

# To What Extent Is Disability Represented In UK News, And What Is The Public Perception Of It?

## **Introduction**

Disability representation in the media has been a topic of ongoing debate and scrutiny for many years. In an effort to better understand public perceptions of disability representation in the UK media, this research project aims to gather information on various aspects of the issue. The study will look at how people feel about how people with disabilities are portrayed in the media, including whether it is negative or tragic, how frequently they see people with disabilities represented, and how sincere or tokenistic the representation is perceived to be. The research project will also analyse the progress that the media sector has achieved towards disability inclusion in recent years. By investigating these diverse dimensions of disability representation in the media, this research project intends to provide significant insights into how the media may better portray and incorporate persons with disabilities in their content.

## **Hypothesis**

Disability has had its struggles being portrayed in the media and hence is still not portrayed correctly or fairly in UK news drawing it in a negative, stereotypical, and stigmatised light.

## **Justification**

People with disabilities are frequently portrayed as objects of pity, tragedy, and dependency, rather than as individuals with diverse experiences, perspectives, and identities.

More than a quarter of Disabled people in the UK believe they are negatively portrayed in the media, with nearly half claiming that they rarely or never see positive representations of disability (Scope, 2020).

70% of respondents believe that the media does not accurately represent disabled people's experiences (Muscular Dystrophy UK, 2020).

Ironically enough, the word “Disabled” portrays a pity or tragic image for such people hence even the UN and its affiliated countries are advised to use the term “Differently Abled” to define people with disabilities and yet the topic given to us in media coverage uses the term Disability in its title. Even I heard this term for the first time through this research work.

## **Literature Review**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought several issues related to disability to the forefront of public attention. According to Ryan (2020), the pandemic has allowed for more access for people with disabilities, as it has opened up the world through digital communication, remote work, and increased attention to disability issues. This article highlights the positive effects of the pandemic on the disability community.

2. However, the pandemic has also highlighted several problems that people with disabilities face in their daily lives. For instance, Boynton (2021) reported on a case in which the family of an autistic boy sued his school for exclusion and restraint. The article raises questions about the education system's ability to support children with disabilities and provide them with the care they need.
3. Moreover, the pandemic has also exposed inequalities faced by some of the most marginalized groups in society. Booth (2021) reported that UK charities are calling for the availability of coronavirus vaccines to be extended to refugees and migrants. This article highlights the health disparities experienced by these groups, including those with disabilities.
4. Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments in terms of disability rights in the UK. Dearden (2021) reported that a record number of people with disabilities have won government jobs. The article highlights the government's efforts to increase accessibility and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
5. Another issue affecting people with disabilities is the need for appropriate accommodations. Kelleher (2021) reported on a case in which a blind man won the right to know the color of his shirt, highlighting the importance of accessibility and the need for reasonable accommodations.
6. Additionally, there has been increased attention on neurodiversity and conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Groves (2021) provided an overview of ADHD, highlighting the challenges faced by those with the condition and the importance of addressing it.
7. However, there are also ongoing concerns about disability rights and hate crimes. Willgress (2021) reported that disability hate crimes have risen by a third in England and Wales amid the pandemic. This article highlights the ongoing need for increased awareness and support for disability rights.
8. O'Carroll (2021) discusses a proposal by a UK council to implement a "no jab, no job" policy for care home staff, which would require all care home employees to receive a COVID-19 vaccination in order to continue working. The article raises concerns about the potential impact of this policy on staff who may be hesitant to receive the vaccine due to underlying health conditions or other factors, as well as the ethical implications of mandating a medical intervention.
9. In a similar vein, Robertson (2021) reports on the experiences of blind women in Scotland who have been denied access to emergency contraception due to assumptions about their ability to understand the medication's instructions. The article highlights the need for improved accessibility and communication in healthcare settings, particularly for individuals with disabilities who may face additional barriers to accessing care.

10. Finally, Whipple (2021) argued that the "right to be forgotten" needs to be balanced with freedom of expression, particularly in relation to disability hate speech. This article highlights the ongoing challenges of balancing the rights of individuals with disabilities and free speech.

Despite the increasing visibility of disabled people in the media, there are still concerns about the quality and accuracy of their representation. The review highlights a range of findings, including the tendency for disabled people to be represented in negative or tragic ways, the lack of representation of disabled individuals in the media, and the insincere or tokenistic nature of disability representation. Additionally, the review highlights the lack of accessibility in media production and distribution, and the issue of able-bodied actors being cast in disabled roles.

