that whether the product was handmade or not did not influence purchase intention. The interaction effect between Disability Label and Handmade was not significant ($F(1, 254) = 0.018, p = 0.894, \eta^2 = 0.000$), showing that the effect of the Disability Label on purchase intention remained consistent across handmade and non-handmade conditions. As a result, **H1b** (Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as 'made by people with disabilities') was not supported, as products with a Disability Label had higher purchase intentions. Similarly, **H2b** (Handmade moderates the effect of Disability Label on purchase intention) was not supported, as the presence of a handmade label did not alter the effect of the Disability Label on purchase intention (Table 7 and Figure 7).

Table 7: Results of the Two Way ANOVA on DV Purchase Intention

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects								
Dependent Variable: PI_Ave								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	84.515 ^a	3	28.172	17.550	<.001	.172	52.651	1.000
Intercept	6182.636	1	6182.636	3851.647	<.001	.938	3851.647	1.000
DisGroup	84.333	1	84.333	52.537	<.001	.171	52.537	1.000
MoGroup	.360	1	.360	.224	.636	.001	.224	.076
DisGroup * MoGroup	.029	1	.029	.018	.894	.000	.018	.052
Error	407.719	254	1.605					
Total	6657.938	258						
Corrected Total	492.234	257						

a. R Squared = .172 (Adjusted R Squared = .162)

b. Computed using alpha = .05



To ensure the robustness of the findings, additional analyses were conducted to control for potential social desirability bias and the influence of type of disability associated with the product label. First, a t-test was performed to assess whether social desirability scores differed between participants in the Disability Label and No Label conditions. The results indicated that there were no significant differences in social desirability between these groups ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that response patterns were not systematically influenced by a tendency to provide socially desirable answers (Table 8).

Table 8: Social Desirability T-Test

T-Test

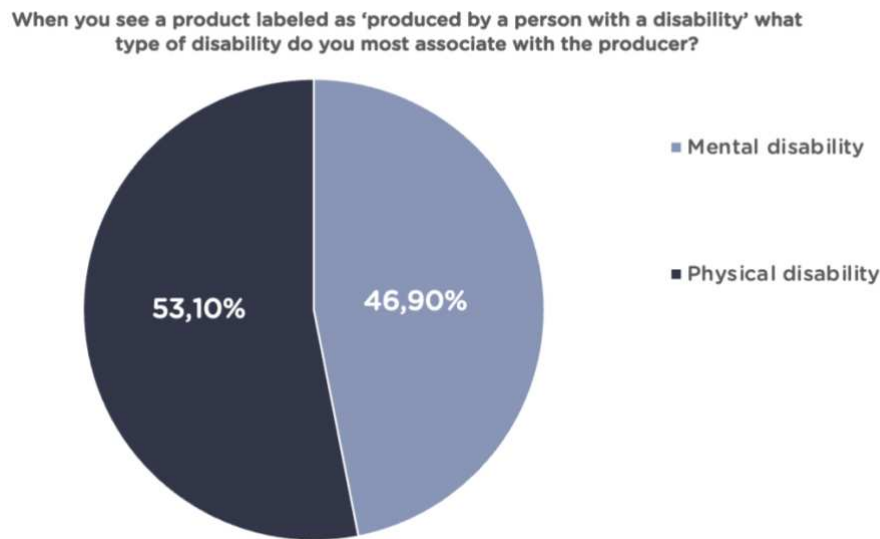
Group Statistics					
	DisGroup	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SocDes_Av	"Disability"	127	4.3031	1.51861	.13475
	"No Label"	131	4.5076	1.49741	.13083

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance One-Sided p	Significance Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
SocDes_Av	Equal variances assumed	.355	.552	-1.089	256	.139	.277	-.20448	.18778	-.57427 .16530
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.089	255.478	.139	.277	-.20448	.18782	-.57435 .16538

To further verify this result, a three-way ANOVA was conducted including Social Desirability as a third fixed factor alongside Product label and Production mode. The analysis showed that Social Desirability did not significantly affect perceived product quality ($(F(12, 207) = 1.453, p = .152, \eta^2 = .072)$) or purchase intention ($(F(11, 207) = 0.979, p = .467, \eta^2 = .049)$), nor were there significant interaction effects with the main experimental variables. These results confirm that social desirability concerns did not meaningfully influence the observed effects and strengthen the internal validity of the findings. However, it is important to acknowledge that the measure used for social desirability may not have fully captured all aspects of socially motivated response behavior, which remains a potential limitation of the study.

