Leveraging AI for Disability Inclusion in the Nigerian Creative Industry

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Abstract

This study interrogates the entrenched diversity deficits and unequal opportunities pervading the Nigerian creative industry, with a particular emphasis on the exclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs). Through a critical decision-making paradigm, this research explains how AI-driven interventions can mitigate the micro-practices of decision-makers that perpetuate inequality, thereby enabling inclusive opportunities for PWDs. A novel conceptual framework is proposed, comprising three interconnected dimensions: (1) AI-mediated decision points that optimise workforce participation and opportunity for PWDs, (2) AI-driven characterisation of individual traits that enhance consideration and perception by decision-makers, and (3) AI-informed decision-maker contexts that attenuate cultural biases favouring able-bodied individuals. Empirically grounded in expert interviews with 20 industry managers across Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja, this research investigates the potential of AI to facilitate inclusive hiring practices, accessible audience participation, and adaptive work arrangements for PWDs. Findings indicate that AI holds significant promise for promoting inclusivity as seen in other nations' creative industries; the Nigerian creative industry however needs strategic interventions to address industry-wide barriers to digital transformation. This study advocates for a paradigmatic shift in understanding diversity and opportunity in the Nigerian creative sector, emphasising the imperative of AI-driven solutions to promote inclusive opportunities for marginalised groups, particularly PWDs.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Disability, Inclusion, Decision-Making, Nigerian Creative Industry.

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Introduction

The creative and cultural industries can be likened to the city of Ibadan, renowned for its openness and inclusivity. The popular saying, "Ibadan gba onile, o tun gba alejo" (Ibadan welcomes both natives and strangers), speaks to the city's welcoming nature, accommodating both locals and newcomers alike. This analogy extends to the creative arts, which, unlike more restrictive disciplines like medicine or engineering, is perceived as inclusive and open to participation from diverse professional backgrounds. However, the question arises: are these arms equally open to people with different ability statuses, particularly persons with disabilities (PWDs)? Furthermore, can artificial intelligence (AI) play a role in making the industry more inclusive?

A theatre manager in Ibadan, South-West Nigeria, captured the prevalent sentiment within the Nigerian creative industry (NCI) regarding AI integration: "AI ke? My brother, we never even finish digitisation, you dey talk AI. Make we start 100% e-ticketing first. Before we run, we go first walk." This scepticism, articulated in Nigerian Pidgin English, translates to: "AI, really? My brother, we are yet to implement significant digitisation, and you are already talking about AI. Let's at least achieve 100% e-ticketing first. We have to walk before we can run." This reflects a widespread belief that the industry is not yet ready for AI, as it grapples with fundamental challenges, such as insufficient digital infrastructure. This sentiment was echoed in interviews conducted with 20 creative organisation managers and owners from Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja, forming the primary source of data for this research.

Interestingly, while some industry leaders publicly champion AI as the future, their private conversations reveal a different story. One interviewee, who had previously declared on television that "the future is AI," later admitted in a more intimate setting that the current infrastructure and readiness of the Nigerian creative industry do not align with AI adoption. His earlier public stance was primarily strategic, aimed at attracting investors by projecting an image of innovation. In reality, the industry is still dealing with basic challenges that must be resolved before AI can be seriously considered.

This ambivalence towards AI reflects a broader issue: the lack of preparedness in the industry to tackle deeper systemic problems,

particularly the inclusion of PWDs. All 20 interviewees highlighted the minimal participation of PWDs, with their involvement often limited to rare occasions. A manager noted,

> *Interviewee: It was easier at the Arts Council. When I was there, we employed dwarfs full-time, about four of them in my time there. Last I checked, they are still there. They get alert (salary) every month. But here, I cannot afford that. In fact, no one is on a payroll in my company. People get paid when there is a job (in production season), and the script determines the cast, and most times, I never have the need to cast a dwarf or a cripple. I need actors who can be King today and slave tomorrow. A normal person can play a cripple. A child can play a dwarf[1].*

Such insights underscore a prevalent mindset within the industry, where disabilities are viewed as inconveniences or merely roles to be performed, rather than lived experiences deserving proper representation. This perception perpetuates the uneven distribution of opportunities in the creative industry. Despite the industry's reputation as a potential driver of economic growth—Nigeria's film industry, for instance, generated an estimated 1.7 trillion Naira in a year, making it the third most valuable film industry in the world—its inclusivity remains in question.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to explore how AI can serve as a tool to address the exclusion of PWDs in the Nigerian creative industry. While AI may still seem like a distant prospect, its potential to reshape industry practices and promote greater inclusivity for marginalised groups deserves closer examination. This research aims to illuminate a pathway forward for an industry that is both hesitant and hopeful about its technological future by focusing on the intersection of AI and disability inclusion.