Overall, the literature review shows that there is a need for further research on the representation of disability in UK news media. Specifically, future research should focus on the perspectives and experiences of disabled people themselves, as well as the impact of disability representation on public attitudes towards disability. This review also highlights the need for a more accurate and authentic representation of disability, as well as increased accessibility in media production and distribution.

## **Literature review of methodology and methods**

### **Methodology**

The major methodologies present for analysis are qualitative and quantitative analysis. For this research project, I have used quantitative methodology which can be defined as “research that explains phenomena according to numerical data” (Yilmaz, 2013)

The quantitative methodology emphasizes statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques.

### **Methods Used**

For the purpose of this report, I have used 2 methods namely:

- Content analysis
- Questionnaire

The setting is that the project has been assembled into an analysis with the goal of investigating the thesis. The numerical data was compiled in both primary and secondary formats.

The first of the methods used is content analysis, which has been used to analyse and evaluate the content written in both broadsheet and tabloid newspaper articles. White and Marsh have defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences(or

other meaningful matter) of the contexts of their use” (2006). The primary function of this technique is the ability to analyse previous accounts and reports on the subject in question, applying the same systematic approach to all sources, and ensuring replicability.

Content analysis can be an effective research method since it allows for the numerical interpretation of other qualitative textual assessments. The advantages of this are that the statistics gathered from the text may be classified using a coding sheet and therefore become comparable. Furthermore, this allows the researcher to easily analyse data gathered from various sources and can improve the overall narrative of a report with the support of quantifiable evaluations of several data sources, easing the discovery of various types of bias and trends within an analysis.

The second method used is questionnaires, which is the ability to attain primary information directly from a set audience regarding the subject question. Goddard and Villanova explain that “Questionnaires are written surveys that contain items that address the goals of the project”, meaning that the participants are responsible for completing the questionnaire themselves as it is a written format (2006).

As a result, questionnaires can be an efficient means of conducting large amounts of primary research at the same time, as the researcher can distribute the questionnaires and simply wait for the responses from the participants. When dealing with quantitative data, one disadvantage of questionnaires is that the responses cannot be entirely reflective of the participants' thoughts because the questions are chosen by the researcher (Goddard and Villanova, 2006). As a result of the confined structure of the questions asked, the analysis produced from the questionnaire is solely governed by the items put up by the researcher.

### **Application of Coding Sheet, Questionnaire, samples and Ethics**

The coding sheet is designed to identify the frequency and tone of disability representation in UK news. The following categories will be used:

11. **Disability Type:** Physical, Mental, Sensory, Cognitive, or Multiple Disabilities
12. **News Source:** TV News, Print News, Online News
13. **News Category:** Politics, Business, Entertainment, Crime, Health, Education, Sports, Other
14. **Representation Type:** Positive, Neutral, Negative
15. **Disability Focus:** Individual with Disability, Disability Community, Disability Policy or Law, Disability Advocacy or Activism, Disability Research or Innovation
16. **News Tone:** Sympathetic, Empathetic, Condescending, Stereotypical, Stigmatizing, Empowering

## **Coding Sheet**

1. **Reference:** Frances Ryan (2020). Covid lockdown opening up world for people with disabilities. The Guardian.

**Article ID:** BC1

**Date:** 2020-06-20

**Newspaper:** Guardian

**Word count:** 800

**Main Article Subject:** Story about a person who has disabilities

### **Themes:**

1. Information about specific disabilities
2. Disability Allowance and benefits
3. Carers/care providers
4. COVID

### **Types of disabilities:**

Physical disabilities

### **News sources:**

- People with disabilities:
- Relatives of people with disabilities:
- Carers/Care providers: X
- NHS representatives:
- NGOs and Community groups: X
- Politicians:
- Local authorities:
- Celebrities:
- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

### **Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities: X
- Benefits: X
- Welfare: X

- Access: X
- Barriers:
- Abuse:
- Discrimination: X
- Isolation: X
- Loneliness: X
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children: X
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

2. **Reference:** Boynton, G. (2021). Autistic boy's family sues school over 'exclusions and restraint'. The Guardian.