Additionally, participants were asked an exploratory question regarding the type of disability they associated with the "made by people with disabilities" label. Responses were categorized as either mental disability or physical disability. As shown in Figure 8, 53.1% of participants associated the label with physical disability, while 46.9% associated it with mental disability. The balanced distribution indicates that participants interpreted the label in a relatively heterogeneous manner, suggesting that the observed effects are not primarily attributable to associations with a specific type of disability.

Figure 8: Frequency Type of Disability



To examine whether the perceived type of disability (mental vs. physical) moderates the effect of product labeling and production mode on consumer evaluations, two additional two-way ANOVAs were conducted – one for each dependent variable. For perceived product quality, the analysis revealed no significant main effect of disability type ($F(1, 250) = 1.642, p = .201$), and no significant interaction effects with the disability label ($F(1, 250) = 1.125, p = .290$) or the production type ($F(1, 250) = 0.002, p = .964$). Furthermore, the three-way interaction (Label $\times$ Production $\times$ Disability Type) was also not significant ($F(1, 250) = 0.579, p = .447$). Similarly, for purchase intention, the type of disability showed no significant main effect ($F(1, 250) = 2.411, p = .122$). There were no significant interactions with product labeling ($F(1, 250) = 0.538, p = .464$), production type ($F(1, 250) = 0.145, p = .704$), or in the three-way interaction ($F(1, 250) = 1.012, p = .315$). These results indicate that the perceived type of disability does not significantly influence how consumers evaluate product quality or purchase intention. Thus, it does not function as a moderator in this context (Table 9).

Table 9: Moderation by Type of Disability Perceived Product Quality

Test of Between-Subject Effects Perceived Product Quality					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	24.263	7	3.466	3.931	<.001
Intercept	6599.097	1	6599.097	7484.378	<.001
DisGroup (Label: Disability vs. No Label)	20.435	1	20.435	23.176	<.001
MoGroup (Production: Handmade vs. None)	0.781	1	0.781	0.885	.348
DisGroup * MoGroup	0.183	1	0.183	0.208	.649
TypeDisability (Mental vs. Physical)	1.447	1	1.447	1.642	.201
DisGroup * TypeDisability	0.992	1	0.992	1.125	.290
MoGroup * TypeDisability	0.002	1	0.002	0.002	.964
DisGroup * MoGroup * TypeDisability	0.510	1	0.510	0.579	.447
Error	220.429	250	0.882		
Total	6953.062	258			
Corrected Total	244.692	257			

Table 10: Moderation by Type of Disability Purchase Intention

Test of Between-Subject Effects Purchase Intention					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	91.074	7	13.011	8.108	<.001
Intercept	6606.056	1	6606.056	3776.856	<.001
DisGroup (Label: Disability vs. No Label)	83.248	1	83.248	51.880	<.001
MoGroup (Production: Handmade vs. None)	0.152	1	0.152	0.094	.759
DisGroup * MoGroup	0.006	1	0.006	0.004	.949
TypeDisability (Mental vs. Physical)	3.869	1	3.869	2.411	.122
DisGroup * TypeDisability	0.863	1	0.863	0.538	.464
MoGroup * TypeDisability	0.232	1	0.232	0.145	.704
DisGroup * MoGroup * TypeDisability	1.624	1	1.624	1.012	.315
Error	401.160	250	1.605		
Total	6657.938	258			
Corrected Total	492.234	257			

In summary, the results of the two-way ANOVA indicate that the Disability Label had a significant positive effect on both perceived product quality and purchase intention, contradicting the initial hypotheses. The Handmade label, however, had no significant impact on either dependent variable, and no interaction effects were found between product

labeling and production type, meaning that the presence of the handmade label did not strengthen or weaken the effect of the disability label on consumer perceptions. These findings suggest that consumers do not devalue products labeled as ‘*made by people with disabilities*’. Instead, they might associate these products with higher social or ethical value, which positively influences their purchase decisions.

