

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń,
Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences
Institute of Pedagogy

Netnographic research on social campaigns on YouTube as an area of the empowerment of people with disabilities

mgr Mateusz Smieszek

summary of

PhD dissertation written under the scientific supervision of dr hab. Beata Borowska-Beszta, prof. UMK (principal supervisor) and dr Tomasz Leszniewski (subsidiary supervisor).

The doctoral dissertation aimed to netnographically explore and understand the issue of empowerment of people with disabilities in the spaces of online social media, with a particular focus on YouTube. The analysis conducted in this dissertation addressed whether and how social campaigns created on YouTube can contribute to the empowerment of people with disabilities. The main analytical category within the research project was empowerment of people with disabilities. The author identified the main themes, codes, and categories of different social phenomena broadly and variously connected with empowerment by analyzing different elements of 40 Polish social campaigns on YouTube (visual materials, comments, video descriptions, slogans). By that, the author made specific conclusions about the empowerment of people with disabilities through the lens of specific theoretical, methodological, and analytical perspectives.

The author generated 9 main research questions: How do social campaigns on YouTube enhance or construct empowerment of people with disabilities? What is the structure of social campaigns on YouTube about people with disabilities? What content is socially taught in social campaigns on YouTube about people with disabilities?, How do linguistic constructs used in social campaigns on YouTube shape social representations of people with disabilities?, How do social campaigns on YouTube indicate changes in public communication about people with disabilities? What elements related to the transformation of social networks appear in social campaigns about people with disabilities on YouTube? How do social campaigns on YouTube present empowerment of people with disabilities in the context of intergroup relations?, How is the image of people with disabilities shaped in the social campaigns on YouTube in the context of their fulfillment of socially valuable roles? Are there any themes that go beyond the categories obtained from the 8 main research questions? Two additional research questions closely related to the second main research question were also developed: What are the forms of social campaigns spots on YouTube focused on issues related to people with disabilities? What topics related to the lives of people with disabilities dominate the message of social campaigns, and which topics are overlooked or ignored?

Research questions were developed in conjunction with the main research theories described and analyzed in this work. Although these theories address all research questions in specific areas and scopes, the specific questions are closely related to the specific theories outlined in the dissertation: Consumer – Directed Theory of Empowerment by J.F. Kosciulek (Research Question 1), Social Learning Theory by Etienne Wenger (Research Question 2, Research Question 3), Theory of Social Representation by Serge Moscovici (Research Question 4), Mediatization Theory by Stig Hjarvard (Research Question 5), Actor–Network Theory by Bruno Latour (Research Question 6), Theory of Network Society by Manuel Castells (Research Question 7), Theory of Social Role Valorization by Wolf Wolfensberger (Research Question 8). The last research question (RQ9) (“Which categories directly connected with the empowerment of people with disabilities go beyond the categories obtained from 8 main research questions?”) was not connected particularly with any of the above-described main theories but was generated from verbatim data. This question summarizes the researcher’s analysis after conducting a netnographic research project using 6 techniques of data analysis (formal analysis, taxonomic analysis, visual analysis, coding and categorization, thematic analysis of video, and content analysis).

In the project, qualitative research methods, techniques, and tools were used to collect and analyze the data. Research method was netnography combined with a collection of secondary data. In the research project, 6 research techniques were used: formal analysis, visual analysis, taxonomic analysis, coding and categorization, thematic analysis, and content analysis. All aspects of the social campaign spots on YouTube were analyzed. This means a formal analysis of spots, analysis of visual material, analysis of statements appearing in the spot, and analysis of slogans and descriptions of spots. The descriptions of the videos were analyzed to examine the declarative purpose of the completed spots. The comments posted under the spots were analyzed to reach the audience’s opinions about the campaign spots. For each area identified, appropriate analytical techniques were used, which were in line with the adopted strategy of qualitative research and which made it possible to obtain answers to the research questions posed. The research sample consisted of social campaigns on YouTube addressing the topic of disability. 40 campaigns published on YouTube between 2012 and 2022 were selected for analysis. The 40 campaigns analyzed included 66 spots (visual materials + video descriptions + comments section).