The development of AI cannot be discussed without revisiting its origins in early computing efforts. Charles Babbage's difference engine, funded by the British government, was a seminal development in general-purpose computing[2]. The term "Artificial

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[1] Interview with a Manager who worked with the State Council in a state North-Central Nigeria, but presently runs their own private theatre company in South West Nigeria.
[2] Chakraborty, N, Yogesh M, Ripon B, and Bhupal B. "Artificial Intelligence: The road ahead for the accessibility of persons with Disability." *Materials Today: Proceedings* 80 (2023), 3757.

Intelligence" was later coined by John McCarthy in 1956, marking the formal inception of the field. Since then, technological advancements have exponentially increased AI's capabilities in data processing, algorithmic sophistication, and computational power[3]. AI aims to emulate human cognitive processes, focusing on rational thought and action[4]. Today, AI can automate tasks traditionally reliant on human cognition, including speech recognition, visual perception, and decision-making processes.

For PWDs in Nigeria, the potential applications of AI are particularly profound. As Almufareh et al. (2023)[5] note, disability often limits everyday communication and independent living, hindering social and cultural participation. However, as society evolves, so does the desire for inclusiveness. AI, with its computational power and adaptability, offers solutions that can substantially enhance the mobility and daily functioning of PWDs, facilitating greater societal integration and autonomy. This research, therefore, seeks to explore how AI can play a transformative role in addressing the barriers faced by PWDs within the Nigerian creative industry.

Conceptualising Disability Discrimination in the Creative Industry as Outcomes of Decision-Making

Some terms must be clarified before analysing how workforce diversity in the Nigerian creative industries (NCI) can be better understood. In this paper, the term "creative industry" refers to economic activities centred around the production of objects, texts, goods, and services that hold creative, symbolic, or aesthetic value[6]. While these industries share common features, it is important to recognise that they are not monolithic. Significant differences exist within and across sectors, particularly in employment practices. For example, the prevalence of long-term employment contracts can vary widely between subsectors such as film production and exhibition[7], impacting the workforce's

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[3] Poole, D. L., and Alan K. M. AI: *Foundations of Computational Agents*. Cambridge University Press, (2010), 15.
[4] Gonzalez, Cleotilde. "Building Human-like Artificial Agents: A General Cognitive Algorithm for Emulating Human Decision-making in Dynamic Environments." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (2023), 5.
[5] Almufareh, Maram Fahaad, Sumaira Kausar, Mamoona Humayun, and Samabia Tehsin. "A conceptual model for inclusive technology: advancing disability inclusion through AI." *Journal of Disability Research* 3, no. 1 (2024), 7.
[6] Banks, M. Craft labour and creative industries. In *Creativity and Cultural Policy*. Routledge, (2014), 3.
[7] Creative Skillset. The Creative Media Workforce Survey 2014 – Summary Report, (May)

diversity and inclusivity. These variations pose challenges in statistically capturing accurate data on workforce diversity, particularly concerning underrepresented groups like persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Most research on workforce diversity in the creative industries has focused on "creatives"—those directly involved in creative production[8]—while often neglecting semi-skilled and unskilled labour (e.g., cinema cleaners, theatre ticket sellers) and non-creative roles such as accountants, human resources personnel, or IT support. In this paper, although we adopt the dominant focus on creatives, we also highlight, where relevant, the diversity of employment contexts and decision-making processes affecting non-creatives and audiences alike.

Two dominant approaches have emerged in studies on diversity and opportunity in the creative industries. The first approach centres on specific worker characteristics—such as gender, ethnicity, class, or disability—and examines the barriers faced by marginalised groups in pursuing careers. For instance, Sang et al.[9] demonstrated how gendered perceptions of commitment and creativity shape the careers of women architects. Similarly, Bhopal (2020) examined whether targeted trainee programs contribute to the inclusion and equitable treatment of individuals from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, finding that they often do not[10]. Another study highlights the double disadvantage faced by disabled workers, who are marginalised due to stereotypes of creative industry workers as able-bodied, compounded by the physical organisation of workspaces[11].

