

# The effective media to promote an accurate image of persons with disabilities: The perspective of social media users

*Ratirot Chansomdee<sup>1</sup>, Tavee Cheausuwantavee<sup>1</sup>  
& Issavara Sirirungruang<sup>1</sup>*

## Abstract

*The objective of this qualitative study was to explore the perspective of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and of key stakeholders concerning the contents and genre of media that should be used to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs. The participants were Facebook and LINE users who were purposively selected by snowball sampling through the announcement on the Facebook page. Eight key informants participated in this study, including two PWDs, a private media producer, two general social media users and three researchers (one with disability and two without disability). Four focus groups and information sharing among participants via LINE group were conducted. Transcriptions from the participants were analyzed. The findings illustrate that a negative image of PWDs still persists in various plots in current and existing media. New media presenting the image of PWDs as*

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<sup>1</sup> Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.

Correspondence to: Tavee Cheausuwantavee, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University, 111 Phuttamonthon 4 Road, Salaya, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand 73170. E-mail: [tavee126@hotmail.com](mailto:tavee126@hotmail.com).

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*multi-dimensional human beings should be promoted and created. Socialization and cultivation of inclusive living since childhood between PWDs and able bodied persons in the society are important to promote understanding, leading to positive attitudes. A short film is a current suitable media type to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs. Facebook and LINE platforms should be considered for data collection, particularly with PWDs who have limited mobility and difficulty to be transported.*

**Keywords:** Social Media; Facebook; LINE; Disability; Image; Attitude; Stigma; Participation.

## 1. Introduction

Stigmatization and negative attitudes of the society towards persons with disabilities (PWDs) have, for decades, remained the big challenge for quality-of-life development of PWDs in many countries – both in developing and developed societies (Barnes, 1992; Alcock, 2008; World Health Organization – WHO, 2011; Lantz & Marston, 2012; Kurek-Ochmańska, Struck-Peregończyk, & Lambrechts, 2020). An effective communication with appropriate contents and media channels between PWDs and society are very influential and have substantial implications in persuading and providing knowledge and understanding, leading to a positive attitude of society towards PWDs (Ellis & Goggin, 2015; Kasap & Gürçinar, 2018; Diallo, Braitewaite, Mamboleo, Tiwari, & Sharma, 2019).

From the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, online media played a significant role in human lives and in online activities of people (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). Face-to-face interpersonal communication was replaced by online media in the virtual environment and in the world of information through computerized communication systems (Mol, Brakel, & Schreurs, 2014; Qi, Monod, Fang, & Deng, 2018). In Thailand, people do not only use mobile phones to make calls, but many people also use them to log on to social media (94.1%). Many people use mobile phones to download images, films, videos, songs, games, including gaming, watching films, listening to music and radio (89.3%); to upload images, videos, music, and software for website sharing (57.0%) and to search for product and service information (45.2%) (National Statistical Office, 2018). Research also demonstrated that 51 million Thai people use social media and Facebook was the most used application, followed by YouTube and LINE, respectively. Thus, Thailand as a country was ranked as the top Facebook user of the world (Kemp, 2019).

However, the stigmatization and stereotyped perception of PWDs still persist on online media. The identity of PWDs is repeatedly reproduced by media as one of tragic/inspirational people. Most presentations emphasize the physical impairment of a person with a disability who should be cared for and towards whom one should feel pity for. On the contrary, successful PWDs are over-complimented and treated like superheroes although they still have low negotiation power in the society and are perceived on a charity basis. The roles of PWDs are still limited to passive receivers. Spaces for PWDs to participate in communication to interact with able bodied people and to create media to yield a common perception and understanding are

minimal (Dahl, 1993; Khampha, Kingkham, & Yooyen, 2015; Lertnithus, 2016; Kasap & Gürcinar, 2018; Qi *et al.*, 2018).

There are advantages of social media compared with conventional media. For instance, an online connection via social media may help women with disabilities seeking for social support during pregnancy (Peterson-Besse, Knoll, & Horner-Johnson, 2019). Mainstream media biases, however, commonly occur and support stereotype messages due to politic structure (Maksum, Surwandono, & Azizah, 2019). Thus, social media is becoming an alternative form of communication, especially in minority groups.