Table 11: Overview Results

Hypothesis	Description	Supported?	Observed Effect
H1a (Main Effect)	Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of lower quality.	Not supported	The opposite was found: Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of lower quality.
H1b (Main Effect)	Consumers have lower purchase intentions for products labeled as "made by people with disabilities" compared to products without such a label.	Not supported	The opposite was true: Products with a Disability Label had higher purchase intentions.
H2a (Moderator)	Consumers perceive products made by people with disabilities (vs. no disability) to be of higher quality for handmade products.	Not supported	Handmade products did not influence the perception of products with a Disability Label.
H2b (Moderator)	Consumers' purchase intentions for products labeled as 'made by people with disabilities' are stronger for handmade products.	Not supported	Handmade products did not influence purchase intentions for products with a Disability Label.

5 Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the effects of product labeling and production type on perceived product quality and purchase intention. The results show that the information ‘made by people with a disability’ positively impacted both perceived quality and purchase intention. This refutes H1a and H1b. Furthermore the information about a handmade production did not have a significant effect on both dependent variables. This also contradicts H2a and H2b.

5.1 Interpretation of results and implications

5.1.1 Main effects of disability labeling

A possible explanation for this outcome lies in the stereotype content model, which suggests that individuals with disabilities are stereotypically perceived as high in warmth but low in competence (Fiske et al., 2002). While this partially aligns with the hypothesis,

the findings suggest that warmth may foster trust and a sense of goodwill in consumption contexts, which in turn can enhance purchase intention (Aaker, 1996). In this case, participants may have responded favorably to the label due to the *perceived warmth* and social value associated with supporting a marginalized group.

Additionally one possible explanation for these results lies in the concept of *warm glow*, wherein consumers derive positive emotional satisfaction from engaging in prosocial behavior, such as supporting marginalized groups. This warm glow effect may override or counterbalance any negative biases associated with perceptions of lower quality. In this context, the label '*made by people with disabilities*' likely triggers an emotional response, enhancing purchase intentions despite potential concerns about product performance. Research in economics and psychology suggests that individuals derive intrinsic pleasure from acts of generosity, a phenomenon known as the warm glow feeling (Bianchi et al., 2023). Economists view this as a motivator for altruistic behavior, while psychologists highlight its link to happiness, showing that prosocial spending increases emotional well-being. This may obfuscate the predicted effect. In this study, consumers may have responded positively to the disability label because purchasing these products created a sense of altruistic satisfaction. Rather than solely evaluating functional attributes, emotional gratification from supporting individuals with disabilities likely played a role in their purchase decisions.

Another contributing factor might be prosocial motivations. Behaviour that benefits others is called prosociality (Jensen, 2016; Pfattheicher et al., 2022), which is a central concern in behavioral studies (Baumsteiger & Siegel, 2018). Supporting individuals with disabilities could invoke a sense of moral obligation, encouraging consumers to favor products with the disability label. These prosocial tendencies may overshadow objective product evaluations, as they are driven by ethical and emotional considerations rather than pure functionality. Furthermore, the recruitment process for this study, which involved sharing the survey through personal networks and social media, may have introduced a potential bias. Thus, the combination of *warm glow*, *prosocial motivation*, and *warmth-based stereotyping* offers a compelling explanation for why the disability label resulted in positive evaluations contrary to the initially hypothesation.

Moreover, social desirability bias could have contributed to this pattern. Even though indirect measurement techniques were used (Paulhus, 1991), participants may have felt a

moral obligation to express favorable attitudes toward products associated with people with disabilities. Such effects are well-documented in CSR and ethical consumption research, where consumers often claim higher purchase intention for socially responsible products than they exhibit in actual behavior (Auger et al., 2008).

