Influencers with physical disabilities on *Instagram*: Features, visibility and business collaboration

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Abstract

In the digital world, social media have become important for people with disabilities in terms of communication and visibility. They have also become the ideal place for activism, as they allow the self-representation of disability by the content creators themselves. This social group, traditionally segregated and discriminated against, has seen in these platforms a tool to promote social inclusion and confront the dominant discourse. This paper explores the social media *Instagram* as a space for communication and visibility of instagrammers with disabilities from Europe and Latin America. The main objective of the research is to analyse the publications of Spanish-speaking influencers with physical disabilities to establish if there are similar characteristics or if there are significant differences in the uses they make of *Instagram*'s functions and how disability is represented in their profiles. Through quantitative, descriptive, and statistical research, a content analysis was carried out of 400 publications corresponding to 10 *Instagram* profiles, all of them of microinfluencers and macroinfluencers with physical disabilities who had different types of business collaborations. The results show that disability is visible in 85% of the publications, whether in the photos or videos shared, in the text of the post, hashtags or emoticons, although it predominates to a greater extent in audiovisual content. In advertising, mentions or tags of brands stand out, much more than paid collaboration, which appears as a minority compared to other forms of promotion. The degree of influence is decisive for interactions in the form of likes and views per video or reels. Finally, the use of hashtags on inclusion and social awareness reinforces the importance of these platforms for the social integration of people with disabilities.

Keywords

Social media; Social networks; *Instagram*; instagrammers; Influencers; Physical Disability; People with disabilities; Accessibility; Inclusion; Content analysis; Brands; Influencer marketing.

1. Introduction

Online social platforms are an ideal space for virtual contact between people and groups with similar habits and interests. **Ibáñez-Cubillas**, **Díaz-Martín**, and **Pérez-Torregrosa** (2017) state that social networks provide the public with a sense of closeness that breaks down barriers of idiosyncrasy, culture, or language, enhancing inherent human socialization. **Ladogina** *et al*. (2020) recognize that social networks such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, or *TikTok* incorporate a dynamism in communication processes that immerse the user in new realities. With the advent of these virtualities, forms of consumption have changed from an analog to a digital model of practice and behavior, transforming user attitudes (**González-Carrión**; **Aguaded**, 2020). In this regard, **Hung** *et al*. (2019) speak of a world 2.0 with increasingly heterogeneous demands, and to which individual and industrial content creators must respond with acumen.

This study focuses specifically on the social network *Instagram*, which is noteworthy for its ability to establish interactions and communities compared with other platforms (**Arora** *et al*., 2019; **Casaló**; **Flavián**; **Ibáñez-Sánchez**, 2020). This has encouraged its use by influencers and companies that collaborate to carry out advertising and marketing campaigns through social networks.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the posts of Spanish-speaking influencers with physical disabilities to establish whether they exhibit similar characteristics or significant differences in how they use the features of *Instagram* and how disability is represented on their profiles.

This study is important because research on disability and media literacy is scarce and does not analyze the accessibility and use of ICTs by the collective, which implies a lack of visibility and representation of people with disabilities (**Bonilla-Del-Río**; **Valor-Rodríguez**; **García-Ruiz**, 2018; **Prefasi** *et al*., 2010). Therefore, there is a need for more studies that focus on a group that is usually ignored in the research carried out in this area (**Gutiérrez-Recacha**; **Martorell-Cafranga**, 2011; **Samaniego** *et al*., 2012).

Social networks such as *Instagram* allow content creators with disabilities to show their interests, participate in the digital environment, and interact with their audience, which facilitates a decrease in barriers and stereotypes and favors their collective empowerment.

Likewise, a key feature that differentiates influencers is the monetization of their social media profiles through marketing collaborations with companies (**Kay**; **Mulcahy**; **Parkinson**, 2020). These collaborations can occur directly with monetary compensation as well as indirectly through free products, which they must promote or give away (**Hwang**; **Jeong**, 2016). This study has focused on the analysis of *Instagram* profiles that, in addition to being placed on the scale of micro- or macro-influencers, have had direct or indirect collaborations and that therefore monetize their profile.

This issue is considered an essential condition for the study because, as previous works have shown (**Foster**; **Pettinicchio**, 2021), social networks allow for an approach and visibility of disability that promote the value of diversity and foster social inclusion. On the basis of this premise, this study focuses on profiles that have not only achieved this visibility on *Instagram*, but also captured the attention of brands and even established collaborations with them. At the same time, this reinforces the consideration that the demand for diversity in social networks is not just an altruistic manifestation of profiles of influencers with disabilities, but that it is taken into account by the business sphere and publicly manifested on the social network in the form of collaboration.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Social networks and visibility of disability

The recognition of diversity and social inclusion are fundamental issues on which today's democracies are based. In the case of people with disabilities who are traditionally and historically discriminated against, the objectives of full participation and social inclusion include representation in and accessibility to communicative environments of all kinds as a necessary condition for people with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms (*UN*, 2006).

Nowadays, social networks have become part of the communicative environment and have become a space that favors virtual contact between people and groups with similar habits and interests. Social relations with the peer group and the search for autonomy and freedom are established as priorities in which leisure acquires a fundamental role (**Codina**; **Pestana**; **Stebbins**, 2017). Along these lines, among the most prominent reasons for the use of social networks by people with disabilities are communication with friends and entertainment (**Bonilla-del-Río**; **Sánchez-Calero**, 2022).

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These platforms encourage users to produce and share their own content, as well as to interact with and disseminate the content of others (**Aguaded**; **Jaramillo-Dent**; **Delgado-Ponce**, 2021), which represents a real transformation of the communicative processes. In this way, users become prosumers, constructing their identities in the network and sharing interests that highlight their presence and protagonism through self-representation and self-exhibition (**Pérez-Daza**, 2021).

Social networks, as highlighted by **Durante** (2011), allow users the possibility of constructing, at least in part, their personal identity in a way that is different from what happens in physical reality. Therefore, the information that is transmitted and shared may be influenced, among other factors, by the user's self-confidence and self-concept, by the decision they make concerning the spheres of their life they wish to share, by the importance they give to privacy, or by the search for popularity (**Durante**, 2011). In this sense, social networks offer the opportunity for people with disabilities to control how and when they disclose information about their disability on these digital platforms, since sometimes the stigma associated with physical disability generates barriers for this group in the consolidation of meaningful friendships (**Furr**; **Carreiro**; **McArthur**, 2017).

