Empowering People with Disabilities through Social Media: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Social media serves as an important space for engagement in everyday activities like education, business, politics, and social life. The purpose of this article is to document ways people with disabilities utilize social media and to examine some of the limitations and motivational elements of their use of social media platforms. This systematic literature review contains research articles from respected databases from 2019 and 2023. The articles were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria and then examined and synthesized according to the research questions. The findings highlight the significance of using social media to support people with disabilities in their daily life activities in addition to promoting their independence and skill acquisition through social media platforms. We believe that this work may offer light on the subject for other researchers. It is suggested that further research needs to be done on understanding how social media platforms can enhance the performance and life quality of those with disabilities.

Keywords: Social media; People with disabilities; Literature review; Skill acquisition

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of people's daily lives, providing an avenue for engagement in various aspects such as education, business, politics, and social life. This platform has given individuals the freedom to express themselves without the constraints they face in the physical world.

Social Media

The usage of social media platforms has changed people's expression, freeing them from some of the boundaries they have in the physical world (Crockett, 2017). Social media serves as an important space for engagement in everyday activities like education, business, politics, and social life (Fuglerud et al., 2012).

Furthermore, as cited by Borgström et al (2019) social media is a collection of web-based programs that support the production and sharing of User Generated Content and are based on the technical and conceptual basis of Web 2.0. Blogging, social networking sites like Facebook, virtual social worlds like Second Life, collaborative initiatives like Wikipedia, content communities like YouTube, and virtual gaming realms are all examples of social media.

People with disabilities

The Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (PWD) defines persons with disabilities (PWD) as individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that hinder their full and effective participation in society when faced with challenges. The PWD Act in Malaysia recognizes seven categories of disabilities: Hearing Disability/Impairment, Visual Disability/Impairment, Speech Disability/Impairment, Physical Disability/Impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Disability/Impairment, and Multiple Disabilities/Impairments ("Person with Disabilities," n.d.).

PURPOSE OF REVIEW

As mentioned by Baumgartner (2021), digital media is considered a crucial tool for people with disabilities to participate in society and gain access to valuable information. It is seen as an opportunity for inclusive and accessible media that can adapt to specific living conditions, but there are also concerns about a "digital divide" between those with and without disabilities. Otherwise, Baumgartner (2021) concurs with the idea that digitalization has the potential to empower people with disabilities, it also poses specific challenges. It is important to take a realistic and nuanced approach to the complex interaction between disability and digital technology. However, there is a lack of scholarly work in this field.

This literature review aims to discuss the utilization of social media and its effects on people with disabilities to support the arguments by Baumgartner (2021). The objective of this review is twofold: first, to explore the potential for social media to be fully utilized in daily life, particularly for communication, education, and social purposes, and second, to examine the implications of social media on people with disabilities. By analyzing the impact of social media on individuals with disabilities, this review aims to shed light on the challenges they face in accessing and utilizing these platforms.

Furthermore, this review seeks to identify how social media can be modified or improved to better serve the needs of individuals with disabilities. Ultimately, the findings of this review aim to provide insights into how social media can be optimized to enhance the social inclusion and well-being of all individuals, including those with disabilities, and to promote a brighter future for all.

Specifically, I intend to answer the following research question: RQ1, how a social media helps people with disability? and RQ2, what were the limitation and motivational factors that social media offers to people with disability? The right social media can affect the usage and benefits to their user.

This review aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges and effects of social media use for people with disabilities, to aid other researchers in developing strategies to support this population. By identifying the unique challenges that people with disabilities face in accessing and utilizing social media, this review can inform future research efforts focused on improving social media accessibility and usability.

Furthermore, by analyzing the impact of social media use on individuals with disabilities, this review aims to highlight the potential risks and benefits associated with these platforms. Ultimately, the findings of this review can inform the development of more effective interventions and policies aimed at promoting the social inclusion and well-being of people with disabilities.

METHOD

Procedure
As mentioned by Arsad and Janan (2022) posit that researchers need to determine the time frame or period of choosing articles to study based on the views presented by Okoli and Schabram (2010). In this study, researchers chose the study period from 2019 to 2021 by using two search engines in the database, namely "Scopus" and "Web of Sciences". The selection of two main databases, namely Scopus and WoS, is because these two databases can provide the necessary data. In addition, the Scopus database is very stable because it has advantages in terms of search functions and quality articles (Martín-Martín et al., 2018).