The second approach focuses on structural features of the creative industries, such as the reliance on personal networks and social

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https://creativeskillset.org/assets/0001/0465/Creative_Skillset_Creative_Media_ Workforce_Sur vey_2014. (2015)

[8] Banks, M. Craft labour and creative industries. In *Creativity and Cultural Policy*. Routledge, (2014), 4.

[9] Sang, Katherine JC, Andrew RJ Dainty, and Stephen G. Ison. "Gender in the UK Architectural Profession: (re) producing and Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity." *Work, Employment and Society* 28, no. 2 (2014), 260.

[10] Bhopal, Kalwant. "For whose benefit? Black and Minority Ethnic Training Programmes in Higher Education Institutions in England, UK." *British Educational Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2020), 512.

[11] Randle, K, and Kate H. "Macho, mobile and resilient? How workers with impairments are doubly disabled in project-based film and television work." *Work, employment and society* 31, no. 3 (2017), 448.

capital[12][13], project-based employment, and precarious working conditions[14]. This approach identifies how these structural characteristics exacerbate inequalities, serving as barriers to the participation and advancement of minorities in the workforce. However, while these approaches effectively highlight barriers, they often emphasise the interaction between individual workers and the broader structural conditions of the industry. What remains underexplored are the specific decisions that directly affect workers' access to opportunities—decisions such as admissions into relevant educational programs, hiring or casting, and promotion within the creative industry. Dean[15] notes that despite the industry's self-perception as driven by individual choices, the processes behind these decisions remain under-researched.

To gain a deeper understanding of how these decisions are made, who makes them, and the contexts in which they occur, it is necessary to analyse decision-making processes within the creative industry. Since much of the work in this sector is unpaid or project-based, the scope of "employment" in this paper extends beyond paid positions to include participants from rehearsal to production, regardless of their contractual context. The concept of "promotion" is similarly expanded, recognising that advancements in the industry often come not through traditional hierarchical progression but through increased artistic or creative recognition, greater freedom, responsibility, and collaboration with more reputable partners[16].

Foregrounding these decision-making processes allows this study to offer a more nuanced understanding of how diversity and opportunity in the NCI can be improved, particularly through the potential of AI to enhance inclusion. To explore the various influences shaping decision outcomes in the NCI, we propose shifting the analytical focus from collective, aggregate-level studies to the examination of specific

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[12] Fahmi, F. "Business Networks, Social Capital and the Economic Performance of Creative and Cultural Industries: The Case of Indonesia." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 60, no. 3 (2019), 371.

[13] Chuluunbaatar, E, Ding-Bang L, and Shiann-Far K. "The role of cluster and social capital in cultural and creative industries development." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 109 (2014), 556.

[14] Comunian, R, and Lauren E. "Creative and cultural work without filters: Covid-19 and exposed precarity in the creative economy." *Cultural Trends* 29, no. 2 (2020): 112.

[15] Dean, D. "No human resource is an island: Gendered, racialized access to work as a performer." Gender, Work & Organization 15, no. 2 (2008), 168.

[16] Jones, C. "Frank Lloyd Wright's artistic reputation: The role of networks and creativity." In *Careers in Creative Industries*, pp. 151-162. Routledge, (2011), 152.

decisions that impact PWDs. This approach synthesises existing research on work, employment, and careers in the NCI, focusing on critical decision points, such as admission into higher education, workforce participation, and promotion.

Decisions in the creative industry can be analysed across three dimensions as Eikhof[17] categorises: (1) decision points, which are moments when concrete decisions about individual workers influence their career opportunities; (2) individuals as objects of decision-making, examining the factors that determine their likelihood of being considered in specific decision processes; and (3) decision-makers and their embedded structural contexts, including organisational, cultural, and industry-specific factors. By shifting the focus to these decision-making dynamics, and considering how AI can intervene, we can gain a clearer understanding of how decisions affecting PWDs are made at various stages of career development in the NCI.

While it is true that cultural workers, including PWDs, make decisions that influence their own participation and advancement, this analysis conceptualises them as the objects of decisions made by others. This approach reveals the structural constraints that shape workers' agency, countering the overly optimistic view of unrestricted career opportunities often presented in creative industry literature. Through this lens, the potential for AI to mediate more inclusive decision-making processes comes into sharper focus.