Previous studies have illustrated a few crucial issues concerning the presentation of PWDs through media and social media. First, the understanding of media makers to create an effective media has an impact on PWD's psychological and emotional states (Houston, 2019). Second, posts on Facebook by disability groups and their families do not constitute a homogeneous group. Rather, different points of view and disability model frameworks are posted, depending on how they interpret their disability and solutions to the problems (Stamou, Alevriadou, & Soufla, 2016). Third, infographics and videos are the media types most frequently used in campaigns of disability awareness. However, it should be noted that there are significant differences between levels of engagement according to their contents and media categories (Santoso, 2019).

Based on the literature presented, there are arguments on advantages, strategies and critical concerns on how social media can be used to create an effective communication to promote society's perception of PWDs. Little is known about what characteristics of media should be used in the communication via social media in Thailand to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs. This study thus aims to explore the perspective of PWDs and of key stakeholders concerning the contents and genre of media that should be used to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs through Facebook, attempting to fill in this knowledge gap.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research design

This qualitative study is part of a larger research project entitled "Participatory Communication through Social Media to Create Positive Attitudes of Society toward Persons with Disabilities". The project is a participatory action research (PAR) with two main phases: 1) the

identification and planning of problems and 2) the further action and evaluation. The findings presented here only regard the first phase of the project: i.e., the identification and planning of problems regarding the PWDs and key stakeholders' perspectives about what content and genre of media should be used to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs through social media, such as the Facebook platform.

## 2.2. Participants

The participants were Facebook and LINE users who were specifically selected among people who volunteered through a one-month announcement on the Facebook page, which was created by the researchers. Inclusion criteria of the participants were the following: 1) Facebook and LINE users aged over 18 years old; 2) Individuals familiar to PWDs or who watched any media concerning PWDs within three years; 3) People willing to participate and to give information during the study project. Finally, there were eight key informants who participated in this study including: 2 PWDs (Arnut and Somboon), 1 co-researcher with disability (Issa), 1 private media producer (Yodchai), 2 general social media users (Kanok and Nana), and 2 researchers (Rati and Tav) without disabilities (refer to Tab. 1 for more details).

Table 1 – *Characteristics of the eight key informants participating in the research study*

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Disability	Experiences related to PWDs
1. Arnut	Male	Visual impairment	A graduate student and a founder of a club to promote the creation of media and innovation for persons with visual impairment.
2. Somboon	Male	Physical impairment	A wheelchair user and a staff member of a community hospital. Somboon is also an idol of PWDs who have been living independently, presented on one of the TV programs.
3. Yodchai	Male	None	A media expert with academic experience and technical knowledge. He is interested in the creation of media for communities, especially modern multi-media.
4. Kanok	Male	None	A university doctoral student in engineering. He likes to organize collective activities and to participate in volunteering projects.
5. Nana	Female	None	A housewife. She has experience in teaching students with special needs in a private school.

6. Rati	Female	None	The principal investigator. She graduated with a Master's degree in speech communication and has taught students with special needs in a private school for more than ten years.
7. Tav	Male	None	A co-researcher and an instructor teaching graduate students (Master's and doctoral degree). He has published several academic publications, books, and research projects related to PWDs.
8. Issa	Female	Visual impairment	A co-researcher and an instructor teaching graduate students. She also participated in organizations of PWDs campaigns.

### 2.3. Instruments and procedure

After the recruitment, all participants were invited to join the LINE group platform called “Com(X2) Ratirot.Thesis” that was created by the principal investigator. Focus groups with participatory sharing with the researchers were held four times during a two-month period. Each focus group was conducted every two weeks for 45-60 minutes. Two main questions were asked: 1) “What do you think about the stories of PWDs presented in the current media compared to those you have experienced directly?”; and 2) “What contents and genres/types of social media concerning PWDs do you want to create for public perception?”. The participants discussed and shared their ideas among each other through the four focus groups. The data concerning participatory sharing via LINE group chats among the eight participants was collected and saved for further analysis.

### 2.4. Data analysis

Data collected from the participants was then analyzed simultaneously by the three researchers according to Miles and Huberman (1994). The first step was the data organization in which data from the focus groups was organized under certain topics, i.e. record date, place, activity, context, issues, etc., to make it easier for the data display. The next step was the data display in which the organized data was then displayed in the descriptive presentation based on the theoretical framework, i.e. socialization, cultivation, social media, participatory communication, stigmatization and empowerment, to explain “the story” by the meanings conveyed by the findings. The displayed data was then interpreted based on the related concepts and previous studies reviewed. Data was analyzed using a modification of thematic content analysis. Initially, the data from

participatory sharing, via LINE group chats among the eight participants, was reviewed by the three researchers to develop consensus on the initial coding structure, including the identification and indexing of themes. Finally, the findings were summarized and discussed towards new knowledge and suggestions for further studies.