According to **Bassey** *et al*. (2021), social networks foster social contact of the collective and promote visibility and social awareness of disability, as well as communication, exchange, and activism (**Ellis**; **Kent**, 2016). These platforms enable people with disabilities to gain positive experiences in terms of social identity and self-esteem development, entertainment, friendship, and enjoyment (**Caton**; **Chapman**, 2016).

In fact, digital inclusion can become the engine that leads to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, and the digital economy and entrepreneurship, through content creation, present opportunities for empowerment (**Johnson**, 2019).

Social networks give activists belonging to groups at risk of social exclusion multiple opportunities for the construction of alternative narratives that challenge the dominant discourse and generate new representations (**Moors**, 2019; **Bitman**, 2021). These resources therefore enable people with disabilities to foster their digital participation, social inclusion (**Bayor** *et al*., 2018), and community integration (**Snethen**; **Zook**, 2016). One of the goals of content creators with disabilities is thus to influence legislators and journalists (**Trevisan**, 2017).

However, there are studies that talk about how, despite their potential, social networks have proven to be inaccessible and have discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities (**Ellis**; **Kent**, 2016). These platforms make it so that disability activists must work harder to achieve their goals (**Bitman**, 2021). This is because they have to become a profitable niche market in the economic dynamics of the social networks themselves to promote their accessibility, visibility, and impact, which other groups achieve more easily.

2.2. Physical disability

Currently, approximately 15% of the population worldwide has some type of disability (*World Health Organization*, 2021), a figure that is increasing mainly owing to aging populations and the prevalence of chronic ailments.

According to the *World Health Organization* (2001), the term disability "encompasses impairments, activity limitations, or participation restrictions", and is a "complex phenomenon that reflects an interaction between the characteristics of the human organism and the characteristics of the society in which it lives" ["*fenómeno complejo que refleja una interacción entre las características del organismo humano y las características de la sociedad en la que vive*"] (**Hermida-Ayala**; **Mateos-Borregón**; **Olalla-Vizcaino**, 2010).

On the basis of *Royal Decree 1971/1999* of December 23, 1999, regarding the procedure for the recognition, declaration, and qualification of the degree of disability, the Spanish *State Representative Platform of Persons with Physical Disabilities* (*Predif*, n/d) proposes a classification of disabilities into three large groups: (1) Physical disabilities (related to the body, limbs, and organs in general), (2) sensory disabilities (originating in the visual or auditory system and possibly affecting the throat and language-related structures), and (3) psychic disabilities (related to intellectual and mental health disabilities).

Physical disability is that which affects the locomotor system, especially the limbs, resulting in an impairment caused by the physical condition of the person that prevents them from moving with full functionality of their motor system in a permanent and irreversible manner (*Observatori de la Discapacitat Física*, n.d.). The majority of people with physical disabilities (around 80%) acquire the disability after birth, either due to common conditions or an accident, while a smaller percentage of them become disabled during pregnancy. This disability can be reflected by the decrease or lack of coordination of movement from disorders in muscle tone or balance (*Predif*, n/d).

In their relationship with social networks, several studies show the motivation of people with physical or motor disabilities, especially young people, to expand their personal relationships and improve their social skills, which is also connected to the social inclusion potential of these platforms (**Suriá-Martínez**, 2015). In fact, among the various types of disability, it is people with motor disabilities who show the highest perception of support in social networks (**Suriá-Martínez**, 2017) and their presence and representation compared with other types of disability is emphasized (**Shpigelman**; **Gill**, 2014). Finally, studies such as those by **Magee** (2012) highlight how people with severe physical or motor disabilities who need personal assistance to use social networks find the privacy of their communications limited, hence the importance of the accessibility of these platforms and the implementation of a design for all people.

2.3. *Instagram*, types of influencers, and monetization

This study focuses on the social network *Instagram*, which stands out for building leadership profiles, for its inherently visual nature, and for its ability to convey trends (**Casaló**; **Flavián**; **Ibáñez-Sánchez**, 2020). Visual impression and content expansion, the primordial basis of *Instagram*, reveal the population's remarkable interest at a global level in storytelling through imagery (**Hernández**; **Hernández**, 2018).

According to **Rojas-Torrijos** and **Panal-Prior** (2017), *Instagram* has features shared with other platforms such as *Facebook*, as well as some of its own. These include the hashtag, which groups content by tags and themes and facilitates the search for topics, users, and interactions such as likes or comments, which allow for feedback and opinions from followers to be counted on the basis of the interest aroused by the content shared. Another feature is the text that accompanies the audiovisual content, which allows users to describe their post or provide the information they consider appropriate. Since its creation, the features of *Instagram*'s have been evolving, including filters, emojis, mentions, and new formats such as stories, videos, or reels, and even the "paid collaboration" features, which promotes collaboration between brands and content creators, among others.

Similarly, their ability to establish interactions and communities (**Casaló**; **Flavián**; **Ibáñez-Sánchez**, 2020) has encouraged their use in influencer marketing.

Craig (2019) believes that content creators are motivated by an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to generate a brand of their own. These are ordinary users who accumulate a "relatively large" number of followers with whom they share personal stories, and they end up monetizing their content by integrating advertising and opinions (**Abidin**, 2016). For **Ki** and **Kim** (2019), influencers aim to strengthen relationships between the captive communities that follow them and the companies or brands that hire them. However, this reality does not always translate into contracts that seek to close sales, but also to the improvement or modification of the image of a brand, organization, product, or service (**Mateus**; **León**; **Núñez-Alberca**, 2022).

Influencers are figures with great fame and power (**Falla-Rubio**, 2019) who gain followers and reputation on the basis of their personality, which characterizes them in their social networks. The power of recommendation and influence on social networks is very effective, and this fact has not gone unnoticed by brands and companies (**Scolari**, 2007).

In a globalized world, being able to hide ulterior motives without being discovered is highly unlikely. Therefore, companies must exercise extreme caution when combining their advertising and marketing interests with users' own interests, especially if social networks come into play, always taking care not to cross the limits set by legality and ethics (**Castelló-Martínez**; **Del-Pino**, 2015). However, the design of influencer marketing actions must be understood as part of the brand's integral communication strategy in an era in which advertising has to be transmedia and multidisciplinary (**Jenkins**; **Ford**; **Green**, 2015).