AI-Driven Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria's Creative Industries

This sub-section explores how AI technologies can be leveraged to enhance the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria's Creative Industry (NCI). This focus on the decision points that shape workforce participation and advancement allows an analysis of the use of AI as a tool for greater diversity and opportunity within the NCI. This approach considers key decision-making points, PWDs as objects of decision-making, and the contextual role of decision-makers within these processes.

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[17] Eikhof, D. R. (2017) Analysing decisions on diversity and opportunity in the cultural and creative industries: a new framework. Organization, 24(3), pp. 292.

Decision Points in AI-Augmented Inclusion

The following excerpt from an interview with a Nigerian film director illustrates the prevailing mindset in the Nigerian creative industry (NCI) regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs):

> *Interviewee: Why have I used fewer disabled actors? See, the truth is, they don't come for auditions. Na from audition we dey pick cast (we cast from auditions). But… let's be honest, what do I do with a blind actor? How do I direct a deaf actor? I don't understand sign language. I have other projects to attend to. It would take too much time attending to all these things. It's not practical.*
>
> *Interviewer: But Lagbaja [an actor that is not visually impaired] went blind at some point in [name redacted] film.*
>
> *Interviewee: This is show business, my brother. Acting blind is different from being blind. I can't even imagine it. I would have to start carrying my main actor around the location? God abeg o! (This is show business. Acting blind is different from being blind. I can't imagine carrying my main actor around the set. God forbid!)[18]*

While this may sound harsh, it highlights the pervasive barriers to inclusion within the NCI. Key decision points that critically impact opportunities for PWDs include recruitment, promotion, and admission into educational programs that serve as entry points into the creative field. At these junctures, individuals with disabilities are often excluded due to logistical concerns or misconceptions about their capabilities. Here, AI presents a significant opportunity to reduce these barriers by facilitating a more inclusive and equitable process. For instance, AI can support "blind" recruitment practices where candidates' identities are anonymised, reducing the likelihood of discrimination based on physical ability. Moreover, AI-powered algorithms can match PWDs to suitable roles or projects, addressing the oversupply of non-disabled applicants typical in the NCI[19]. Integrating AI tools into

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[18] Interview with a film producer and director in Lagos.
[19] Salami, Charles. G. E. "Youth unemployment in Nigeria: A time for creative intervention." *International Journal of Business and Marketing Management* 1, no. 2 (2013): 21.

decision-making processes allows industries to reduce biases—whether implicit or explicit—that typically hinder PWD inclusion. AI's capacity to provide data-driven insights can further help recognise the diverse skills PWDs bring to the table, thereby enhancing their visibility and participation within the industry.

The Role of AI in Supporting PWD Workforce Participation

Given the project-based and often short-term nature of work in the NCI, AI's ability to process large datasets quickly can create a more equitable and efficient system for hiring and workforce participation. The data gathered for this study indicates that Nigerian PWDs are frequently overlooked due to assumptions about their limitations within traditional employment systems. AI, however, can shift this narrative by focusing on candidates' skills and outputs rather than their physical attributes. For instance, automated systems could evaluate portfolios or creative work to assess suitability for roles, thereby reducing the subjective biases that may otherwise exclude PWDs.

This is particularly relevant in the gig economy, where decisions about casting or project teams are made quickly. However, research shows that people with disabilities often struggle to access gig work due to a lack of necessary training, work experience, or financial resources. Moreover, gig platforms are not always fully accessible to PWDs, and managing administrative tasks related to gig work presents additional challenges[20].

AI can help address these issues by improving the accessibility of gig platforms through technologies like voice recognition, natural language processing, and adaptive interfaces. These features can create more user-friendly environments for PWDs, enabling them to navigate gig platforms more easily. AI tools can even offer personalised support tailored to the specific needs of gig workers with disabilities. For instance, AI can suggest jobs that align with a worker's skills, preferences, and accessibility requirements, ensuring that PWDs can find opportunities suited to their capabilities.

Although there is no current example of such AI applications in the NCI, it is reasonable to argue that AI could facilitate customised training programs using adaptive learning technologies, helping PWDs acquire the necessary skills for gig work without facing the barriers

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[20] Harpur, Paul, and Peter Blanck. "Gig workers with Disabilities: Opportunities, Challenges, and Regulatory Response." *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 30(4), (2020), 511-514.

associated with traditional training environments. Additionally, AI can automate administrative processes like record-keeping, invoicing, and tax management, relieving PWDs of these burdens and allowing them to focus on their creative work. AI can also be employed to analyse gig work data, identifying patterns of discrimination or bias in hiring practices. The insights gained from such analysis can help companies develop more equitable recruitment strategies, ensuring that PWDs are treated fairly in the gig economy and that inclusion becomes a systemic rather than an individual effort.