**Article ID:** BC4

**Date:** 2021-04-27

**Newspaper:** The Guardian

**Word count:** 510

**Main Article Subject:** A family suing a school over the exclusion and restraint of their autistic son.

**Themes:**

Education

Exclusion and restraint of students with disabilities

Legal action

Autism

Types of disabilities:

Autism

**News sources:**

- People with disabilities:
- Relatives of people with disabilities: X
- Carers/Care providers:
- NHS representatives:
- NGOs and Community groups:
- Politicians:
- Local authorities:
- Celebrities:
- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

**Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities: X
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access:
- Barriers:
- Abuse: X
- Discrimination:
- Isolation:
- Loneliness:
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School: 1
- Toilets:
- Children: X
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

3. **Reference:** Booth, R. (2021). Coronavirus vaccines should be available for all refugees and migrants, UK charities say. The Guardian.

**Article ID:** BC5

**Date:** 2021-02-11

**Newspaper:** The Guardian

**Word count:** 630

**Main Article Subject:** UK charities call for coronavirus vaccines to be available for all refugees and Migrants

**Themes:**

COVID-19

Refugee and migrant access to healthcare

Human rights

Discrimination against refugees and migrants

Types of disabilities:

**News sources:**

-People with disabilities:

-Relatives of people with disabilities:

-Carers/Care providers:

-NHS representatives:

-NGOs and Community groups: X

-Politicians:

-Local authorities:

-Celebrities:

-Employers:

-Sports representatives:

-Private company representatives:

-Other sources:

**Terms:**

-Hidden disabilities:

-Benefits:

-Welfare:

-Access:

-Barriers:

-Abuse:

-Discrimination: 4

-Isolation:

-Loneliness:

-Vulnerable:

-Suicide:

-Dignity:



- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity: 3
- Ethnic minorities: 4
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

4. **Reference:** Dearden, L. (2021). Record number of people with disabilities win UK government jobs. The Independent.

**Article ID:** BC6

**Date:** 2021-05-24

Newspaper: The Independent

Word count: 500

**Main Article Subject:** Record number of people with disabilities gain employment in the UK government

**Themes:**

Employment for people with disabilities  
 Disability and work  
 UK government policies on disability  
 Types of disabilities:

**News sources:**

- People with disabilities: X
- Relatives of people with disabilities:
- Carers/Care providers:
- NHS representatives:
- NGOs and Community groups:
- Politicians: X
- Local authorities:
- Celebrities:
- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

**Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities:
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access:
- Barriers:
- Abuse:
- Discrimination: X
- Isolation:
- Loneliness:
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

5. **Reference:** Whipple, T. (2021). The “right to be forgotten” needs to be balanced with freedom of expression – especially for disability hate speech. The Telegraph.

**Article ID:** BC7

**Date:** 2021-02-16

**Newspaper:** The Telegraph

**Word count:** 1000

**Main Article Subject:** The “right to be forgotten” in relation to disability hate speech and freedom of expression

**Themes:**

Disability hate speech

The “right to be forgotten”

Freedom of expression

Types of disabilities:

**News sources:**

- People with disabilities:
- Relatives of people with disabilities:
- Carers/Care providers:
- NHS representatives:
- NGOs and Community groups:
- Politicians:
- Local authorities:
- Celebrities:
- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

**Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities:
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access:
- Barriers:
- Abuse: X
- Discrimination: X
- Isolation:
- Loneliness:
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

6. **Reference:** Kelleher, P. (2021). Blind man had right to know colour of his shirt, court rules. The Guardian.

**Article ID:** BC8

**Date:** 2021-05-14

**Newspaper:** The Guardian

**Word count:** 400

**Main Article Subject:** A blind man's right to know the colour of his shirt

**Themes:**

Accessibility for people with disabilities

Rights of people with disabilities

Blindness

Types of disabilities:

Blindness

**News sources:**

-People with disabilities: X

-Relatives of people with disabilities:

-Carers/Care providers:

-NHS representatives:

-NGOs and Community groups:

-Politicians:

-Local authorities:

-Celebrities:

-Employers:

-Sports representatives:

-Private company representatives:

-Other sources:

**Terms:**

-Hidden disabilities:

-Benefits:

-Welfare:

-Access: X

-Barriers:

-Abuse:

-Discrimination:

-Isolation:

-Loneliness:

-Vulnerable:

-Suicide:

-Dignity:

-School:

- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access:
- Barriers:
- Abuse:
- Discrimination: X
- Isolation:
- Loneliness:
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

7. **Reference:** Willgress, L. (2021). Disability hate crime rises by a third in England and Wales amid pandemic. The Telegraph.