Undoubtedly, influencers are characterized by accumulating a large, albeit variable, number of followers (**Casaló**; **Flavián**; **Ibáñez-Sánchez**, 2020; **Gottbrecht**, 2016). However, studies such as those by **Djafarova** and **Rushworth** (2017) have shown how *Instagram* users tend to trust influencers with a modest number of followers more than those with a larger number. In fact, recent work proposes that the number of followers can even reduce follower engagement (**Tafesse**; **Wood**, 2021). According to **Alassani** and **Göretz** (2019), the categories of influencers can be classified as follows:

1. *Mega-influencer:* Those considered to be celebrities; that is, people recognized for their talent such as artists and actors, among others, and who also appear in different media. These influencers have 1,000,000 or more followers.

2. *Macro-influencer*: These are experts, such as journalists, bloggers, and professionals. Their community ranges from 100,000 to 999,999 followers.

3. *Micro-influencer*: They are ordinary consumers whose influence is based on experience with brands and audiences and who have, on average, between 1,000 and 99,999 followers. The influencers in this group are also referred to as micro-celebrities (**Marwick**, 2015).

4. *Nano-influencer*: This group has a maximum number of 1,000 followers, so their reach is limited, although the level of engagement with their audience is high.

This hierarchy is taken into account when monetizing the profiles and content shared by influencers, who have become the opinion leaders of the twenty-first century, with commercial brands relying on them to launch their messages (**Rodrigo-Martín**; **Rodrigo-Martín**; **Muñoz-Sastre**, 2021).

The monetization of a profile is understood as the capacity to generate income by posting audiovisual content. For **Castelló and Pino** (2015), collaboration must be on a win–win basis so that both parties obtain some benefit, which is not always economic. While the brand is imbued with the credibility and trust that the influencer radiates, the influencer sees their work rewarded by strengthening their professional position and relevance (**Martínez-Sanz**; **González-Fernández**, 2018).

Influencer marketing is based on the contact and connection that a company establishes with previously identified influencers to multiply the reach of their brand communication. This discipline merges corporate communication with advertising, bringing out the best of each to ultimately generate a bond with the user that ends up building loyalty (**Castelló**; **Pino**, 2015).

3. Objectives

The main objective of this research is to analyze the posts of Spanish-speaking influencers with physical disabilities to establish whether they exhibit similar characteristics or significant differences in how they use the features of *Instagram* and how disability is represented on their profiles. Specifically, this main goal is broken down into the following distinct objectives:

O1: To examine how influencers with disabilities who create content on *Instagram* use *Instagram* on the basis of their degree of influence.

O2: To test whether there are differences in terms of gender in regard to the use of *Instagram* by influencers with disabilities.

O3: To analyze the collaborations that influencers with disabilities make with brands on *Instagram*.

O4: To study the self-representation of disability and the accessibility of content created by influencers.

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample

For this research, a content analysis of 10 *Instagram* profiles was carried out, all of them of Spanish-speaking influencers with physical disabilities who had business collaborations.

For the design of the research, the selection of the sample, and the analysis tool, the previous literature, together with the application of the walkthrough method, were taken as a reference, which made it possible to adapt the method to the specific study. This walkthrough technique allows for the selection of a corpus of data on which to build a detailed analysis and serves as a basis for user-centered research (**Light**; **Burgess**; **Duguay**, 2018). The walkthrough method was performed prior to the analysis and in two phases: (1) a search for profiles in line with the objectives to define the object of study, and (2) a preliminary analysis of the 10 profiles analyzed to adapt the analysis tool to the characteristics of the selected influencers and the objectives of the study.

In the first phase, we began the search for profiles managed by people with disabilities who met the requirements to be influencers and had some kind of commercial relationship with a brand, i.e., not only had followers, but also had some form of profitable position as influencers. This generic search was refined owing to the fact that the results obtained were dominated by profiles of influencers with physical disabilities who had monetized their status as influencers or, at the very least, had business support in other forms of collaboration, compared with other types of disabilities. Therefore, it was decided to limit the search to this type of profile. To cover a larger sample and taking into consideration the Spanish-speaking accounts found, international profiles with this characteristic were selected in an attempt to utilize a diverse sample in terms of the influencers' geographic origin. Information was recorded for all the profiles found, as well as their characteristics (user name, gender, number of followers, nationality, collaboration with brands, and type of disability). A number of micro- and macro-influencers were established, and it was decided to balance the sample in terms of the influencers' gender. The profiles that made up the final sample were selected on the basis of these criteria.

Throughout this process, the objectives of the study were defined while also taking into account previous research. Likewise, the different profiles of the selected influencers were chosen by looking at their biographies, stories, highlights, and posts to decide which content was to be analyzed. Finally, the authors decided to focus the study exclusively on posts.

During the second phase, once the 10 profiles had been selected and the tool had been designed, a preliminary analysis was carried out to assess its reliability. These processes are detailed in the following sections.

The study focused on this type of disability. Ten Spanish-speaking profiles from European and Latin American countries –Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico, Spain, and Venezuela– were selected. The profiles were balanced by gender: five men and five women. Similarly, considering the diversity of profiles according to the number of followers and interactions, five profiles of micro-influencers (1,001-99,999 followers) and five of macro-influencers (100,000-999,999 followers) were selected (**Alassani**; **Göretz**, 2019). Establishing profiles proportionally in terms of sex and degree of influence facilitates the comparison considering that the sample was also balanced in terms of the number of units of analysis per profile.

> It is significant that macro-influencers tend not to answer, while with micro-influencers the trend is reversed

Table 1. Data on the profiles included in the study as of February 28, 2022

Name	User name	Country	Degree of influence	Followers
Cisco García	@ciscogarve	Spain	Macro-influencer	301,308
Edna Serrano	@ednaserranooficial	Mexico	Macro-influencer	297,917
Mauricio Riffo	@tenientedan	Chile	Macro-influencer	209,169
Davide Morana	@davidebartolomorana	Italy	Macro-influencer	101,846
Victoria Salcedo	@vicco_salcedo	Ecuador	Macro-influencer	165,664
Dany	@v_a_l_i_e_n_t_e	Colombia	Micro-influencer	53,527
Franwil Basulto	@franwil_basulto	Venezuela	Micro-influencer	37,147
Alan	@alanelruedas	Spain	Micro-influencer	26,833
Anabel Domínguez	@nosoyloquevesoficial	Spain	Micro-influencer	16,224
Cami Herrera	@cami.herrerar	Chile	Micro-influencer	14,543

For the selection of the sample, from all the content available on *Instagram*, we focused on the influencers' posts, because of their ongoing presence on their profiles. We thus selected 40 posts from each profile. In total, the sample size was 400 units of analysis corresponding to posts published up to February 28, 2022. The posts from this date backwards were analyzed until the required number from each profile was reached.