In this study, screening was performed on 659 articles selected according to the selection criteria automatically from the database. Researchers have used the more specific keyword "social media" AND "disability" to specialize the search in the database. The selection of these keywords is by the recommendations of Okoli and Schabram (2015) who said that the selection of keywords depends on keywords that have been used before.

After that, the researcher will ensure that all the articles that have been screened match the selected criteria. The limitation to the research area of "communication", "educational", "social science", "science technology", "information science", and "art humanities" had been conducted that results to 233 articles on both databases.

This process will be done by reading the title and abstract of the article. The researcher excluded 167 articles because they did not meet the criteria to be studied and did not answer the research questions. The excluded articles area such as roles of caregivers, mental disorders, technology tools, web technology, and opinion related. The inclusion criteria were (a) the benefits of social networking for those with disabilities and (b) the restrictions and motivating elements that social media provides to those with disabilities. From the articles selected, I excluded the articles which related to COVID-19 research. The articles included were the document that was accessible for retrieval and English language. 15 articles were included in this review that meets

the purpose of this paper. Figure 1 represents the process of selecting the reviewed paper.
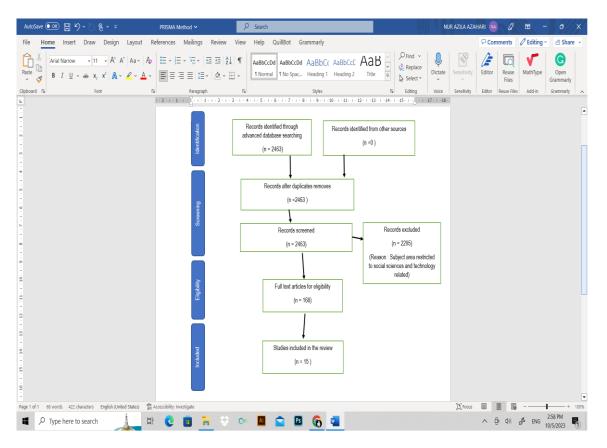

Figure 1: Flow diagram on the process of selecting reviewed paper.

DISCUSSION

This section is divided into two parts that address the research questions posed for this study: RQ1, How a social media helps people with disability? and RQ2, What were the limitations and motivational factors that social media offers to people with disability?

The first part of this section, titled "Use of Social Media by People with Disabilities," presents findings related to RQ1, while the second part, which consists of two sub-sections, "Effects of Social Media" and "Challenges in Social Media Use for People with Disabilities," addresses RQ2.

Use of Social Media by Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities frequently use social media to establish connections with others in their community by developing and disseminating content that highlights their experiences, triumphs, and challenges (Cocq, 2021). Hence, social media offers an alternative to expand the social circle, keep in contact with others and express thoughts and opinions as mentioned in Borgström et al (2019). Additionally, social media offers the feeling of control over, wider participation in social life and society in general and the Internet can serve as a platform for individuals with intellectual disabilities to present themselves without highlighting their disability, and thereby experience a sense of inclusion and normalcy.

Ma et al. (2021) reported that older adults with self-reported hearing impairment engage in social media use for various purposes, such as communicating with family and friends, accessing news and information, and participating in online support groups or forums related to hearing loss. Additionally, the study found that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most commonly used social media platforms among the participants.

To find and engage with others who have similar experiences, they often use hashtags, groups, and pages that are specific to their disability (Cocq, 2021) Hence, this enables them to build a sense of community and support, which can help counteract feelings of segregation and prejudice. As an example, Hill (2022) mentioned that the Twitter hashtag has been used by disabled people to create or develop a community and bring attention to the everyday experiences of disabled people via hashtags such as #EverydayAbleism and #ActuallyAutistic. Furthermore, the hashtags such as #HotPersonInAWheelchair, #Disabodiposi, #DisabledAndHot, and #DisabledAndCute aim to challenge the stereotypes besides promoting social inclusion, equity, and justice for people with disabilities.

Baumgartner (2021) suggests that while social media and technology can facilitate communication, connection, and access to information and services, individuals with mobility impairments may encounter challenges when using these tools, particularly when trying to obtain services or connect with others. As Duval et al. (2021) studied TikTok videos created by people with disabilities to show how play can promote socialization, creativity, and well-being for this population. The study suggests that technology design should take into account the unique needs and experiences of people with disabilities.