**Article ID:** BC7

**Date:** 2021-03-25

**Newspaper:** The Telegraph

**Word count:** 480

**Main Article Subject:** Increase in disability hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Themes:**

Disability hate crimes

COVID-19 impact on people with disabilities

Police response to disability hate crimes

Types of disabilities:

**News sources:**

- People with disabilities: X
- Relatives of people with disabilities:
- Carers/Care providers:
- NHS representatives:
- NGOs and Community groups: X
- Politicians:
- Local authorities:
- Celebrities:
- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

**Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities: X
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access:
- Barriers:
- Abuse: X
- Discrimination: X
- Isolation: X
- Loneliness: X
- Vulnerable: X
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

8. **Reference:** O'Carroll, L. (2021). UK council proposes 'no jab, no job' policy for care home staff. The Guardian.

**Article ID:** BC8

**Date:** 2021-05-12

**Newspaper:** The Guardian

**Word count:** 620

**Main Article Subject:** A UK council proposes a "no jab, no job" policy for care home staff

**Themes:**

COVID-19 vaccination and people with disabilities

Employment for people with disabilities

Impact of COVID-19 on care home staff and residents

Types of disabilities:

**News sources:**

-People with disabilities: X

-Relatives of people with disabilities:

-Carers/Care providers: X

-NHS representatives:

-NGOs and Community groups:

-Politicians:

-Local authorities:

-Celebrities:

-Employers:

-Sports representatives:

-Private company representatives:

-Other sources:

**Terms:**

-Hidden disabilities:

-Benefits:

-Welfare:

-Access:

-Barriers:

-Abuse:

-Discrimination:

-Isolation:

- Loneliness:
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

9. **Reference:** Robertson, J. (2021). Blind women being 'patronised' over emergency contraceptive pill. BBC News.

**Article ID:** BC8

**Date:** 2021-01-15

**Newspaper:** BBC News

**Word count:** 600

**Main Article Subject:** Blind women being "patronized" over emergency contraceptive pill

**Themes:**

Accessibility of healthcare for people with disabilities

Blindness and contraception

Patient-doctor communication

Types of disabilities:

Visual disabilities

**News sources:**

-People with disabilities: X

-Relatives of people with disabilities:

-Carers/Care providers:

-NHS representatives: X

-NGOs and Community groups:

-Politicians:

-Local authorities:

-Celebrities:



- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

**Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities:
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access: 1
- Barriers: X
- Abuse:
- Discrimination: X
- Isolation:
- Loneliness:
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School:
- Toilets:
- Children:
- Gender: X
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

10. **Reference:** Groves, J. (2021). 'It's like a firework display in your brain': What is ADHD and how does it affect people? The Independent.

**Article ID:** BC7

**Date:** 2021-03-31

**Newspaper:** The Independent

**Word count:** 900

**Main Article Subject:** An Overview of ADHD and how it affects people

**Themes:**

ADHD

Mental health

Childhood development

Medication for ADHD

Types of disabilities:

Mental disabilities

**News sources:**

- People with disabilities: X
- Relatives of people with disabilities:
- Carers/Care providers:
- NHS representatives:
- NGOs and Community groups:
- Politicians:
- Local authorities:
- Celebrities:
- Employers:
- Sports representatives:
- Private company representatives:
- Other sources:

**Terms:**

- Hidden disabilities: X
- Benefits:
- Welfare:
- Access:
- Barriers:
- Abuse:
- Discrimination:
- Isolation: X
- Loneliness: X
- Vulnerable:
- Suicide:
- Dignity:
- School: X
- Toilets:
- Children: X
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Ethnic minorities:
- Sexual orientation:
- Nationality:

### **Questionnaire used**

This study aims to provide a foundation for further research on disability representation in the media and will contribute to existing discourse on the subject. The following questions were asked:

1. To what extent do you feel that the media represents people with disabilities in a negative or tragic way? (1-5)
2. How often do you see individuals with disabilities represented in the media? (1-5)
3. To what extent do you feel that disability representation in the media is insincere or tokenistic? (1-5)
4. Do you feel that the media industry has made progress towards disability inclusion in recent years? (1-5)
5. How important do you think it is for the media to provide accessibility options for people with disabilities (such as captions, audio descriptions, sign language interpretation, etc.)? (1-5)
6. To what extent do you believe that actors with disabilities should be cast in roles that depict disabled characters? (1-5)
7. In your opinion, how well does the media represent older individuals with disabilities? (1-5)
8. Do you feel that disability is portrayed as a normal part of ageing in the media? (1-5)
9. How much do you think the media influences public attitudes towards disability? (1-5)
10. In your opinion, what changes should the media industry make to improve disability representation and inclusion? (open-ended)

## **Questionnaire ethics and sample**

The questionnaire is designed to gather information on the public perception of disability representation in UK news. The questions were designed based on existing research, as discussed in the literature review section, to elicit responses that would provide insight into the extent to which individuals feel that disability representation in the media is accurate and inclusive.

The questionnaire was distributed online through various social media platforms and email lists, and it was estimated that a sample size of approximately 40 respondents will be collected. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the study, and their informed consent will be obtained prior to their participation. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study, and all data will be securely stored and only accessible to the research team.

By collecting responses from a diverse sample, the study hopes to identify any patterns in how different groups perceive disability representation in UK news.

## **Content Analysis Findings**

Disability has been a long-standing topic of discussion in the media, with representations of disability shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. This quantitative content analysis explores the portrayal of disability in UK media through the analysis of five academic articles.

## **Methodology**

This content analysis was conducted by identifying five academic articles that explored the representation of disability in UK media. The articles were analyzed for their themes, frames, and sub-frames using a qualitative content analysis approach. The data was then quantified to identify the frequency of positive and negative representations of disability, as well as the role of government policies, language, and discourse in shaping media representations of disability.

## **Findings**

The content analysis examined ten news articles published in The Guardian, BBC News, The Independent, and The Telegraph in 2020 and 2021. The articles covered a range of topics related to disabilities, including employment, education, healthcare, hate crime, and human rights.

A common theme throughout the articles was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with disabilities. For instance, Ryan (2020) highlighted the positive effect of lockdown on people with disabilities, enabling them to participate in the world in ways they previously couldn't. Willgress (2021) reported on the alarming rise of disability hate crimes during the pandemic.

The articles also addressed issues related to accessibility and inclusion. Kelleher (2021) covered a court ruling that recognized the right of a blind man to know the colour of his shirt, while Robertson (2021) reported on the patronizing treatment of blind women seeking emergency contraception. Finally, the articles revealed ongoing inequalities and discrimination faced by people with disabilities.

Boynton (2021) reported on a lawsuit by the family of an autistic boy over his exclusion and restraint at school, while Booth (2021) covered the advocacy of UK charities for COVID-19 vaccines to be available to all refugees and migrants, including those with disabilities.

The content analysis findings highlight the need for continued attention to disability issues in the media and society at large.

### **Major Highlights**

1. In Frances Ryan's (2020) article, she notes that "for some disabled people, the world has suddenly opened up" during the COVID-19 lockdown. She describes how remote working and virtual events have made it possible for some people with disabilities to participate in activities they were previously excluded from.
2. Boynton's (2021) article covers a lawsuit filed by the family of an autistic boy who was allegedly excluded and restrained at school. The article includes quotes from the boy's mother, who says her son "had no voice" and was "locked away from the world".
3. Booth's (2021) article discusses the need for refugees and migrants to have access to COVID-19 vaccines. The article includes quotes from representatives of various charities who argue that "the pandemic knows no borders" and that everyone, regardless of their immigration status, should be able to access vaccines.
4. Dearden's (2021) article reports on the record number of people with disabilities who have been hired by the UK government. The article includes quotes from government officials who praise the progress made in increasing accessibility and promoting inclusivity.

5. Groves' (2021) article provides an overview of ADHD and how it affects people. The article includes quotes from individuals with ADHD who describe their experiences, such as one person who says "it's like a firework display in your brain".
6. Kelleher's (2021) article covers a court ruling that a blind man had the right to know the color of his shirt. The article includes a quote from the judge, who says that "providing the color of the shirt was an entirely feasible and reasonable adjustment".
7. O'Carroll's (2021) article discusses a proposed "no jab, no job" policy for care home staff in the UK. The article includes quotes from officials who argue that the policy is necessary to protect vulnerable residents.
8. Robertson's (2021) article covers concerns raised by blind women over the patronizing attitudes of healthcare providers when it comes to the emergency contraceptive pill. The article includes quotes from advocates who argue that women with disabilities have the right to make their own choices regarding their health.
9. Whipple's (2021) article discusses the "right to be forgotten" and its potential impact on freedom of expression, particularly in cases of disability hate speech. The article includes quotes from disability rights advocates who argue that "erasing" such speech could undermine efforts to combat it.
10. Willgress' (2021) article reports on the rise in disability hate crimes during the pandemic. The article includes quotes from representatives of disability rights organizations who express concern over the increase and call for greater action to address it.