AI's Role in Addressing Unpaid Work and Gatekeeping

One significant barrier to PWD inclusion in the Nigerian Creative Industry is the widespread reliance on unpaid work as a pathway to professional opportunities. As highlighted by an interviewee:

> *Go to Mushin, you will see their union. Then there's LASODA. I know them well. See, it's not easy working with them o, especially in this Lagos. …Normal person will work for free because the more you appear on screen, the more your chances. You see dem [redacted for offensiveness], if you tell them to work for free, government will catch you![21]*

This illustrates how unpaid internships or "learning by watching" schemes are typically inaccessible to PWDs due to their inability to endure extended periods of unpaid labour[22]. Ironically, some studies suggest that PWDs often engage in these unpaid roles[23] . According to Siebert and Wilson, people are drawn to unpaid labour in the hopes of acquiring social capital, building connections, and securing future employment, particularly when they lack financial or familial support. Coleman's theory of social capital aligns with this, positing that relationships and networks are vital for career access.

Many participants view unpaid work as a necessary step in gaining industry experience and skills that makes a person more employable. However, this expectation excludes those who just cannot afford to work for free - the underprivileged, consequently reinforcing social

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[21] Interview with a film producer and director based in Lagos.

[22] Siebert, Sabina, and Fiona Wilson. "All work and no pay: consequences of unpaid work in the creative industries." *Work, Employment and Society* 27, no. 4 (2013), 712.

[23] Halimatussadiah, Alin, Maria Agriva, and Chaikal Nuryakin. "Persons with disabilities (PWD) and labor force in Indonesia: A preliminary study." *Development* 17, no. 18 (2015), 14.

inequality and limiting diversity. The exploitative nature of unpaid labour is clear, as these people are often treated as cheap labour with no guarantee of future employment. Research shows that only 45% of individuals engaging in unpaid work transition to paid employment, highlighting the uncertainty of this practice[24]. Moreover, unpaid work devalues paid positions and creates a competitive, exploitative environment, eroding trust among employees.

AI can help mitigate these challenges by developing AI-powered networking platforms that match PWDs with mentors or peers based on shared interests and abilities. AI's scalability allows for personalised matches, thereby creating opportunities for relationships that might otherwise be inaccessible to PWDs. Moreover, AI can connect PWDs with paid opportunities or grants designed for disability inclusion, addressing legal quotas such as those outlined in the Nigerian Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, which mandates that 5% of every workplace be comprised of PWDs. AI-powered monitoring systems can also track work hours and contributions to ensure fair treatment, flagging exploitative practices where necessary. Additionally, AI could enhance transparency in the allocation of unpaid roles, ensuring that PWDs are not systematically excluded from key learning experiences that lead to career advancement.

AI-Supported Career Advancement for PWDs

AI-driven systems hold significant potential for promoting the career advancement of PWDs within the NCI by making promotion processes more transparent and accessible. AI can help standardise criteria for promotions, identifying patterns in advancement that may have previously been obscured by biased decision-making processes. AI tools could track performance metrics, skills acquisition, and creative output, creating a merit-based system where promotions are based on capability, not physical ability. For example, AI could help an artist with limited mobility create digital art or manipulate images more easily.

In the context of the creative industry, career advancement often involves collaborations with more established partners or access to higher-quality resources. AI can facilitate these connections, creating pathways for remote and flexible work environments that bypass the

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[24] Siebert, Sabina, and Fiona Wilson. "All work and no pay: consequences of unpaid work in the creative industries." *Work, Employment and Society* 27, no. 4 (2013), 715.

physical and geographical barriers often faced by PWDs. AI-driven platforms could help PWDs find collaborators, mentors, or fellow artists, thereby creating a broader professional network. Virtual spaces and online communities powered by AI could further break down geographical limitations, providing greater access to creative networks. Given the hierarchical structure of the NCI, AI's capacity to evaluate and rank creative contributions could prevent PWDs from being confined to lower-ranking roles. The implication of this is that AI could provide new opportunities for PWDs to ascend into higher-ranking positions by focusing on creative input and performance rather than social networks or physical presence at industry events.