5.1.2 Moderator effects of handmade production

The findings of this study contradict prior research suggesting that handmade products are generally associated with higher perceived quality and craftsmanship (Fuchs et al., 2015). The expectation that handmade production would positively moderate the effects of the information about producers with a disability was not supported. Several potential explanations may account for this unexpected result. The handmade manipulation may not have been prominent enough to impact consumer perceptions. Unlike studies where visual or descriptive elements highlight craftsmanship, this study relied solely on a brief textual mention of ‘handmade’. If participants did not fully process or prioritize this detail, it would not significantly influence their evaluations. The disability label may have overshadowed the effect of handmade production in the Disability + Handmade Group. Research suggests that emotionally and ethically charged attributes can dominate consumer decision-making (Smith & Langford, 2009). Given that participants likely focused on the socially meaningful disability label, the comparatively neutral handmade attribute may have had little impact. Furthermore handmade production may not be equally relevant for all product categories. Prior studies on handmade effects often focus on luxury, artisanal, or decorative goods (Fuchs et al., 2015). In contrast, the products used in this study (e.g., soap, jam, mugs, keychain) are more everyday, utilitarian items, where handmade attributes may not be as strongly associated with perceived quality benefits.

5.1.3 Managerial and theoretical implications

Although the initial hypotheses regarding the perceived product quality and purchase intention of products made by people with disabilities were not supported in the expected direction, the results offer valuable managerial and theoretical implications. The findings challenge the assumption that consumers associate disability-related production with lower product quality or reduced desirability. Instead, the CSR-related labeling had a positive effect, demonstrating that ethical and prosocial considerations can enhance consumer evaluations and drive purchase behavior. Since consumers did not perceive a drop in quality due to the disability label, firms do not need to fear reputational risks in highlighting

their commitment to inclusivity. However, companies should ensure that CSR messaging is framed in an empowering way. Beyond marketing, these findings support the argument that hiring individuals with disabilities can contribute to positive brand differentiation. Showcasing real employees and their skills can enhance credibility and foster consumer trust in CSR initiatives, including hiring people with a disability. While the study highlights the potential benefits of communicating inclusivity, firms should be mindful of how they position their messaging to avoid skepticism regarding their motivations. Ethical consumerism is increasingly subject to public scrutiny and firms should demonstrate genuine long-term commitment rather than using disability employment as a short-term marketing tool and ensure transparency by communicating actual impact stories rather than broad, generic statements and educate consumers about the skills and expertise of employees with disabilities to challenge existing stereotypes. For brands emphasizing handmade production, additional emphasis on artisanal craftsmanship and uniqueness may be necessary to differentiate products effectively.

5.2 Limitations and outlook

While the study provides meaningful insights into producers with a disability and purchase intention and the perception of quality, several limitations should be acknowledged.

One primary limitation is the potential lack of salience in the handmade manipulation. While the disability label was highlighted in bold font, the handmade information was presented in plain text. It is therefore possible that participants overlooked or did not sufficiently register the handmade attribute, limiting its impact on product evaluations. This study relied solely on text-based labeling. Future research should explore stronger experimental manipulations, incorporating visual and physical cues to test whether a more pronounced handmade attribute influences consumer perceptions. Furthermore the findings may be product-specific. Handmade attributes might carry more weight in high-involvement product categories (e.g., luxury fashion, handcrafted furniture) than in everyday consumer goods (e.g., soap, jam, mugs). And future studies should examine whether product type moderates the effect of handmade and CSR-related attributes.

A further limitation lies in the operationalization of disability. The study used a generalized label, 'made by people with disabilities' without specifying the type of disability. However, disability is a heterogeneous category encompassing a wide range of conditions, from

physical impairments (e.g., mobility limitations) to cognitive or invisible disabilities (e.g., diabetes or mental illness). Stereotypes may differ significantly depending on the type of disability (Coleman et al., 2015). For instance, visible or cognitive impairments may elicit different assumptions about competence and reliability compared to less visible or physical disabilities. Future research should differentiate between types of disabilities and investigate whether consumer evaluations vary accordingly.

