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Evaluation report of a dissertation thesis

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

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

The evaluated thesis titled "Netnographic research on social campaigns on YouTube as an area of the empowerment of people with disabilities" aimed to understand the phenomenon of empowerment of people with disabilities through social online campaigns. The author achieved this goal by examining selected social campaigns on YouTube that deal with the topic of disability. The work has a logical structure, aims to achieve the objective and contains the appropriate components of such type of work (theoretical insight, literature review, methodology, results, conclusions and recommendations, discussion, work limits, ethical aspects).

The topic of the thesis is prevailing and important from the point of view of the theory and practice of special education, especially with regard to the increasing attention to social networks and other platforms that influence the attitudes of society (especially generation Z or Alpha, cf. page 5) towards people with disabilities and enable them to leverage these attitudes.

Introduction and theory

The theoretical part of the work is elaborated thoroughly, the introductory insight into the issue is followed by the definition of terms and then a detailed elaboration of the topics essential for the empirical part of the work (see chapter 2). It is to be appreciated that the author depicted detailed elaboration of the theories of ethnographic research, which he presents in chapter 2.2, but the other chapters are also of high quality and overall I rate this part very positively.

There are only a few and I would say rare problematic statements or incomplete parts in the work. For example, the statement "Social relations are the basis of research work in pedagogy and its sub-disciplines, including special education or social pedagogy" (p. 5) is problematic and narrows the view of research in pedagogy / special pedagogy. When defining the concept of disability, the author refers, among other things, to the Polish law of 1997 (p. 53), but ignores the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006, ratified by Poland in 2012), where the definition of disability is also given (the convention is part of the Polish legal order).

In chapter 2.4 (Social campaigns about disability and the Internet as areas of empowerment), I miss a deeper description of the risks of using social campaigns, such as the risk of a paradoxical effect, acknowledgement of receivers in their stereotypes, overly simplified / misleading presentation of complex problems or misuse and unethical use of materials. The issue of the perception of campaigns from the point of view of different receivers (persons with specific disabilities, the intact population, people with different religious beliefs, etc.) is also important. As an example, it is possible to cite, for example, the video on YouTube "Dear future mum", which is focused on the issue of Down syndrome. According to some of the recipients, this campaign uses emotional blackmail aimed at pregnant women, which was the reason for the ban on public television in France, but from the point of view of another group, it is a very beneficial campaign that reduces the risk of aborting fetuses with Down syndrome, and its ban / restriction is perceived as a violation of the right to freedom of expression. Reviewer's personal note: This video was chosen on purpose, in the Polish context the negative opinion about this campaign may affect a part of the population inappropriately, but the aim was to show the need for insight into social campaigns from multiple perspectives and to point out the risks, which is a bit lacking in the work.

The author could have paid more attention to the risks and problems that the use of social campaigns can bring to certain groups of people with disabilities. These are mainly people with intellectual disabilities, but also with severe sensory disabilities or multiple disabilities. The specifics of people with intellectual disabilities are marginally mentioned on page 95 or 106, but for example in chapter 2.4.5

the author writes generally about people with disabilities and does not take into account the specifics of some groups, which fundamentally limit their opportunities to participate in social campaigns. Insufficient differentiation and consideration of the great variability of persons with disabilities are a deficit of the entire work.

Work with resources

The work with sources is adequate, the author used relevant resources, especially foreign ones. The use of resources in Polish is adequate, the Polish context, domestic research must be reflected, and of course it is possible to use Polish translations (e.g. the very important publication Kozinets, 2010 in Polish translation 2012).

Methodology

Considering the objectives of the work, the qualitative methodology is adequate. I particularly positively evaluate the scope of the examined sample of videos on You Tube, the use of a wide range of available methods for data processing (see chapter 3.7). From a methodological point of view, the work is of high quality.

I have only one comment about this part of the work. In ethnographic / netnographic research, the researcher himself has a key role and can significantly influence this research. In general, the risk of subjective distortion is relatively high in qualitative research, and this is especially true for ethnographic research (in the case of netnographic research, especially during data processing). In this context, the personal motivation of the researcher, his involvement in the issue, personal experience and his attitude are also important. From a methodological point of view, it is appropriate when the author presents facts that may influence the degree of subjectivity in data processing, which also includes the person of the researcher himself, which could have been mentioned, for example, in chapter 3.1 (Researcher positioning). It is rather a matter of principle, because it is evident from the whole work that the author tried to eliminate distortion/bias as much as possible.

Findings and conclusions

The author formulated nine main research questions (p. 140), which he answers in chapter 5.2 (p. 247). The results are presented in a comprehensible way, sub-analyses (formal, visual, thematic, contextual, etc.) allow you to get an insight into the analyzed videos from different points of view. However, at least a partial analysis from a gender perspective is missing (e.g. also taking into account the different incidence of certain types of disability in women and men; autism spectrum disorders 4:1, etc.; partially traceable, e.g., in the descriptions in Table 13). A more detailed analysis of the representation/absence

of individual types of disability in the campaigns could have been processed (included in part, short analysis in the conclusions on p. 196-197) or a more detailed analysis of the age structure (persons in the videos, target group of viewers). From Table 13, it seems that none of the videos feature a person with a disability at a senior age, but this is the age group with the highest occurrence of disability in the population (high occurrence of hearing and vision impairments, etc.).

In the conclusions of the work, the positive aspects of the analyzed campaigns are presented (strengthening of the positive perception of people with disabilities, deviation from the medical perception of disabilities, involvement of people with disabilities in presentations, etc.). The shortcomings are partly technical (non-adaptation for people with sensory disabilities), but conclusions based on negative comments on videos (e.g. idealization of people with disabilities) or the problem of a relatively small impact (number of views, comments) are also presented here. In the conclusion part, there could be a clearer analysis of strengths and weaknesses (table, SWOT analysis), which would increase the benefit for practice (creation of videos, campaigns on social networks, etc.).

The conclusion part lacks reflection on the contribution of the work to the theory of special education.

In the discussion part, it would be worth thinking about whether any aspects specific to domestic (Polish) videos (tradition, faith, historical experience, stereotypes, etc.) appear in the videos. But here I recognize that it would rather be for the whole other work, but the author could comment on it during a thesis defense.

Formal form of the thesis

The submitted thesis has 382 pages and its scope meets (rather exceeds) the requirements for a doctoral thesis. Formal side of the work contains only minor flaws. The description of the tables should be written in italics (to be distinguished from the text of the thesis), a dot should not be placed after the last digit of the chapter numbering, the thesis should be formatted so that the text does not overlap part of the tables into the next page (see pages 189-190). The list of analyzed videos with links and description (Table 3, pp. 148-156) would be more suitable to be placed in a separate appendix, where it would be possible to include other data that would allow finding the videos in the future (links to the creator, etc.). The clarity of the text would benefit from a presentation in the form of bullet points in the text or a table without a line.

Overall evaluation

Overall, I evaluate this thesis as very good and of high quality. The author demonstrated the ability to deal with a very complex expertise, to use appropriate methods and to interpret the achieved results in appropriate manner.

The presented thesis meets the criteria and I recommend it for its defense.

In Hradec Králové, 24. 6. 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters that appear to read 'P. Zikl'.

doc. PhDr. Pavel Zikl, Ph.D.