Empowerment in the netnographic research project was a contextual category. This means that the analysis of empowerment was generated from the context of collected data and observed phenomena and issues within the analyzed 40 social campaigns on YouTube. This also means that by using 6 different techniques of analysis (formal analysis, taxonomic analysis, visual analysis, coding and categorization, thematic analysis, and content analysis), the researcher identified codes, categories, and broader themes that were crucial in the context of 9 main research questions and then analyzed them in relation to the empowerment of people with disabilities. The research project’s findings showed that all the elements that constitute the spots of the analyzed social campaigns (videos, comment section, video descriptions, slogans) are essential factors in enhancing or constructing the empowerment of people with disabilities. All 40 YouTube social campaign spots selected for analysis have similar structures. They are short

(up to 3 minutes) audiovisual materials presenting issues concerning the everyday life of people with disabilities and the social perception of disability. These materials are characterized by simple forms and easy-to-read content. Individual spots adopt a similar presentation of content. Much of the material consists of dynamically edited scenes (either acting or scenes in the form of reportage or direct statements to the camera by people with disabilities). The final element of the materials is the final board, where the audience sees the slogan promoting the campaign and information about the authors of the spot, campaign partners, or donors. The final boards also indicate where to find additional information about the campaign. Spots, in many cases, are based on direct statements by the protagonists (with or without disabilities), but a frequent procedure is also the voiceover, which indicates the essential content covered in the spot. Some analyzed campaigns have subtitles for the visual material (37 out of 66 spots have subtitles in Polish, and 9 out of 66 spots have subtitles in English), a sign language translation (4 out of 40 social campaigns), or a version with an audio-description (1 out of 66 spots).

The technique of coding and categorization was used in a qualitative research project to analyze the empowerment of people with disabilities within statements appearing in the analyzed campaign spots. These include statements by actors participating in the spots, people with disabilities speaking in the visual materials, and voiceovers. Coding and categorization allowed the researcher to distinguish 5 categories indicated within those statements. Those are awareness, inclusion, rights and advocacy, participation, and changes. The thematic analysis of 40 social campaigns made it possible to identify 8 main themes that regularly appear in social campaigns and which are connected with the empowerment of people with disabilities. These are the social perception of disability, the relationship of people with disabilities with the rest of society, a person with disabilities in a family and partnership context, everyday life of people with disabilities, professional activity of people with disabilities, people with disabilities pursuing their passions and dreams, social support of people with disabilities, education of people with disabilities and education about disability.

In addition to analyzing directly published visual materials (visual analysis, coding, and categorization, thematic analysis), elements related to the content developed by the creators of 40 social campaigns were also analyzed. These include comments in the comments section directly below the campaign video, descriptions of the videos, and the main slogans promoting a particular social campaign. Content analysis after collecting, selecting, and organizing comments published within 40 analyzed social campaigns allowed the researcher to identify such areas of viewers' statements: positive views on social campaigns, words of support for people with disabilities, comments relating to strengthening social cooperation, negative views, sharing personal experiences of campaign recipients in comments, discussions of disability and the place of people with disabilities in public space, social campaigns in the context of education. After collecting and preliminary analyzing the slogans of all the social campaigns selected for the research project, the researcher distinguished 4 basic categories of slogans created by the authors of social campaigns and which categories are directly or indirectly connected with empowerment. These categories are slogans that are strictly informational, slogans that aim to make people reflect on specific issues, action-oriented slogans, and slogans that explicitly emphasize the empowerment of people with disabilities. 29 out of 40 social

campaigns selected for analysis had information in the video descriptions about the declared goals of the campaigns' creators. The researcher divided the campaign goals declared in the video descriptions, after analysis, into the following categories: presentation of people with disabilities in various life situations, efforts to deconstruction of stereotypes and to change the image of people with disabilities, normalization of disability, efforts to convince the rest of society to make specific changes in behavior or action, efforts to bring about changes at the legal level, strengthening social activism of people with disabilities, promoting the activities of the social campaign creators, counteracting social exclusion, supporting children.

The research project also allowed the researcher to identify 5 themes that are directly connected with the empowerment of people with disabilities, which go beyond categories obtained from 8 main research questions. The researcher made conclusions through analysis by the use of all 6 techniques of data analysis (formal analysis, visual analysis, taxonomic analysis, coding and categorization, thematic analysis of video, and content analysis). All those techniques allowed the researcher to identify 5 themes generated from verbatim data, which are crucial in enhancing the empowerment of people with disabilities. Those themes illustrate a certain reality of empowerment of people with disabilities in social campaigns, however, different from those suggested by the literature analyzed within theoretical chapters of the thesis. These themes are a lack of social movements themes in social campaigns, lack of civic education themes within social campaigns, lack of content on international cooperation themes, lack of aspects of multicultural themes of the empowerment of people with disabilities, and insufficient presence of social cooperation themes in the context of the empowerment of people with disabilities.