Some other study as Sánchez-Castillo and Mercado-Sáez (2021) looks at how people with rare diseases use social media to raise awareness of their conditions and cope with daily struggles. The researchers analyzed 2,750 TikTok posts with popular hashtags related to rare diseases in six languages, from January 2019 to September 2020. They found that TikTok is changing the way rare diseases are portrayed online, creating new ways for people to share their experiences and protest against the lack of support and recognition for their community. Bonilla-Del-río et al. (2022) investigated the experiences of individuals with physical disabilities who use Instagram as a platform to develop their brand and collaborate with businesses. The study examined how individuals with physical disabilities navigate the digital space of Instagram, and how they utilize the platform to challenge social norms and stigma associated with their disability. The authors provide insights into how Instagram can provide opportunities for individuals with physical

disabilities to share their experiences and gain visibility, as well as to engage in meaningful collaborations with businesses.

Otherwise, Brunner et al. (2019) found that the social media platforms that were used by the participants, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube has various reasons, such as to connect with others who have experienced Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), to share their own experiences and raise awareness, to access information and resources, and to participate in advocacy efforts. The study by Duval et al. (2021) identifies five prominent themes that emerged from the TikTok videos created by individuals with disabilities: creation, reimagination, adaptation, exploration, and performance. These themes shed light on the multifaceted nature of play experiences within this population and their ability to adjust to their circumstances. Table 1 shows the summary of the use of social media by disabled people.

Table 1
Use of social media by Disabilities

Types of Disability	Social media platform	Findings
Intellectual disability	Not spesific mentioned	Expanding the social circle. Express thoughts and opinions.
Hearing impairment	Facebook and Whatapps	Communicates with family and friends. Access news and information. Participate in online support groups or forums.
Disable people	Twitter	Engage with others who have similar experiences. Build a sense of community and support by using hashtags, groups, and pages. Counteract feelings of segregation and prejudice.
Rare diseases Physical disabilities	Tik Tok Instagram	Raise awareness and cope with daily struggles Share their experiences and gain visibility. Engage in collaborations with businesses.
Traumatic Brain Injury	Facebook Twitter Instagram YouTube	Share experiences and raise awareness. Access information and resources. Participate in advocacy efforts.
Disable people	Tik Tok	Able to create, reimagine, adapt, explore, and perform to adjust to their circumstances.

Effects of Social Media

There were a few studies that show the benefits and effects of social media on people with disabilities. Some of the benefits of using social media reported by Ma et al. (2021) were older adults with self-reported hearing impairment had negatively associated with sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and feeling lonely or isolated. In addition, the more time participants spent on social media, the lower their levels of depressive symptoms.

In addition, social media provides a platform for individuals with disabilities to confront dominant discourses and stereotypes concerning disability and advocate for their rights and inclusion in society (Cocq, 2021). Moreover, Borgström et al. (2019) reported social media has been observed to promote a shift towards a more positive perspective in individuals' immediate surroundings, as well as among teachers and parents. Teachers often highlight the benefits of social media for interactive learning, while parents utilize it as a tool to gain a better understanding of their children's disabilities and connect with other families in similar situations.

In their study, Brunner et al. (2019) discovered that social media platforms offer a unique space for individuals with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) to connect with others who have undergone similar experiences and share their stories with a broader audience. This connection helped alleviate feelings of isolation and provided support during the recovery process. Moreover, participants in the study reported using social media to access resources and information regarding TBI, as well as to participate in advocacy efforts. The study's findings highlight the potential benefits of social media use for individuals with TBI and suggest that these platforms can serve as essential resources for individuals seeking support and information.

I agree with the observation that the relationship between online and offline vulnerability is a critical area for examination, as highlighted in the analysis conducted by Lough, Flynn, and Riby (2015). The study suggests that while not all individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or Williams syndrome (WS) are vulnerable to online exploitation, certain risk factors may exist that require attention. These risk factors are relevant not only to individuals with developmental disorders but also to other vulnerable populations offline. By recognizing the interplay between online and offline vulnerabilities, future research can develop more comprehensive strategies to address the risks and challenges associated with online interactions, especially for those with developmental disorders.