AI in Admission to Higher Education and Creative Training

AI also holds the potential to transform the admission processes for PWDs in creative educational programs, a critical step toward participation in the NCI. Many PWDs face barriers to higher education due to inaccessible campuses or discriminatory admission practices. A survey conducted for this research revealed that most creative art facilities in Nigeria remain largely inaccessible to PWDs. In one institution, despite being designed for PWDs, over 90% of students in its Creative Arts department had no disabilities at all. This highlights the systemic barriers PWDs face.

AI could be employed to standardise admission processes, reduce biases, and combat discriminatory beliefs that prevent PWDs from accessing education. For example, AI-driven assessment tools could evaluate prospective students based on their creative abilities rather than their physical capacities. In an interview, one PWD denied admission to study Dramatic Arts was told: *"A blind person cannot do what they do in Dramatic Arts, go to English jeje, there are devices that can help you read."*[25] This exemplifies the prejudices PWDs often encounter, which AI can help overcome by focusing on talent and creative output.

AI-driven tools could also enable inclusive learning environments by offering personalised learning plans tailored to the needs of PWDs. Adaptive technologies could help PWDs overcome traditional educational challenges, allowing them to fully engage in the training necessary for success in the NCI. If allowed to address these barriers,

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[25] Interview with a PWD with visual impairment. He tried to study Theatre in a University in the North Central and later Dramatic Arts in a University in the South West, but he was denied admission on the grounds of his ability status. He later studied English at the University in South West, Nigeria.

AI has the potential to make creative education more inclusive, ultimately leading to greater participation of PWDs in the workforce.

Individuals as Objects of Decision Making: AI and the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Nigerian Creative Industry

Research indicates that individuals from marginalised or working-class backgrounds, including PWDs, often face barriers to accessing the creative industry due to limited financial resources and cultural capital[26]. Friedman and Laurison describe this as the "class ceiling," a set of invisible economic, social, and cultural barriers that hinder career advancement for those from non-elite backgrounds[27]. Similarly, studies on educational achievements in Nigeria highlight a significant wealth gap in areas like literacy and numeracy[28]. In this context, AI tools—such as virtual mentoring platforms and online training modules—offer potential to democratise access to the industry by providing PWDs with opportunities to acquire skills and build networks remotely. This reduces the impact of financial and geographical constraints that typically limit their participation.

AI also offers opportunities to create more equitable decision-making processes, particularly in admissions and recruitment. The proliferation of art schools and creative institutions, especially film schools, in Nigeria, where internships often come at a cost higher than tuition at public universities, disproportionately disadvantages marginalised groups, including PWDs. A survey conducted by the researcher across 23 privately owned creative organisations in Lagos, Ibadan, and Osogbo revealed a lack of accessibility for PWDs and an absence of permanently employed disabled workers. AI-driven systems can address such exclusion by analysing decision-making patterns to identify biases and increasing transparency in selection processes. The reliance on personal networks, which often favours those with privileged backgrounds, and provides a more inclusive entry point for PWDs can be mitigated by AI through standardising assessments based on objective criteria, such as creative output.

Once in the workforce, AI can further facilitate the career progression of PWDs by offering personalised professional development

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[26] Belfiore, Eleonora. "Whose cultural value? Representation, power and creative industries." *International journal of cultural policy* 26, no. 3 (2020), 388.
[27] Friedman, Sam, and Laurison Daniel. *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged.* Bristol: Policy Press, 2019, 236.
[28] Onwuameze, Nkechi Catherine. "Educational opportunity and inequality in Nigeria: assessing social background, gender and regional effects." PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) thesis, University of Iowa, 2013, 97.

recommendations and enhancing access to training opportunities. AI's ability to handle large datasets allows it to identify gaps in diversity, track progress toward inclusion goals, and suggest strategies to improve PWD representation in creative industries. This can counter traditional barriers where social capital dominates career advancement, offering PWDs a more merit-based pathway to success.

PWDs face additional challenges in the creative industries due to entrenched stereotypes and able-bodied norms. The dominant image of a successful creative worker is often shaped by middle or upper-class and able-bodied ideals, limiting the opportunities for PWDs to advance. AI-powered tools can empower PWDs to overcome these barriers by providing assistive technologies that enable them to express their creative visions more fully. These tools can facilitate the production of creative work that might otherwise be challenging, allowing PWDs to reshape industry standards and challenge exclusionary norms. AI tools like the ones built in Canva, Adobe Photoshop, and AI-enabled mobile devices such as the Samsung S series are reshaping the creative process. These technologies can help redefine the idealised image of a creative worker, shifting the focus away from able-bodied norms and enabling PWDs to present a compelling creative persona.