4.2. Variables

For the selection of the variables and categories to be analyzed, we began with tools used in previous literature (**González-Romo**; **Iriarte-Aguirre**, 2020; **Romero-Coves**; **Carratalá-Martínez**; **Segarra-Saavedra**, 2020; **Villena-Alarcón**; **Fernández-Torres**, 2020), including adaptations to this study through digital ethnography. The combination of these criteria makes it possible to create a tool that is both solidly based and tailored to the specific study. The specific variables analyzed were:

1) post subject matter;
2) advertising;
3) audiovisual format;
4) interactions, e.g., likes, comments, and responses;
5) presence and company of the influencer;
6) accessibility; and
7) self-representation/visibility of the disability.

In the variable "post subject matter," the following categories were distinguished on the basis of previous literature (**González-Romo**; **Iriarte-Aguirre**, 2020) and the walkthrough method applied herein:

1) recommendation and promotion (includes those posts that recommend products and promote events, workshops, campaigns, or books);

2) disability (posts in which the main content is disability, the rights of the collective, barriers and adaptations, and claims, among others);

3) sports (covers all sports disciplines, training, guidelines, recommendations, etc.);

4) fashion and beauty (posts on outfits, clothing, footwear, skin care, makeup, beauty treatments, cleaning and exfoliation routines, or haircare, among others);

5) Covid-19 (posts dealing with the pandemic, infographics, prevention measures, treatments, symptoms, and general information);

6) humor (any post that has comic or humorous content);

7) personal (posts of a personal nature such as selfies, personal images, and/or moments from the influencer's personal life); and

8) other (posts that cannot be categorized in the previous sections).

In addition, "advertising" was measured as a separate variable, following the previous literature (**González-Romo**; **Iriarte-Aguirre**, 2020). This is owing to the importance of this issue for the study, as one of the requirements for the selection of the profiles was business collaboration of some kind on *Instagram*. Thus, we distinguish between:

1) explicit mention of "paid collaboration";
2) the appearance of hashtags such as #ad, #publi, and #gift; and
3) mentions or tags of brands.

In view of all the options offered by *Instagram*, the following categories were established in terms of "audiovisual format":

1) photography;
2) video;
3) reel;

4) photo carousel;
5) video carousel; and
6) mixed carousel

Regarding "interactions" or engagement, the numbers of views, likes, and comments were analyzed. Compared with other research (**Romero-Coves**; **Carratalá-Martínez**; **Segarra-Saavedra**, 2020), we also studied whether influencers respond to at least some of the comments on their posts.

We included the variable "content accessibility" in consideration of the fact that this is a study on profiles with disabilities and that, in the ethnographic analysis of *Instagram* in general and of the studied profiles in particular, some accounts that included captioning in their videos were found. Other audiovisual accessibility services were also added. In that case, we distinguish whether it is captioning, sign language, or alternative text (#alt).

To analyze "self-representation/visibility of disability," we observed whether it is present and, if so, whether it appears in: (1) audiovisual content, (2) text, (3) hashtags, and (4) emojis. We also collected data on the use of hashtags or emojis concerning disability to establish which are the most widespread and used.

We also included the variable "Presence and company of the influencer in the post" (**Romero-Coves**; **Carratalá-Martínez**; **Segarra-Saavedra**, 2020), which consisted of the following categories: (1) individual, (2) with a partner, (3) with family, (4) with friends, and (5) other.

Finally, the variable "mentions or tags" measures whether the post mentions other accounts.

In addition to all these quantitative variables that measure the frequency of occurrence of the items noted, the tool allowed the coder's qualitative impressions to be collected. This addition of qualitative elements to content analysis has been supported for decades by **Bardin** (1986) and **Krippendorff** (1990).

4.3. Tool

The tool was designed in *Google Forms*, and to measure the accuracy of the analysis sheet a test was performed including 10% of the total sample distributed among all the profiles analyzed. The test served to correct and increase the accuracy of the tool and, therefore, of the analysis itself. Finally, the Krippendorff alpha coefficient was calculated for reliability, suitable for studies involving more than two coders, on 10% of the total analyzed. Overall, the reliability was satisfactory, reaching 0.824 (**Krippendorff**, 2004).

Once the content analysis and coding had been carried out, the information from the form was extracted in Excel format, transferring the data for each variable to the *SPSS v.28.0* software. For data processing, we first performed the chi-squared and Cramer's *V* correlation tests followed by Spearman's correlation. The former was used to assess the probability of discrepancies on the basis of the null hypothesis, which states that there is no relationship and that the variables have complete independence (**Flores-Peña**, 2016), to test for the existence of significant differences between the observed and expected frequencies, calculating Cramer's *V* correction to determine the intensity of relationship of nominal type variables (**Vizcaíno-Verdú**; **Tirocchi**, 2021). Spearman's correlation made it possible to measure the association between two ordinal variables, or between one ordinal and another scale variable (**Reguant-Álvarez**; **Vilà-Baños**; **Torrado-Fonseca**, 2018).

5. Results

It is first essential to provide a brief description of the biographies of the profiles analyzed in order to then focus on the posts analyzed. Selecting only profiles of influencers with physical disabilities has allowed us to find parallels between them, such as the fact that half of them use the blue wheelchair emoji in their biography. The use of this specific emoji corresponds with the accounts of all the influencers who move in wheelchairs, with the exception of Cami Herrera. The rest of the profiles also show disability in their biography in various ways. A total of 50% of them tell their personal story about their disability in the featured stories. Davide Morana uses the text "amputee x4" and "adapted athletics." Some profiles use motivational phrases such as "LimitsAreOnlyInOurMinds" ["*LosLímitesSoloEstánEnEnNuestraMentes*"] (Franwil Basulto), "If it doesn't challenge you it doesn't change you" (Victoria Salcedo), or "Even when life doesn't end up being the party that you hoped for.... Never stop dancing!" ["*Aunque la vida no resulte ser la fiesta que esperabas...¡Nunca dejes de bailar!*"] (Dany). Although this information is sometimes ambiguous on its own, it is complemented by audiovisual content, such as their profile picture or featured stories, thus clarifying that it refers to the issue of disability. Like other influencers –with or without disabilities– they include other social networks in their biographical text, such as *YouTube* channels or *link.tree* links to all their sites (90%), information about their profession or area (50%), contact email for collaborations (40%), or links to their own products, such as books (20%).