Borgström et al. (2019) note that previous research on the Internet's impact has largely centered on adults, with a focus on topics such as barriers to access, opportunities for engagement, dangers of cyber victimization, and issues of inequality. As a result, individuals with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the potential risks and challenges posed by social media. By examining the unique challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in navigating social media, future research can inform strategies to promote greater accessibility, safety, and inclusion for these individuals. Moreover, a better understanding of how individuals with disabilities use and interact with social media can inform policies and interventions aimed at mitigating risks and promoting well-being.

According to Zebracki (2019), social media use can offer opportunities for increased social connection, self-expression, and participation in society for young people with disabilities. However, there are risks involved, such as cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content. It is crucial to promote safe and responsible social media use for adolescents with disabilities and provide support for their parents and caregivers. The article argues that social media can have both positive and negative impacts on the social and emotional well-being of these adolescents, and careful consideration of its use is necessary to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

Baumgartner (2021) also highlights how media and technology can play a role in reducing social isolation and providing opportunities for participation in society. Social media platforms and online communities can connect people with disabilities to others who share similar experiences and interests, providing a sense of community and belonging that might be difficult to achieve in the physical world. As mentioned by Hill (2022), posting selfies and declaring themselves #DisabledAndCute has increased their confidence and enabled them to make their disabled selves visible, while also drawing attention to what it is like to experience disability or impairment.

Pritchard (2021) highlights the advantages of using Facebook for participant recruitment, including its wide reach, low cost, and ability to target specific groups of people. The authors also discuss the potential pitfalls of using Facebook, such as issues related to privacy, informed consent, and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Trevisan (2020) examines how social media affects the relationship between disability, mental health, and political marginalization. The author argues that while social media can empower individuals with disabilities and provide opportunities for connection and advocacy, it can also lead to stress and marginalization due to negative attitudes and discrimination. Moreover, the author suggests that social media can worsen mental health issues for individuals with disabilities, as they may feel overwhelmed by the constant stream of information and opinions.

Bonilla-Del-río et al. (2022) found that Instagram is used by influencers with physical disabilities to promote disability rights and challenge societal stereotypes. These influencers typically have smaller followings and face unique challenges in collaborating with businesses. Despite this, the authors suggest that there is a growing interest in working with influencers with disabilities, which could increase diversity and inclusivity in the influencer marketing industry. The study emphasizes that Instagram has the potential to be a powerful tool for individuals with physical disabilities to advocate for their rights, build their brand, and engage in business collaborations.

Social media carries significant risks for individuals with poor insight and social judgment. People with disabilities are often dependent on their surroundings as the support from their parents and professionals in their daily life and also when using social media. This is important to avoid on the internet circumstance as cyberbullying (Borgström et al., 2019).

The Challenge in Social Media Use for People with Disabilities.
According to Pritchard (2021), people with disabilities may face obstacles in protecting their privacy when using public platforms such as Facebook, particularly when considering the potential risks of stigma and discrimination that may arise from sharing personal information publicly.

Hence, Clancy et al (2022) identified several barriers faced by low-morbidity stroke survivors including a lack of skills or knowledge in using the internet or social media, as well as cost and lack of necessary equipment such as computers or smartphones. Additionally, older age and lower income were found to be associated with lower usage of the internet and social media, potentially reflecting issues related to familiarity with technology and access to resources. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these barriers and improve access to online health resources for all individuals.

Physical or cognitive limitations experienced by individuals with disabilities may pose challenges to their use of the Facebook platform, such as difficulties with typing on a keyboard or accessing a touch screen, thereby impacting their ability to access the platform (Pritchard, 2021). As mentioned by Zebracki (2019), individuals with intellectual disabilities may face unique challenges in navigating social media, and they suggest that additional support may be needed to help these individuals safely and effectively use social media. Brunner et al. (2019) support this argument by highlighting the risks associated with using social media, including privacy concerns and the possibility of encountering negative or stigmatizing comments. This evidence underscores the importance of being cautious and mindful when using social media, particularly for vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities.