Like many consumer studies, this research relied on self-reported purchase intention, which does not always correlate with actual purchasing behavior (Jamieson & Bass, 1989). Prior work has shown that consumers often express greater willingness to purchase socially responsible products than they actually follow through on (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Future studies should incorporate behavioral experiments, such as real-world purchasing decisions or choice-based conjoint analysis, to assess the actual impact of the disability label.

Despite attempts to control for social desirability, participants may still have been influenced by perceived social norms regarding disability and ethical consumption. However, it is important to acknowledge that the measure used for social desirability may not have fully captured all aspects of socially motivated response behavior, which remains a potential limitation of the study. Future studies could further refine social desirability measures by employing implicit association tests or response latency techniques to capture subconscious biases.

Participants familiar with the researcher may have felt a desire to support the study, consciously or unconsciously providing more favorable evaluations. This phenomenon aligns with impression management theory, where individuals adjust their responses to meet perceived social expectations (Paulhus, 1984). While this possibility does not detract from the observed effects of the disability label, it highlights the importance of future studies ensuring a neutral recruitment process to mitigate such biases. Consumer responses to CSR labels and handmade production may vary based on demographic factors. The sample in this study consisted primarily of younger participants, who may place greater emphasis on ethical considerations than older consumers (Auger et al., 2008). Future research should explore cross-cultural differences to assess whether CSR-related perceptions generalize across different consumer segments and international markets. Finally, this study primarily focused on social perception stereotypes. However, additional theoretical perspectives could provide further insights into consumer responses. For instance, self-concept theory suggests that consumers may be drawn to CSR-labeled products as a means of expressing their values

and identity (Aaker, 1999). Future studies could examine how self-congruence with ethical branding influences purchase behavior.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of labelling products as 'made by people with disabilities' on consumers' perceptions of product quality and purchase intention. It also examined whether the production method (handmade vs. machine-made) moderates these effects. The findings contribute to the growing literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and consumer choice by providing empirical evidence on how disability labels influence product evaluations.

Contrary to initial expectations, the results suggest that consumers perceive products labelled as 'made by disabled people' as having higher - not lower - quality than those not labelled as 'made by disabled people'. This challenges the common assumption that disability stereotypes negatively influence consumer perceptions of quality. Instead, the study suggests that consumers may evaluate products associated with inclusive employment positively due to ethical considerations, social responsibility motives and prosocial behaviour. Similarly, purchase intention was found to be higher for products with the disability label. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that consumers are increasingly prioritising ethical consumption and are willing to support brands that promote DEI initiatives. It suggests that companies that actively communicate their commitment to disability inclusion may benefit from increased consumer trust and brand loyalty. However, these findings also raise an important question about the potential gap between the stated preferences of consumers and their actual behaviour in the marketplace. While consumers express a willingness to purchase ethically labelled products in survey settings, real-world purchasing behaviour may be influenced by additional factors such as price sensitivity, brand reputation and competitive alternatives. With regard to the moderating role of production method, the hypothesis that handmade production would increase perceived product quality and purchase intention for products with a disability label was not supported. These results suggest that consumers' perceptions of quality are not influenced by their belief that handmade products are of higher quality. From a managerial point of view, these findings provide valuable insights for businesses that incorporate disability-inclusive employment policies. Contrary

to concerns that disability-related labels may deter consumers due to competence stereotypes, the study suggests that inclusive hiring practices can function as a competitive advantage. It is suggested that companies consider transparently communicating their commitment to hiring people with disabilities, as this can enhance perceived brand authenticity and foster positive consumer sentiment. Nevertheless, effective communication of Corporate Social Responsibility must be carefully considered; rather than emphasising charity or sympathy, it is recommended that brands highlight the skills, dedication and contributions of employees with disabilities to reinforce positive quality associations. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior by demonstrating that ethical considerations play a significant role in shaping product evaluations. While previous studies have shown that CSR initiatives generally enhance corporate reputation, this study specifically sheds light on the underexplored domain of disability-inclusive labeling. The results indicate that businesses can successfully integrate DEI initiatives into their branding strategies without facing negative quality perceptions. Future research should continue to examine how disability-related labels interact with other product attributes, market conditions, and cultural differences to gain a more comprehensive understanding of consumer responses to inclusive business practices.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Experimental Survey

Introduction / Informed Conccent

Purpose of the study: We are interested in your opinion concerning several products.