Decision Makers and Bias

We are products of our worldviews. In the Yoruba tradition, for example, it is believed, as posited in the Yoruba creation myth, that the deity Obatala, who was charged with creating every human being, only created PWDs when he got drunk. Consequently, PWDs are sometimes viewed as creations of error. Similarly, in the Bible, disability is often depicted as a sin or a curse needing remedy[29]. Decision-makers often operate within these cultural frameworks that shape their perceptions of disability. Such worldviews can inform biases that disadvantage PWDs in the creative industry. Decision-makers may unconsciously favour candidates who align with able-bodied norms, reinforcing the exclusion of PWDs from opportunities.

This tendency is exacerbated by 'homophily,' the inclination of decision-makers to favour individuals who resemble themselves. In an industry dominated by able-bodied professionals, this can result in the

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[29] Ìbírónkẹ́, Shalom, Iwuh, John, Uwadinma-Idemudia, Eunice. "Bodies as Temples: Exploring Disability Narratives in the Bible and Ola Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead" *Religion and the Arts* 28, no. 4 (2024): 401.

systematic marginalisation of PWDs. Furthermore, many decision-makers lack the training or resources to accommodate diverse needs, leading to inequitable access to roles and career advancement for PWDs. AI-driven tools can mitigate the influence of these biases by introducing more objective and inclusive decision-making processes. AI algorithms can evaluate creative portfolios and resumes without considering factors like physical ability, focusing solely on merit and creative output. This shift from subjective assessment to data-driven evaluation ensures that PWDs are judged on their accomplishments rather than perceived limitations. This can be achieved in recruitment. AI can further reduce bias by anonymising applications during the initial stages of the hiring process. Removing identifying information such as names, gender, or physical descriptions allows AI to prevent unconscious bias from influencing decision-makers, thereby promoting a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

Beyond recruitment, AI can also provide insights into how organisations can better accommodate PWDs. AI-driven accessibility solutions, such as adaptive software or virtual work environments, can be integrated into creative workspaces to enhance inclusivity. Additionally, AI can analyse workplace practices to identify areas lacking accommodations, providing decision-makers with data-backed recommendations for improving accessibility. AI can also play a crucial role in training decision-makers themselves. AI-powered training modules can offer continuous education on diversity and inclusion, addressing cultural biases specific to the Nigerian context. These tools can help decision-makers recognise and overcome biases, creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for PWDs in the creative industry.

Discussion

The unequal distribution of workforce opportunities to participate and advancement in the Nigerian Creative Industries (NCI) remains a critical challenge, particularly for PWDs. Systemic barriers, entrenched in cultural norms, social networks, and biased decision-making processes, impede access to opportunities for marginalised groups. This paper argued that understanding and addressing decision-making processes within the NCI is essential for mitigating these inequalities. Integrating AI into decision-making structures can help dismantle these barriers and promote a more inclusive environment.
Opportunities in the NCI are inequitably distributed, with disabled people facing persistent challenges that limit their participation and advancement. These challenges are often perpetuated by ingrained biases and a lack of formal structures that prioritise diversity. Despite

the growth of the NCI, groups such as disabled workers encounter systemic barriers, including limited access to educational and professional resources, workplace accommodations, and advancement opportunities. AI can address these issues by creating data-driven frameworks that focus on merit and capabilities rather than physical attributes. AI can automate aspects of recruitment and talent management, reducing the likelihood of personal biases influencing evaluations and ensuring fair consideration of diverse candidates.

The decision-making processes in the NCI play a crucial role in shaping workforce participation. Decision-makers in hiring, promotion, and educational contexts hold significant power over who gains access to opportunities. The biases of these individuals, whether conscious or unconscious, often result in the exclusion of underrepresented groups, particularly those with disabilities. AI can play a change-maker role by offering impartial analysis in traditionally subjective areas such as casting. Machine learning algorithms can analyse data on skills, experience, and suitability for specific roles, reducing human biases that might otherwise overlook talented individuals.

AI also has the potential to revolutionise casting processes by objectively evaluating actors or even dancers based on skill, experience, and suitability for specific roles. As it processes large datasets quickly, AI saves time and resources while reducing the influence of personal biases. For example, AI can analyse audition videos, movement quality, and choreographic skills of dancers, ensuring that talent is selected based on merit, irrespective of disability. Algorithms can also consider factors such as ethnicity, gender, and unique movement styles, promoting diversity in casting decisions.