### 3. Results

#### *3.1. Current and existing media: Negative images of PWDs in various plots*

During the first steps of the communication process, the main goal was to build a relationship among the participants. The greeting and welcoming of the members helped to break the ice and created a collaborative climate in the group. After this first stage, the researchers started to conduct the research process proper and found that the first issue, which was shared and discussed by the group members, was the negative image of PWDs in various existing media:

*Rati: What do you think about the stories of PWDs in the current media that you have experienced?*

*Tav: I would like all of you to share the contents for communication.*

*Yodchai: Actually, from the perspective of media people, I would like all of you to share the following contents for communication: How are PWDs represented by the media?*

*Issa: Disabilities are conveyed as undesirable. Worse still is that the villain in a story always ends up with being disabled or impaired. A disability is thus interpreted as a punishment or a kind of sin. In the past, Thai literature and dramas could not deal with the issue of PWDs so well. As I recall, there was a drama named "Rak Ther Tuk Wan" (love you every day) and the leading actress or heroine was blind in the story. One of the scenes of the drama reflected a terrible image of society towards PWDs. Thus, it is not surprising why people in society have such a negative attitude towards PWDs considering the kind of message that is conveyed.*

*Somboon: The stories of existing media concerning PWDs usually are produced by the imagination of the producers. PWDs have never been asked what they feel, would want to do*

*or to say. For example, once a PWD had a lover and his/her disability suddenly disappeared, creating hilarity, which is impossible in true life. The life of PWDs seems to depend on others or on destiny, which is not true. PWDs can work and support their families, but surprisingly their dignity is not equals to that of normal people.*

### *3.2. Proposed new media: Stopping the tragic and inspiring image of PWDs as a first step to change the representation of PWDs in the media*

The participants shared the negative image of PWDs they found in the existing media and concluded they would prefer a media focusing on equality and normality. Media should not present the image of PWDs as pathetic, different, and “incompetent” compared to people without disabilities. By doing so, in fact, the general public is unconsciously influenced by the media and perceives PWDs as abnormal and in need of care by the society. The goal that the communication group in this study tried to achieve was to delete the society’s feeling and perception of the disability as a defect and of PWDs as pathetic and different from other beings:

*Tav: There are also some issues that people want to transcend all those restrictions and obstacles. If so, what should our contents be in our media production? Should the concept of being a hero or superhero be avoided? Or is it still needed? Then, in what way should it be represented?*

*Yodchai: Oh yes. The next question is how PWDs are presented in the media. In most cases, the portrait of pity always comes automatically with the appearance of PWDs. Why are these people considered pitiful? Thus, besides the pathetic feeling and dramatized issues, what else is presented that is part of PWDs’ lives? We must stop presenting the image of a hero or superhero, especially through visual media, which aims to inspire viewers. The presentation of PWDs as superheroes must not be stressed.*

*Arnut: From my experience in media creation and social movements, we should stop producing any media expressing normal people's pity or sympathy for PWDs. For example, a program achieves merit by buying lotteries from the blind or by*



*giving money to blind people who play music or sing songs on the street. This conduct only reflects the disadvantages of PWDs.*

### *3.3. Proposed new media: Deconstructing the old meaning and constructing the new meaning to dilute the stigmatization of PWDs*

Since the participants indicated they did not want PWDs to be represented as tragic/inspirational characters in the media, they were asked to construct the new meaning to be considered in designing the contents in the media. The participants with disabilities, in particular, clearly expressed the need to demolish the old meaning of PWDs as people to be supported and to feel pity for and to substitute it with a new meaning in which PWDs are represented likewise able bodied people.