5.1. Uses of *Instagram* based on the degree of influence of content creators

The content analysis encompassing the 400 posts first analyzed the uses that influencers with disabilities make of the various features, then related these results to their degree of influence.

Regarding the format types most used by the influencers (Figure 1), micro-influencers prefer to use the photo carousel (24.8%), followed by the mixed carousel (13.3%) and reels (10.5%), while macro-influencers share their content more frequently through mixed carousels (those that combine photos and videos) (22.8%) and reels (14.5%). In both cases, there is a low preference by the influencers to share their posts in video format (5%) or video carousels (1.3%).

We also analyzed the interactions generated by the influencers, taking into account whether they are micro- or macro-influencers (Table 2).
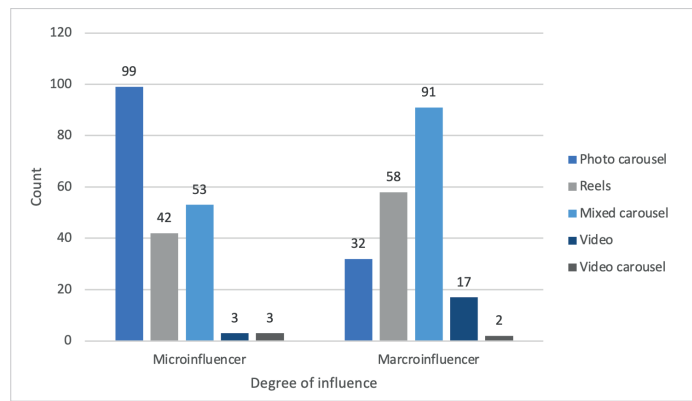

Figure 1. Formats most commonly used according to the degree of influence

Table 2. Summary of case processing by degree of influence and interactions

	Cases					
	Valid		Lost		Total	
	N	Percentaje	N	Percentaje	N	Percentaje
Degree of influence – followers	400	100	0	0.0	400	100
Degree of influence – likes	380	95.0	20	5.0	400	100
Degree of influence – comments	400	100	0	0.0	400	100
Degree of influence – views	119	29.8	281	70.3	400	100

These results were calculated on the basis of the number of valid posts. In the case of "likes," there are 20 missing data items owing to the fact that influencers activated the *Instagram* feature that allows hiding the number of "likes" so that the information is not visible. Likewise, in the case of the number of "views," there are 281 posts in which this criterion did not apply, either because they are photographic posts or because the data were not available, as in the case of the videos that form part of the video carousels. However, as mentioned above, this type of post is very scarce (1.3%).

Table 3. Spearman's correlation between degree of influence and interactions

Spearman's correlation		
	Value	Sig. (bilateral)
Followers	0.870	< 0.001
Likes	0.613	< 0.001
Comments	0.237	< 0.001
Views	0.705	< 0.001

The data show the existence of a positive and significant correlation in the number of followers, likes, and views (Table 3). In the first case, there is a highly significant correlation, which is explained by the fact that the number of followers determines the degree of influence, i.e., these data determine whether influencers are considered micro- or macro-influencers. There is also a moderate to strong association regarding the number of "likes" and views, as well as a weak correlation regarding the number of comments. Therefore, we can conclude the significance of the degree of influence of the influencers with respect to the interactions they generate from their followers.

Table 4. Influencer interaction through comments according to their degree of influence

			Interaction in the comments		
			Yes	No	Total
Degree of influence	Micro-influencer	Count	153	47	200
		% within degree of influence	76.5	23.5	100
		% within interaction in the comments	74.6	24.4	100
		% of total	38.3	11.7	50.0
	Macro-influencer	Count	52	148	200
		% within degree of influence	26.0	74.0	100
		% within interaction in the comments	25	75	100
		% of total	13.0	37.0	50.0
Total		Count	205	195	400
		% of total	51.2	48.8	100

It is also relevant to highlight that both micro- and macro-influencers interact through comments, responding to their followers and taking advantage of this *Instagram* feature (Table 3). According to Figure 2, there is a balance between posts in which this interaction occurs (51.2%) and those in which it does not (48.8%). However, it is significant that

macro-influencers tend not to answer (37% of the occasions compared with 13% in which they do respond with at least some comment), while with micro-influencers the trend is reversed (in 38.3% of the cases they answer whereas in 11.7% they do not).

5.2. Uses of *Instagram* according to influencers' gender

The results were then analyzed according to the variables and gender (Table 5). Moderate significant associations were found in the following variables according to Cramer's *V* and in ascending order: "accessible content," "post format," "disability visibility," and "type of presence." Regarding the latter two, it is worth noting the tendency of influencers of both genders to appear alone in their posts (n = 293; 73.25%), although, when accompanied, it is more common for men to appear with a member of their family (n = 21; 5.25%), with their partner (n = 11; 2.75%), with other people such as, for example, health specialists or work colleagues (n = 36; 9%), or with friends (n = 1; 0.25%), when compared with the data for women, which show that when they appear accompanied, the percentages are reduced, appearing to a greater extent with friends (n = 11; 2.75%), with family (n = 8; 2%), with their partner (n = 4; 1%), or with other people (n = 7; 1.75%). Regarding the visibility of disability, for both genders there is a greater representation through the posts' audiovisual content (men: n = 91; women: n = 87), as well as through the combination of several categories: audiovisual content, text of the post, hashtags, and/or emojis (men: n = 55; women: n = 89). Text is where the least representation of disability in isolation exists (men: n = 5; women: n = 0), along with hashtags (men: n = 0; women: n = 5), and followed by emoji (men: n = 8; women: n = 0). It is also significant that only 4.5% of the posts by women (n = 18) and 10.5% of the posts by men (n = 42) do not show their disability, meaning that their visibility is significant.
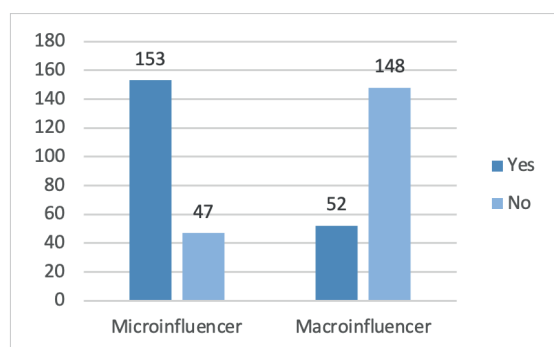