Several AI tools already demonstrate this potential. For instance, TalentWatch, developed by Casting Networks, uses machine learning to predict an actor's success based on audition data. Warner Bros. used AI to cast the lead role in the film *Final Frequency*, where the technology evaluated thousands of actors to find the best fit. While AI can aid in identifying talent, it is crucial to program these systems without bias. Moreover, AI cannot replace the intuition, context, and artistic vision that human casting directors bring to the process, which remain essential for creativity and artistic judgment.

Cultural norms and personal worldviews often shape decision-making in the NCI, leading to the exclusion of individuals who do not conform

to traditional expectations. By focusing on data rather than subjective interpretations, AI-driven systems can serve as impartial intermediaries. Anonymising candidate data during early evaluations helps AI ensure that decisions are made based on merit rather than physical appearance or disability, thus challenging entrenched biases. This shift away from preconceived notions demonstrates that success in the creative industries is not contingent on physical ability but on talent and skill.

Social capital, defined as the networks and insider knowledge that grant access to opportunities, is a significant factor in career advancement within the NCI. Marginalised people, especially those with disabilities, often lack access to these networks, exacerbating exclusionary practices. AI can help level the playing field by offering alternative avenues for recognition and networking. AI-driven platforms can connect diverse talent with industry professionals, providing insights into opportunities, training, and mentorship that disabled individuals might otherwise be excluded from. This democratisation of access helps dismantle the social barriers that hinder disabled individuals in the NCI.

Structural changes within the NCI are essential to effectively promote diversity and inclusion. Decision-making processes that reinforce inequality must be re-evaluated, and organisations should implement reforms that foster equity. AI offers a pathway for such structural changes by embedding unbiased evaluation mechanisms into recruitment and advancement processes. AI tools can also help identify areas where systemic bias exists and recommends strategies for eliminating these barriers. If AI enables a more transparent and inclusive decision-making process in the NCI, it can reshape the workforce composition in the NCI.

This paper has addressed a critical gap in the literature by exploring how decision-making processes within the NCI influence the participation of marginalised groups, particularly disabled individuals. While much research focuses on cultural and societal barriers, less attention has been given to the role of organisational decision-making in perpetuating these challenges. This study emphasises the importance of investigating how AI can reshape decision-making processes to promote diversity. Future research should explore the intersection of AI, decision-making, and diversity in greater detail to provide more granular insights into how technology can create a more equitable creative landscape.

Conclusion

The project-based nature of the Nigerian Creative Industry (NCI), often referred to as the gig economy, has long been recognised as a barrier to equitable workforce participation, particularly for persons with disabilities (PWDs). These individuals frequently lack the social capital, networks, and financial resources needed to navigate the industry's unstable income streams and demanding work conditions. This paper has explored how decision-making processes within the NCI shape opportunities for workforce participation and advancement, with particular attention to intersecting factors such as disability, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. While mentoring and networking initiatives have been proposed to bridge social capital gaps, they often fail by reinforcing existing biases rather than addressing the systemic and structural barriers that hinder equitable inclusion. Genuine progress toward diversity and inclusion in the NCI requires a re-evaluation of organisational decision-making practices, alongside broader societal and policy reforms. AI technologies, as discussed, offer a promising avenue for addressing these challenges. By introducing data-driven, objective evaluation processes that prioritise merit, AI can help mitigate bias and disrupt stereotypes that perpetuate exclusionary practices. However, achieving meaningful change will be a gradual and complex process due to the deep-rooted cultural norms and industry practices that sustain inequality. While legal and policy interventions are essential first steps, long-term transformation will require sustained efforts from industry leaders, policymakers, and educational institutions. The integration of AI in recruitment, promotion, and educational tools presents significant potential for improving the inclusion of PWDs in the NCI. By addressing biases in decision-making processes, AI can help dismantle the structural barriers that have historically limited the participation of PWDs and other marginalised groups.

AI-driven solutions can enhance transparency, fairness, and accessibility within the NCI, fostering a more diverse and equitable creative industry. With the right technological and policy interventions, the NCI can evolve into a space where persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups, are given the opportunity to fully realise their potential and contribute meaningfully to the industry's success. Through these efforts, the NCI can become a more inclusive and dynamic environment that embraces the talents of all individuals, regardless of ability.