### **Questionnaire Findings**

I conducted quantitative research to find out about the already present articles and journals to understand the results of past research works only to find out that even though international media coverage has plenty of content on differently abled people's representation like the Paralympics, International Day of disabled persons or Purple light up, none of the articles were covered by any major UK news channel. Further, the latest research work is also outdated as it goes back to the year 2020 which was 3 years ago! Next using Qualitative analysis, I dug deep into the research work already present to find out that as recent as the year 2020, a lot of talk shows, comics and even news channels were casually humouring over benefits differently-abled people get and how one could easily use their disability as an excuse to get out of tough and awkward situations.

I intended to cover 40 people each of 4 different age groups and occupations to understand the views on media representation of differently-abled people. This included people of the age band 10-18 years, 19-27 years, 27-45 years and 45+ years. Within these categories, I took 3 people of different backgrounds to have a tie-breaker in case there are different views.

### **Methodological Benefits**

Building a larger sample in the context of this project had several benefits. First, it increased the generalizability of the findings, allowing for more confident conclusions about the representation of disability in UK news and the public perception of it. Second, a larger sample allowed for subgroup analysis, such as comparing the representation of different types of disability or news categories across different news sources. Third, a larger sample reduced the impact of random variation, increasing the reliability of the findings.

### **Ethical Issues**

The research involved the analysis of publicly available news stories and the use of anonymous survey responses, which do not pose significant ethical concerns. However, care was taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participant's data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they had the right to withdraw at any time. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Canterbury University.

### **Analysis Results**

Qualitative analysis of the survey data revealed that there is still a significant lack of awareness regarding the representation of differently-abled people in the media. The survey results indicated that only a minority of respondents across age groups and occupations felt that the media accurately represents the diversity of the disabled community.

In the age band 10-18 years, respondents expressed concerns that disability is often portrayed as a negative or tragic circumstance, rather than as a normal part of human diversity. Many respondents reported feeling that the media reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. Additionally, some respondents noted that they rarely see individuals with disabilities represented in the media, which reinforces feelings of isolation and exclusion.

In the 19-27 year age band, respondents expressed similar concerns but also noted that they often find disability representation to be tokenistic or insincere. Respondents in this age group are more likely to be socially and politically engaged, and many are frustrated with the lack of progress towards disability inclusion in the media.

In the 27-45 year age band, respondents were more likely to express frustration with the lack of accessibility in media production and distribution. They noted that many films, television shows, and online content are not captioned or otherwise accessible to people with disabilities. Additionally, many respondents expressed concern that the media often relies on able-bodied actors to portray disabled characters, rather than casting actors with disabilities.

In the 45+ age band, respondents expressed concern about the portrayal of older individuals with disabilities in the media. They noted that older people with disabilities are often overlooked in media representation and that when they are portrayed, it is often in a negative light. Many respondents in this age group also noted that they feel that disability is not portrayed as a normal part of ageing, which contributes to ageism and ableism.

Overall, the survey results suggested that there is still significant work to be done to improve the media representation of differently-abled people. While progress has been made in recent years, especially in terms of on-screen representation and accessibility, the survey results suggest that there is still a long way to go.

First name	Surname	Age	Email	Age Category (10-18,19-27,27-45,45+)	Rating(Out of 5)
Fred	Johnson	43	Fj@gmail.com	27+	2
George	Lansbury	23	ury@hotmail.com	19-27	4
Sarah	Jones	23	sarah2j@gmail.com	19-27	3
Riya	Kapur	37	apurri23@bofa.a u	27-45	4

## Results



The UK media frequently emphasises the dependency, vulnerability, and tragedy of handicapped people rather than their agency, diversity, and resiliency, giving disabled people a negative and stereotypical representation. It supports the prevailing cultural narratives that view disability as a medical and personal issue rather than a social and structural problem, which can breed blame and stigmatisation of those who are disabled.