Figure 2. Interaction of influencers with followers based on their degree of influence

Table 5. Variables in chi-squared test and Cramer's *V* function in the *Instagram* posts in terms of gender

Pearson's chi-squared test				
	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)	Cramer's *V*
Post format	20.093	4	<0.001	0.224
Influencer presence in the post	0.490	1	0.484	0.035
Type of presence	42.668	4	<0.001	0.327
Visibility of disability	35.709	5	<0.001	0.299
Accessible content	18.399	2	<0.001	0.214
Advertising	4.783	3	0.188	0.109
Interaction in the comments	12.986	1	<0.001	0.180
Mentions or tags	0.224	1	0.636	0.024

Note: df = degree of freedom

On the other hand, it is essential in a study on influencers to highlight the number of views their content has (Table 6). There is a relationship between the number of followers and the average number of plays per video or reel, in which macro-influencers are in the lead. With respect to the gender variable, the cases of Victoria Salcedo and Dany should be emphasized, because they have an average number of views per video or reel higher than that of other male influencers with a larger number of followers, such as Mauricio Riffo.

Table 6. Average views based on influencer and followers

	No. of views	No. of videos/reels	Average number of views	Number of followers
Cisco García	4,324,089	18	240,227	301,304
Davide Morana	3,457,435	15	230,495	192,992
Edna Serrano	3,211,526	19	169,028	296,385
Victoria Salcedo	560,105	6	93,351	163,065
Dany	412,009	6	68,668	53,600
Mauricio Riffo	1,090,358	17	64,139	212,333
Franwil Basulto	354,874	26	13,649	37,147
Cami Herrera	79,021	13	6,079	14,400
Alan	0	0	0	25,900
Anabel	0	0	0	16,000
Total (*N*)	13,489,417	120	885,636	1,313,126

5.3. Collaborations between brands and influencers with disabilities

Another of the most interesting variables is "advertising," which analyzes the collaborations that influencers make with brands and how they indicate the recommendation and promotion of products. In 28.25% of the posts analyzed, direct advertising of some kind was found ($n = 113$), either by labeling the post as "paid collaboration," adding hashtags that identify the content as advertising (#ad, #publi, #collaboration, etc.), mentioning the brand, or through a combination of several of these options.

Having established the number of posts that include product recommendations, we first calculated the possible correlations between this variable and the others (Table 7).

Table 7. Variables in chi-squared test and Cramer's *V* function in *Instagram* posts in terms of advertising

Pearson's chi-squared test				
	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)	Cramer's *V*
Nationality	56.811	18	<0.001	0.377
Profile theme	23.038	12	0.027	0.139
Post theme	246.909	24	<0.001	0.454
Post format	43.067	12	<0.001	0.189
Influencer presence in the post	6.572	3	0.87	0.128
Type of presence	13.079	12	0.363	0.104
Visibility of disability	12.388	15	0.496	0.109
Accessible content	12.037	6	0.061	0.123
Interaction in the comments	3.453	3	0.327	0.093
Mentions or tags	91.267	3	< 0.001	0.478

Note: df = degree of freedom

The data show a moderate positive correlation, in ascending order, in relation to the variables "nationality," "subject of the post," and "mentions or tags."

The representation of posts in the 40 per profile that were analyzed in which advertising is present according to nationality is 47.5% for the Ecuadorian influencer ($n = 19$), 42.5% for the two Chilean influencers ($n = 34$), 37.5% for the Venezuelan influencer ($n = 15$), 26.6% for the three Spanish influencers ($n = 32$), 15% for the Italian influencer ($n = 6$), 10% for the Mexican influencer, and 7.5% for the Colombian influencer.

In terms of post subject matter, there is a greater presence of advertising in the content included in the "beauty" ($n = 44$; 38.94%) and "fashion" ($n = 23$; 20.35%) categories, followed by "personal" ($n = 18$; 15.93%), "sports" ($n = 15$; 13.27%), and "humor" ($n = 13$; 11.51%).

The preferred feature for sharing advertising content is through "mentions or tags," either by tagging the post as a recommendation and promotion ($n = 89$; 78.76%) or by combining this with other ways, e.g., with the use of specific hashtags or "paid collaboration" ($n = 24$; 21.24%).

5.4. Self-representation of disability and accessible content

Another relevant aspect for the study is the visibility of disability by the influencers themselves in their posts. This variable took into account all the elements that make up *Instagram* posts: audiovisual content, text, hashtags, and emojis. In 85% of the posts analyzed ($n = 339$), there is representation of disability, which is a significant percentage.

Only one profile was found, that of Alan, in which the posts where disability is not seen or not alluded to are more numerous ($n = 22$; 55%) than those in which it is shown ($n = 18$; 45%). In all other cases, there is a greater representation of disability versus its absence. This is especially seen in the profiles of Dany and Mauricio Riffo that make disability more visible (100% in both cases), followed by Cami Herrera and Edna Serrano (95% in both), and Davide Morana and Victoria Salcedo (92.5%, respectively).

> It is worth noting the tendency of influencers of both genders to appear alone in their posts

In all cases, the element in which disability is most visible is audiovisual content, whether it be photographs, reels, or videos, seen in 79% of the units analyzed ($n = 314$). The results allow us to establish some patterns in the treatment of disability by some of the influencers studied. This is the case of Mauricio Riffo, who uses the wheelchair emoji (♿) in all his posts, or those of Dany, Cami Herrera, and Victoria Salcedo, who use hashtags related to disability on a regular basis. However, these are characteristics of specific profiles and not features common to all the influencers studied. Another emoji used repeatedly is the "mechanical arm" (🦾), particularly in Davide Morana's profile.

The following classification has been made regarding the use of hashtags (Table 8).