Task: You will read a scenario and answer questions about 4 products.

Duration: 3 minutes

Voluntary participation and anonymity: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the survey at any time and for any reason without penalty. We collect all your responses to the questions in this questionnaire anonymously; they will be analyzed in aggregate and exclusively used for research purposes. Your answers will never be judged.

Anonymity and GDPR information: The data controller is Sophia Paul (a12207339@unet.univie.ac.at). The personal data we collect includes your answers to the survey topic, age, gender and level of education. We do not foresee that data collection and analysis pose any risk to participants. The data controller will store and analyze data on password-protected computers accessible only by the researchers. The data controller will also share anonymous data online on public data repositories indefinitely and at least for 10 years after the publication of this study's results, in line with current research transparency guidelines. The purpose of this is to guarantee open science practices in the public interest and the advancement of a transparent scientific process.

Please read everything very carefully and answer honestly so you can help us to get good-quality data for our study! If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research, please contact Sophia Paul (a12207339@unet.univie.ac.at).

☐ I've read all of the above. I confirm that I am 18 years or older and I want to take part in this study.

☐ I've read all of the above. I do not want to participate or I am not eligible.

Condition Group 1: Disability + Handmade

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade soap, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Soap_1

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade mug, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Mug_1



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade jam, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Jam_1



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade key chain, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Key chain_1



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Condition Group 2: Disability + No Info

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a soap, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Soap_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a mug, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Mug_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a jam, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Jam_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a key chain, produced by a **person with a disability**.



Key chain_2



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Condition Group 3: No label + Handmade

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade soap.



Soap_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade mug.



Mug_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade jam.



Jam_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a handmade key chain.



Key chain_3



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Condition Group 4: No label + No info

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a soap.



Soap_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a mug.



Mug_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a jam.



Jam_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please look at this product carefully. This product is a key chain.



Key chain_4



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Totally agree
If I needed this product and it was available at a price I could afford, I would be likely to buy it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product is well-made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This product has quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Social Desirability I

How concerned will a person be with what others are thinking of him/her when s/he states a high likelihood of not liking products made by disabled people?

- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Slightly concerned
- ☐ Somewhat concerned
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderately concerned
- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Extremely concerned

Social Desirability II

Please fill in the blank below according to your opinion:

A person will be [] concerned with what others are thinking of him/her when s/he believes a product made by a disabled person has lower quality.

- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Slightly concerned
- ☐ Somewhat concerned
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Moderately concerned
- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Extremely concerned

Exploratory Question: Type of Disability

When you see a product labeled as 'produced by a person with a disability,' what type of disability do you most associate with the producer?

- ☐ Mental disability
- ☐ Physical disability

Attention Check I

Who was indicated as the producer of the products you rated?

- ☐ People with a disability
- ☐ I do not have information about the producer
- ☐ I don't remember

Attention Check II

What mode of production was specified for the products you rated?

- ☐ Handmade
- ☐ I do not have information about the production mode
- ☐ I don't remember

Demographics – Age

What is your age?

Demographics – Gender

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Diverse

Demographics – Level of education

What is your highest level of education completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other

Thank you for participating in this survey!

I appreciate your time and effort in helping me with this research.

Your responses have been recorded and will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about this study, please feel free to contact me at a12207339@unet.univie.ac.at

Have a great day!

Appendix B: Declaration of Use of AI Tools

This thesis employed ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI and DeepL, as supplementary tools for language refinement, idea structuring, and enhancing clarity in writing. Additionally, it assisted in formulating SPSS prompts to improve the efficiency of data analysis. The AI not used for generating research results, conducting core analyses, or formulating original arguments. All intellectual contributions, theoretical frameworks, and data interpretations are solely the author's own work.

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