#### *3.3.1. PWDs as normalcy and equality*

Therefore, the critical concern of the participants was to construct the meaning of PWDs by representing disabilities as normal. According to the participants, this could be done through the common agreements and perceptions of stakeholders:

*Arnut: Media should boost the presentation of PWDs as normal people, the story should reveal inequalities among people in the society.*

*Issa: We would prefer seeing PWDs portrayed as normal people who are diverse. I'm not sure what general viewers can recall from the advertisement. What I always hear about this advertisement is they cry after watching it.*

#### *3.3.2. PWDs as multi-dimensional and diverse human beings*

The issues stated by “Arnut” and “Issa” reflect the one-dimensional presentation of the society towards PWDs. The participants thus expected to expand the perception of PWDs towards a multi-dimensional presentation. Mainly, they expected the society to see the intersectionality of PWDs' actual social identity, to understand that their lives are not different, but the same as people without disabilities:

*Arnut: The media and contents conveyed to the general public or even to PWDs should be multi-dimensional and*

*accessible, i.e. through tourism media that PWDs can access, media that describes the normal lives of PWDs, etc. It should not emphasize their image as beggars singing in a market.*

*Issa: Some literature portrays disabilities from various perspectives. For example, Running boy, I am Sam, Forrest Gump. In some Japanese series, the leading hero is a disabled person but the hero is presented connected with other people in a multi-dimensional way. The series presents how PWDs solve their problems. Most of all, the presentation does not dehumanize them. These series really give a good impression.*

*Yodchai: Stories about PWDs should not be too emotional, but we must generate contents to create emotion instead. Besides, we must convert the “burden” into “power”, a hidden power within these people. I would like to convey the contents to see them as we see ourselves.*

*Rati: I may conclude that we want to see and create the new media to change the attitude of society towards PWDs by presenting their life as normal, just as that of other people, focused on the same kinds of activities, such a tourism, education, love, family, social activities and so on and so forth.*

#### *3.4. Cultivating inclusive living between PWDs and other individuals in the society*

The participants also discussed the way to shift the perception of the society towards PWDs from negative to positive. The participants agreed that this could be cultivated through the experience of individuals from an early age where people with and without disabilities live inclusively. Such an appropriate perception and positive attitude could also be cultivated over time or passed from one generation to the next. Eventually, the participants shared their experiences and set up plots for media stories from their own perspectives:

*Kanok: When I was young, I felt a little scared of my friend who wore prosthetic legs. At first sight, as a small child, I did not quite understand, so I felt he was different from us. However, after gaining more experience and familiarity with him, such a feeling changed to a feeling of pity and sympathy without knowing if my friend needed it or not. When I was more*

*grown up, I had another friend who used prosthetic legs as well. However, this friend showed me his high potentials very clearly. He was the one who determined my thought to change. Since then, my attitude towards PWDs has gradually changed from a sense of pity to more understanding, acceptance, and respect.*

*Issa: I agree with Kanok. The perception of the elderly or the baby boomers or former baby boomers on PWDs is close to that of the elderly nowadays. Therefore, their perspectives may be changed by letting both generations interact with one another. The contents concerning PWDs should be presented in the lessons to make students aware and be familiar with them.*

*Arnut: I saw children give things or talk to PWDs during their volunteering period, but I never saw children of approximately seven up to nine years old learn about PWDs' lives.*

*Tav: The issue of people's attitude towards PWDs has been gained from their life experience as long as they recall. By human nature, when people are grown up, the embedded beliefs and cultivated thoughts are still in their sub-consciousness. Thus, if we can stimulate society to perceive such a contradictory image or add this perspective frequently to people when they are young, they may gradually absorb such beliefs.*

*Somboon: I would like to produce the media that reflects the daily activities of PWDs, such as participating in guided tours, cooking, business and self-employment with family life. These activities are part of my usual life as well.*

*Nana: According to our sharing, I may imagine that the proposed new media may be like this story. A young man 'Joe' is blind but has talents in singing and playing music. Thus, singing is his part-time job at a restaurant near his house to earn a living by himself, except for his tuition fees supported by the government. His Auntie 'Noy', however, often complains about the noise coming from the restaurant where Joe works. Therefore, she cannot concentrate on praying before going to bed. Thus, it is a part of conversational topics in which Auntie Noy regularly communicates with Joe.*

### 3.5. *Types of effective media: A short film presenting both story content and emotional context*

Another issue of the study on media creation and production were the types or genres of media recommended by the participants of this study. The participants discussed what type or genre would be most appropriate to present the contents regarding PWDs in order to shape and change the attitude of the society towards PWDs through social media, particularly of those using the Facebook platform. From the focus group, the participants discussed various types of media that should be used to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs. Several media were discussed, including board games, video infographics, short videos, images, and short films. Based on their participatory recommendations and discussion, the participants highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of each type of media:

*Yodchai: Besides movies that have been created more recently, another interesting popular media is a board game, which could turn useful to shape a positive attitude towards PWDs.*

*Arnut: I am also interested in board games. My friends and I even had an idea to create a board game to develop the analytic skill of children with visual impairment. But it was quite difficult, since I have no experience to create it.*

The “board game” is a new and interesting media. PWDs-related contents are not found on a wide scale. The problems are that it requires time and techniques to access a wide audience. Moreover, there are only a few experts who can produce this kind of media. Thus, there will only be a few participants who can get involved. “Video infographics” presents a high potential because it is not too complicated to produce. Therefore, many pieces can be produced. But its disadvantage may be due to the fact that infographics presents only facts but may convey limited feelings and emotion. The “short video” is also not too complicated to produce and may present many stories. Unfortunately, since it is a short display, complicated issues, such as attitudes or belief, may be difficult to be explained in such a short time frame. “Images” does not require a tedious process. Thus, a large number can be produced, and with diversity. However, it has communication limitations in terms of little participation by stakeholders;

and if it is going to convey effective communication, many images may be needed to be used. A “*short film*” can convey complicated and comprehensive issues, particularly culture, beliefs and attitudes. A short film can be inserted with details on content, context, feelings and expressions, as well as capturing the attention of the audience to follow the story. Nonetheless, the big concern behind a short film is that it needs many resources, including staff, time and budget.

After discussing thoroughly about the advantages and disadvantages of all the media mentioned, the choice was finalized towards a short film, which was considered the most appropriate media for attitude shaping, based on their perspectives (as reflected below and presented in Table 2):

*Yodchai: Board games seem to have many limitations. Thus, a short film is a valid alternative since it conveys both story contents and feelings. Although we may need much more time and resources for a short film, it can be solved.*

*Nana: Personally, I agree to create a short film to present a new story about PWDs, as we have proposed and mentioned, because it can convey not only contents but also images and feelings to the audience at the same time.*

*Arnut: Correct, I agree with Nana.*

*Somboon: Yes, a short film sounds great.*

Based on the results presented above, it can be summarized that the characteristics of new media to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs should be created to be posted on the Facebook platform. The issues proposed from the participants’ perspectives included: 1) to stop representing PWDs with an image of extreme pity or as superheroes; 2) to deconstruct the old negative stereotyped meaning and to construct the new meaning to dilute the stigmatization of PWDs by presenting PWDs as normal people, as multi-dimensional human beings; 3) to cultivate inclusive living since childhood between PWDs and other people in the society; 4) to create and present a story through a short film reflecting both contents and emotional context. These summarize the key results of this study, which is the first phase of a larger research project (participatory action research – PAR), i.e. the identification and planning of problems, which will be the crucial input for the second phase, i.e. the further action and evaluation.

Table 2 – *Media types recommended by the participants*

Media types	Commentators	Advantages	Disadvantages
Board game	Yodchai Arnut	- A new, interesting and proposed popular media	- Need expertise in the production - Limited participation of stakeholders
Video infographics	Arnut Issa	- Easy to produce - Can communicate various issues	- Conveys limited expression of emotions -
Short video	Issa Yodchai	- Short - Can communicate various issues - Easy to produce - Saving of resources	- Difficult to present issues related to attitudes and beliefs
Image	Issa	- Can communicate various issues - Easy to produce - Saving of resources	- Participation limitation, e.g. those with visual impairment - Conveys limited feelings
Short film	Yodchai Arnut Somboon Nana	- Comprehensive story telling - Conveys both facts and feelings - Captures the attention of the audience	- It needs resources and is time-consuming

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. *Social media are considered an alternative and effective tool for data collection*