Table 8. Use of hashtags related to disability

Hashtags related to disability or physical disability	#amputee #amputees [#*amputados*] #amputeelife #disability [#*discapacidad*] #amputation #amputeestrong #peoplewithdisability [#*personascondiscapacidad*] #osteogenesisimperfecta #oi #disabilitycolombia [#*discapacidadcolpmbia*] #oiwoman #oigirl #disabled #amputeegirl #womenamputees [#*mujeresamputadas*]
Hashtags related to inclusion and social awareness	#diversityandinclusion #inclusion #inclusivity #integratedchile [#*integradochile*] #togetherforinclusion [#*juntosporlainclusion*] #AssistedVote [#*VotoAsistido*] #Summerinclusive #disabilityawareness #bravewomen [#*mujeresvalientes*] #therearenobarriers [#*nohaybarreras*] #togetherforinclusion [#*juntosporlainclusion*] #imperfect #accessibletourism [#*turismoaccesible*] #accessibility [#*accesibilidad*] #universalaccessibility [#*accesibilidaduniversal*] #healthwithouthoaxes [#*saludsinbulos*] #internationaldisabilityday [#*diainternacionaldeladiscapacidad*] #internationalpeoplewithdisabilityday [#*diainternacionaldelaspersonascondiscapacidad*] #marchfordisability [#*marchaporladiscapacidad*] #inclusivebar [#*barinclusivo*] #WorldMentalHealthDay [#*DiaMundialDeLaSaludMental*]
Hashtags related to disability and fashion	#disabledandcute #disabledmodel #disabledmodel #disabledfashion #wheelchairoutfit #inclusivefashion [#*modainclusiva*]
Hashtags related to disability and sport	#adaptedathletics #parathletics
Motivational hashtags	#Nolimits [#*Sinlimites*] #UpWithLife [#*ArribaLaVida*] #UpWithLife 💪 [#*ArribaLaVida* 💪] #bosslady #selflove [#*amorpropio*] #willpower [#*fuerzadevoluntad*] #confidence [#*confianza*] #resilience [#*resiliencia*] #hope [#*esperanza*] #inspiration [#*inspiracion*] #disabledandproud #inspirationalquotes #yesyoucan [#*sipuedes*] #iloveyou [#*teamo*]
Hashtags specifically related to reduced mobility	#ottobock #prothesis [#*protesis*] #wheelchairgirl #prostheticleg #wheelchairboss #wheelchairlifestyle #wheelchairstyle #wheelchairlife ♿ #wheelchair #wheelchairwoman #wheelchaircostume #wheelchairlifestyle ♿ #3R80 #wheelchairtravel #cleg

The category with the most hashtags is the one we have named "inclusion and social awareness." Through these labels, the influencers make reference to diversity and to recognized days such as International Disability Day or World Mental Health Day. They also demand universal accessibility, the need for assisted voting, and that there be no barriers; thus, through these hashtags, they make disability visible and demand their rights. The categories "disability or physical disability" and "reduced mobility," the next most commonly used, include hashtags related to limb amputation and osteogenesis imperfecta (#osteogenesisimperfecta #oi #oiwoman #oigirl), as well as hashtags related to the products they use, such as wheelchairs or prostheses. Some of these tags include the name of specialized product suppliers for users with reduced mobility (#ottobock) and the name of some of their prostheses, such as #cleg (C-Leg is a prosthetic knee) or #3R80 (a knee joint).

Also present in the posts are the hashtags that we have included in the "motivational" category, referring to inspirational messages (#inspirationalquotes, [#*Sinlimites*] #UpWithLife [#*ArribaLaVida*]), self-affirmation and self-care (#disabledandproud, #selflove [#*amorpropio*], #willpower [#*fuerzadevoluntad*], #confidence [#*confianza*], #resilience [#*resiliencia*], and #hope [#*esperanza*]), and support for other people with disabilities (#yesyoucan [#*sipuedes*] and #iloveyou [#*teamo*]).

It is also interesting to analyze the subject matter of the posts that include self-representation. It is noteworthy that almost half of the posts (*n* = 183; 46%) are of a personal nature. This is followed by 21% of recommendation and promotion posts (*n* = 84) and 14% of posts on disability issues (*n* = 57). Also noteworthy is the fact that topics related to the specialization or interest of the profiles analyzed were clearly underrepresented: fashion and beauty (7%), sports (6%), and humor (3%).

We also analyzed whether the content published by the influencers with disabilities was accessible and through which resource this accessibility was achieved, namely alternative text, subtitles, or sign language. The data show that, in 93% of the posts analyzed (*n* = 372), the content did not incorporate any of these three elements to improve accessibility. It should also be noted that none of the posts analyzed included alternative text.

To measure the use of subtitles and sign language by influencers accurately, only those formats in which these elements could be included were taken into account (*n* = 156). Therefore, photo posts or photo carousels were not counted. In this regard, only 16.62% of the posts that make up the sample and that could be accessible include subtitles (*n* = 26), with Mauricio Riffo's profile having the most subtitled content shared (9.58%), followed by Franwil Basulto (4.48%), Cami Herrera (1.92%), and Alan (0.64%). In the case of Franwil Basulto, it is worth mentioning that, although subtitles are sometimes included, they generally appear partially, only subtitling what the influencer himself says; that is, in videos in which he appears with other people, their speech is not subtitled, so the content is not 100% accessible. Furthermore, only one of the posts analyzed contained content in sign language (0.64%), although it was not the influencer who signed.

> The preferred feature for sharing advertising content is through "mentions or tags," either by tagging the post as a recommendation and promotion or by combining this with other ways, e.g., with the use of specific hashtags or "paid collaboration"

6. Discussion and conclusions

Social networks have joined the communicative framework as platforms that favor socialization processes and active participation in society (**Ibáñez-Cubillas**; **Díaz-Martín**; **Pérez-Torregrosa**, 2017). For people with disabilities, social networks encourage social contact and promote visibility and awareness (**Bassey** *et al*., 2021), while fostering the development of social identity, self-esteem, entertainment, friendship, and enjoyment (**Caton**; **Chapman**, 2016). The findings of this research make it possible to conclude that these platforms are relevant for people with disabilities in terms of communication, exchange, and activism, just as **Ellis** and **Kent** (2016) demonstrated in their study. They also present interesting opportunities for empowerment (**Johnson**, 2019).