Otherwise, Trevisan (2020) concludes that a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among social media, disability, mental health, and political marginalization is essential in enabling individuals with disabilities to fully engage in both online and offline communities, without compromising their mental health or overall well-being. One of the main challenges was related to privacy concerns, as participants may not feel comfortable sharing personal information on a social media platform. This was particularly relevant for individuals with dwarfism, who may be more sensitive to issues of privacy and security due to the social stigma surrounding their condition. (Pritchard, 2021) Another challenge was related to issues of informed consent, as it may be difficult to ensure that participants fully understand the nature of the research study and their rights as research participants when using Facebook as a recruitment tool. (Pritchard, 2021) The authors also note that accessibility for individuals with disabilities is a key concern when using Facebook as a recruitment tool. For example, some individuals with dwarfism may have difficulty using Facebook due to physical limitations, such as difficulty typing on a keyboard or accessing a touch screen (Pritchard, 2021).

However, the study by Brunner et al. (2019) also identified some challenges and concerns associated with social media use. Some participants reported difficulties with technology and accessing social media platforms. Additionally, some participants expressed concerns about privacy and safety, particularly around sharing personal information online. These barriers need to be a concern as the benefits of online health resources, including social support and engagement in self-management behaviors can be fully utilized (Clancy et al, 2022).

Baumgartner (2021) highlights several challenges faced by people with disabilities concerning digital tools and technologies. These include accessibility issues, which can make it difficult for individuals with physical or sensory impairments to use digital tools effectively. Cost and affordability also pose a significant challenge, as some technologies and devices may be expensive and not covered by insurance. Additionally, the lack of training and support can make

it difficult for people with disabilities to learn how to use digital tools effectively. This can create barriers to their full participation in online communities or social networks and can contribute to feelings of social isolation and exclusion. It is crucial to address these challenges and ensure that digital tools and technologies are accessible, affordable, and accompanied by adequate training and support to enable the full participation of people with disabilities in digital spaces.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this review has provided an analysis of the current state of knowledge on the topic of social media utilization by people with disabilities. Our review has revealed that individuals with disabilities use social media to connect with others, share their experiences, and raise awareness. They often use hashtags, groups, and pages specific to their disability to find and engage with others who have similar experiences. However, individuals with mobility impairments may encounter challenges when using social media and technology. On the other hand, social media provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to share their experiences, gain visibility, and engage in meaningful collaborations with businesses, which have important implications for the well-being of individuals with disabilities, including reducing depressive symptoms and providing a platform for advocacy and connecting with others who share similar experiences. However, individuals with disabilities, particularly those with developmental disorders, may be more vulnerable to online risks and challenges, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to address both online and offline vulnerabilities. Despite the risks, social media can offer opportunities for increased social connection, self-expression, and participation in society for young people with disabilities, though there are also risks involved, such as cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content.

Additionally, social media can be used for participant recruitment, but there are potential pitfalls related to privacy, informed consent, and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. While social media can empower individuals with disabilities and provide opportunities for connection and advocacy, it can also lead to stress and marginalization due to negative attitudes and discrimination. Specifically, our findings suggest greater awareness and education around issues of privacy, safety, and responsible use of social media, particularly for vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities. While further research is needed to fully understand the complexity of this topic, our review provides a solid foundation for future studies and practical applications. Overall, this review highlights the need for significant concerns around privacy and safety, particularly for individuals with disabilities who may be more vulnerable to negative or stigmatizing comments. Moreover, accessibility, affordability, and lack of training and support can pose barriers to the use of these tools. It is crucial to address these challenges and ensure that individuals with disabilities have full and equal access to digital tools and technologies. Targeted interventions can help address the barriers and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing and using these tools, ultimately promoting their overall well-being and inclusion in online communities.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Authors' Contributions

Nur Azila Azahari and Dr. Nurullizam Jamiat both contributed to the conception and design of the study. Nur Azila Azahari collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Nurullizam Jamiat provided critical feedback, revisions, and guidance throughout the research process. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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	Nur Azila Azahari is a PhD student at the Centre for Instructional Technology & Multimedia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. Currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Nurullizam Jamiat. Her research explores the role of social media as a learning tool for individuals with disabilities. Specifically, she focuses on how social media can be utilized to promote inclusive and accessible learning experiences.
	Dr. Nurullizam Jamiat, a faculty member in the Centre for Instructional Technology & Multimedia at Universiti Sains Malaysia, is the supervisor for this research project. Dr. Jamiat brings extensive experience in the field of inclusive education and has provided valuable guidance and feedback throughout the research process.