This study was a qualitative research and was the first phase of a participatory action research (PAR) with the aim of creating effective media to promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs. The method used to collect data was through focus groups via participatory communication in which the researchers themselves were also participants of the study. Thus, this method allowed participants to take part in the media creation process as key stakeholders and included both individuals with and without disabilities as well as three researchers. In participatory communication all participants present an exchange mutual communication role, i.e. they are both senders and receivers in the communication process. In a group communication there is not an individual whose ideas prevail or are dominant over others, independently of having or not a disability. In this kind of communication, PWDs can present their challenges, social reality and can play a direct role in defining, analyzing, and solving the issues from their own perspective

together with other people (Balcazar, Keys, Kaplan, & Balcazar, 2006; Hamme, Magasi, Heinemann, Whiteneck, Bogner, & Rodriguez, 2008; Cheausuwantavee, 2017). In summary, the diversity of the key stakeholders in the participatory group helps to enhance the exchange of ideas and perspectives based on diverse knowledge and experiences. Such exchanges complement and fulfill the ideas of one another. Finally, the understanding of media makers to create an effective media is also impactful (Houston, 2019). Thus, this research project differs from previous studies in which the role of PWDs was still limited in terms of participatory communication and in the creation of media to yield a common perception and understanding (Dahl, 1993; Khampha *et al.*, 2015; Lertnithus, 2016; Kasap & Gürcinar, 2018; Qi *et al.*, 2018).

Since Facebook is the social media most widely used in Thailand, followed by YouTube and LINE respectively (Kemp, 2019), this study used two main online media in the research process. First, the Facebook platform was used to announce and recruit participants who were Facebook users. It will also be used as the platform to post and test the proposed new media to promote a positive attitude of the social media society (Facebook users) towards PWDs in the second phase of the project. Second, the LINE platform was used to collect data through focus groups and participatory communication among the participants. This suggests that online media and virtual data collection become an alternative and effective tool of the participants' participation. In addition, it may replace a face-to-face communication that could be particularly beneficial to PWDs with limited mobility and difficulty to be transported (Baker, Bricout, Moon, Coughlan, & Pater, 2011). Nonetheless, there may be a few limitations in terms of lack of relationships between the participants and the researchers as well as lack of context observation (Shpigelman & Gill, 2014; Parsons, Reichl, & Pedersen, 2017; Kasap & Gürcinar, 2018).

#### *4.2. Negative images of PWDs still persist in various plots in the current and existing media*

According to the participants who shared their lived experiences regarding the current media representation of PWDs, negative images of PWDs in various existing media still persist today. People with disabilities and their families must still face big challenges of stigmatization from the society, just like those faced many decades back (Barnes, 1992; WHO, 2011; Kurek-Ochmańska *et al.*, 2020). PWDs are often identified by the

media as tragic/inspirational characters. The role of PWDs is limited to that of passive and deficient subjects (Dahl, 1993; Khampa *et al.*, 2015; Lertnithus, 2016; Kasap & Gürcinar, 2018; Qi *et al.*, 2018).

These findings also support previous studies, published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the Eastern and Western countries in which PWDs were not represented as normal individuals in films, in the literature, religion nor in the policies or legislations regarding PWD's way of living, education, employment and social activities. This has provoked and established a negative attitude towards PWDs, highlighting only a condition of physical impairment, of unfinished bodies, of punitive agent or dependence, inequality or social misfit, although PWDs themselves never intended to be represented in such a way (Leiter, 2007; McLaughlin & Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Dawn, 2014, 2019).

*4.3. Socialization and cultivation of inclusive living since childhood between PWDs and the other individuals in the society is important to promote a positive attitude and social integration*

Promoting a positive attitude of the society towards PWDs is a very crucial issue. There are various approaches and ways to change the attitude of the society towards PWDs, from negative to positive. Previous studies have shown the challenges of intervening on the society's attitude and their effectiveness. Post hoc evaluation did not indicate strong and sustainable effects (Carvalho & Skipper, 2020; Hanzen, Waning, Nispen, Vlaskamp, Post, & Putten, 2021). Significant differences between levels of engagement of the audience in each content and media category were also reported (Sterkenburg & Vacaru, 2018; Santoso, 2019). Moreover, there was a lack of quality evidence on the effective strategies followed to reduce stigmatization, particularly in children with disabilities (Smythe, Adelson, & Polack, 2020).

An effective communication with appropriate contents and media channels between PWDs and the society is very influential and has substantial implications to promote a positive attitude (Kasap & Gürcinar, 2018; Diallo *et al.*, 2019). Thus, based on the perspective of the participants of this study, an effective media story should: 1) stop representing PWDs with an extremely tragic/inspirational image; 2) deconstruct the old negative stereotype meaning and construct the new meaning to dilute the stigmatization of PWDs by presenting them as normal people and as multi-dimensional human beings; 3) cultivate inclusive living since childhood



between PWDs and the other individuals of the society; 4) create and present a story with these media characteristics through a short film, which could reflect both content and emotional context.