The main objective of this research is to analyze the posts of Spanish-speaking influencers with physical disabilities to establish whether they exhibit similar characteristics or significant differences in how they use *Instagram*'s features and how disability is represented on their profiles.

This last issue of self-representation or visibility of disability is linked to one of the main values of social networks for vulnerable groups or those at risk of exclusion, namely the possibility of telling their own story. These platforms overcome the limitations of physical reality (**Durante**, 2011) and make the construction of alternative narratives that challenge the dominant discourse and generate new representations possible (**Bitman**, 2021). Regarding narrative or identity construction, the findings highlight that the profiles contain the personal story of the influencers, in which they tell their followers about their experience with disability, as well as that almost half of the posts analyzed (46%) were about personal topics. In conclusion, the use of these platforms to make disability visible and "normalize" it is emphasized. This implies an evolution in the representation of disability and the models used to understand it, owing to the fact that, in previous decades under the rehabilitative or medical models, it was considered that people with disabilities had to undergo a rehabilitation process or hide their disability to be socially accepted, which prevented them from participating actively in society (**Franco-Zapata**, 2019; **Pérez-Dalmeda**; **Chhabra**, 2019). Social networks, as shown by the results obtained herein, also allow people with disabilities to show their interests, collaborate with brands, and interact with a large audience, valuing and making diversity visible and sharing messages that allow for social awareness and the elimination of stereotypes about the group, which is in line with previous studies (**Bonilla-de-Río** *et al.*, 2022).

In relation to the specific objective of studying the self-representation of disability, the high percentage of posts (85%) in which disability is visible, and also the fact that audiovisual content, whether photographs, reels, or videos, is the element in which it is most visible (79%), is emphasized. This shows that, in general, there is no make-up or concealment of disability in the analysis carried out, but that it is shown in a natural way in posts that not only deal with disability but can also be of a personal nature, promotion, etc.

The results allow us to establish patterns in the treatment of disability by some of the influencers studied. This is the case of Mauricio Riffo, who uses the wheelchair emoji (♿) in all his posts, or those of Dany, Cami Herrera, and Victoria Salcedo, who use hashtags related to disability on a regular basis. However, these are characteristics of specific profiles and not features common to all the influencers studied.

The use of hashtags is striking mainly because the results allow us to establish categories that are also related to self-perception and the narration of disability. In conclusion, among these categories, "social inclusion and awareness" stands out, which in turn is connected to the potential of social networks to promote awareness and social integration of vulnerable groups shown in previous studies (**Bassey** *et al*., 2021; **Foster**; **Pettinicchio**, 2021).

This specific objective also included measuring the accessibility of content published by influencers with physical disabilities. Specifically, the results indicate that alternative text was not used in the sample analyzed and only one post had sign language, although it was not the influencer who signed. Subtitled content was found, which makes sense since this is the most implemented and widespread accessibility service (**García-Prieto**; **Aguaded**, 2021). The results showed that 16.62% of the posts in the sample that could be accessible –excluding photographs and photo carousels– were captioned.

In addition, the study focused on influencers with physical disabilities who had collaborations with companies of some kind. The objective of analyzing the collaborations of influencers with disabilities and brands was addressed in the "advertising" variable. The data show that, in 28.25% of the posts analyzed, direct advertising of some kind was found, predominantly with the "mentions or tags" feature, mainly as a unique way of tagging the post as a recommendation and promotion (78.76%), and in a smaller proportion combining this option with others, either with the use of specific hashtags or "paid collaboration." Thus, among the multiple options for monetization or earning for influencers, paid collaboration remains a minority compared with other forms of promotion among the micro- and macro-influencers with physical disabilities analyzed, which coincides with what was proposed by **Hwang** and **Jeong** (2016).

Regarding the analysis of *Instagram* uses and the degree of influence of content creators, despite previous studies showing how *Instagram* users tend to trust influencers with a modest number of followers more (**Djafarova**; **Rushworth**, 2017) or even that a higher number

> There is a greater presence of advertising in the content included in the "beauty" and "fashion" categories

of followers can reduce follower engagement (**Tafesse**; **Wood**, 2021), this research found a significant correlation between the degree of influence of influencers and the interactions generated by their followers with regard to likes and views, although not the number of comments. On the other hand, in the case of the influencer's

> Content creators make visible their disability in the audiovisual content using emojis or hashtags specific to this type of disability

own response to followers' comments, an inverse relationship was found, which coincides with the studies that show that influencers with fewer followers have higher engagement.

However, it is significant that macro-influencers tend not to answer (37% of occasions compared with 13% in which they do respond with at least some comment), while micro-influencers do tend to respond (in 38.3% of the cases they answer while in 11.7% they do not). Nevertheless, in this case, the interaction comes from the content creator themselves and not from their followers. According to **Sarmiento-Guede** and **Rodríguez-Terceño** (2020), micro-influencers generate greater interaction owing to the fact that as their community is smaller, the level of engagement increases, which implies greater two-way communication with their followers.

Meanwhile, moderate correlations were found between the variables "accessible content," "post format," "visibility of disability," and "type of presence" and the gender of the influencers. However, for both genders, posts in which the influencer appeared alone predominated, as well as those in which the visibility of the disability was given in an audiovisual content or through the combination of several categories: audiovisual content, text of the post, hashtags, and/or emojis. The fact that influencers' content is dominated by posts in which they appear alone could be interpreted as a way of professionalizing their account, avoiding putting the focus on their personal contacts. However, in some of the content, they are accompanied by people from their closest circles, such as family or friends.

Finally, the analysis of the profiles of influencers with physical disabilities has allowed a comparison to establish the existence of some common characteristics, such as the visibility of the disability in the audiovisual content and the use of emojis or hashtags specific to this type of disability. Nevertheless, for future research, it would also be interesting to compare these profile data with other types of disability to see if these or different patterns are found. A limitation of this study that is worth mentioning is its quantitative approach and the number of accounts analyzed, which does not allow the results to be generalized. In this way, the possibility of expanding the number of accounts analyzed and deepening qualitative aspects through interviews or focus groups with influencers and collaborating companies that have chosen to work with influencers with disabilities as marketing influencers is being considered. However, the study highlights the need to analyze the use and visibility of social networks of people with physical disabilities, providing an inclusive perspective that continues to be necessary to eliminate barriers, stereotypes, and situations of digital or social exclusion.

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