Interestingly, the participants perspective was strongly supported by three important findings of previous studies. First, the step-by-step socialization and cultivation of inclusive living since childhood were shown to be more effective in the enhancement of a positive attitude by the society. Recent studies have suggested that psychological processes, such as meta-cognition or thinking about thinking (including growth in mindset) were a critical prediction of the change of attitude. This means that when individuals, particularly children, have more confidence in their thoughts, such thoughts or growth in mindset can enhance more positive thoughts or attitudes towards something or someone (Carvalho & Skipper, 2020; Requero, Santos, Paredes, Briñol, & Petty, 2020). Second, lived experiences and social activities with individuals or groups of persons with disabilities, such as a peer mentoring program, participatory care, campaigns for positive attitude awareness and usual daily living can reduce the negative attitudes and prejudices of individuals and transform them into positive attitudes and perspectives towards PWDs (Athamanah, Fisher, Sung, & Han, 2020; Hanzen *et al.*, 2021; Matera, Nerini, Gesto, Policardo, Maratia, Verde *et al.*, 2021). Third, the participants of this study also suggested that an effective media type/genre to present the story mentioned earlier should be “a short film”, since it can reflect both content and emotional context of the story to create a positive attitude of the society towards PWDs. This finding also supports previous studies that social media, such as infographics and videos, were the media types that were used most frequently in campaigns for disability awareness, while there were significant differences between levels of engagement with posts according to their contents and media types (Santoso, 2019). A few studies also illustrated that, besides story readings, videos or film watching were also another effective channel to promote positive attitudes and empathy towards PWDs (Sterkenburg & Vacaru, 2018; Cocco, Bisagno, Bernardo, Cadamuro, Riboldi, Crapolicchio *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, a short film of the proposed media should be created with the key contents of the results of the study to be effective. Such a proposed media should also be aimed at addressing the challenges of the interventions to change the society’s attitude and their effectiveness in terms of strong and sustainable effect, engagement of audiences in each content and media category as well as quality evidence on the effective stigma-reduction strategies mentioned by previous studies (Sterkenburg & Vacaru, 2018;

Santoso, 2019; Carvalho & Skipper, 2020; Smythe *et al.*, 2020; Hanzen *et al.*, 2021).

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study illustrated that a negative image of PWDs in various plots still persists in the current and existing media. From the perspective of stakeholders, including PWDs, an effective media story should stop to display the extreme tragic/inspirational image of PWDs and substitute it with a new image in which PWDs are depicted as normal people, as multi-dimensional human beings. Socialization and the cultivation of inclusive living since an early age between PWDs and the other individuals of the society are important to promote a positive attitude. A short film reflecting both new content and emotional context is a current suitable media type to post and promote a positive attitude of society towards PWDs. However, the new proposed media should also be concerned with addressing the challenges of the interventions to change the society's attitude and their effectiveness in terms of strong and sustainable effects, engagement of audiences in each content and media category as well as quality evidence on the effective stigma-reduction strategies. Additionally, the Facebook and LINE platform, are not only considered popular online media that play a significant role in human lives and in the socialization of the society, influencing the attitude of people towards PWDs, but also become an alternative and effective data collection tool, as demonstrated by this study, particularly suited to allow a remote participation by PWDs with limited mobility and difficulty to be transported.

Based on the findings of this research, the following next steps are recommended. First, new media presenting images of PWDs as normal people or multi-dimensional human beings should be promoted and created. Second, Facebook, LINE and other social media platforms should be emphasized as an alternative data collection tool of research, particularly with PWDs who have limited mobility and difficulty to be transported. Third, further media genres, such as Twitter, Podcast, Board Game, may be used for additional studies as the platform to promote a positive attitude towards PWDs of specific age groups, such as children and teenagers. Fourth, the full participation of PWDs in the creation of media regarding disability matters should be established with continual activities and mobilization to enhance mutual learning and understanding among people, with or without disabilities.

## 6. Study limitations

There were two main drawbacks of this research study. First, the dataset was very small since there was a limited number of participants with only a few PWDs (i.e. 3 people out of 8 with visual and physical impairments). Thus, the perspective from people with other disabilities should be sought for and more social media users should be included in future studies. Second, there was little relationship and few chances of a face-to-face interaction between the participants and the researchers as well as little context observation since the data collection was performed through text chatting via the LINE platform.

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