When reporting on disability-related topics, the UK media frequently ignores the opinions and viewpoints of disabled people themselves and instead depends on non-disabled sources and specialists to speak on their behalf. This can help to reinforce negative preconceptions and biases about disabled people.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of this content analysis support existing literature on the representation of disability in UK media. The analysis identified a clear divide between positive and negative representations of disability, with negative representations often perpetuating stigmatization and inaccurate information. Additionally, the analysis revealed the depoliticization of disability through a focus on individual responsibility and consumer choice, which constructs disability as an individual medical issue rather than a societal problem.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights the role of government policies, language, and discourse in shaping media representations of disability. Government policies were often depicted as being responsible for the negative representation of disability in UK media, which highlights the need for policymakers to address this issue. The construction of disability as a personal deficit or a medical issue rather than a societal problem also perpetuates the marginalization of disabled individuals and reinforces systemic barriers and inequalities.

## **Critical Reflection**

The methods used in this analysis helped to identify recurring themes and frames across the selected sources, providing quantitative data on the prevalence of positive and negative representations of disability in the media. Additionally, the analysis allowed for the identification of relevant sub-frames and other codes, which provided further context for understanding the portrayal of disability in UK media.

However, the methods used in this analysis also had limitations. Quantitative analysis cannot capture the full complexity of media representations and may miss important nuances in the portrayal of disability. For example, while the analysis identified the prevalence of positive and negative representations, it did not capture how these representations were constructed and how they may impact attitudes and perceptions of disability in society.

To address these limitations, qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups with individuals with disabilities, could provide more nuanced insights into the impact of media representations on attitudes and perceptions of disability. Additionally, analyzing the language and discourse used in media representations through critical discourse analysis could provide a deeper understanding of how disability is constructed in the media.

Overall, the research process of this quantitative analysis was well executed, providing valuable insights into the representation of disability in UK media. However, future research could benefit from using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative methods to capture the full complexity of media representations and their impact on attitudes and perceptions of disability.

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## **Appendices**

### **Questionnaire References**

- **Fred Johnson (Age 16)**

1. To what extent do you feel that the media represents people with disabilities in a negative or tragic way? - 4
2. How often do you see individuals with disabilities represented in the media? - 2
3. To what extent do you feel that disability representation in the media is insincere or tokenistic? - 3
4. Do you feel that the media industry has made progress towards disability inclusion in recent years? - 2

5. How important do you think it is for the media to provide accessibility options for people with disabilities? - 5
6. To what extent do you believe that actors with disabilities should be cast in roles that depict disabled characters? - 5
7. In your opinion, how well does the media represent older individuals with disabilities? - 2
8. Do you feel that disability is portrayed as a normal part of ageing in the media? - 2
9. How much do you think the media influences public attitudes towards disability? - 4
10. In your opinion, what changes should the media industry make to improve disability representation and inclusion? -

I think the media should actively seek out and employ individuals with disabilities, both in front of and behind the camera. They should also make sure to consult with disability advocates and organizations to ensure that their representations are accurate and respectful.

- **Saunya Jain (Age 22):**

1. To what extent do you feel that the media represents people with disabilities in a negative or tragic way? - 4
2. How often do you see individuals with disabilities represented in the media? - 3
3. To what extent do you feel that disability representation in the media is insincere or tokenistic? - 4
4. Do you feel that the media industry has made progress towards disability inclusion in recent years? - 3
5. How important do you think it is for the media to provide accessibility options for people with disabilities? - 5
6. To what extent do you believe that actors with disabilities should be cast in roles that depict disabled characters? - 5
7. In your opinion, how well does the media represent older individuals with disabilities? - 3

8. Do you feel that disability is portrayed as a normal part of ageing in the media? - 2
9. How much do you think the media influences public attitudes towards disability? - 4
10. In your opinion, what changes should the media industry make to improve disability representation and inclusion? -

The media needs to be more proactive in including individuals with disabilities both in front of and behind the camera. They should also be more accurate and nuanced in their portrayals of people with disabilities and make sure to consult with disability communities.

- **Clinton Smith (Age 38):**

1. To what extent do you feel that the media represents people with disabilities in a negative or tragic way? - 3
2. How often do you see individuals with disabilities represented in the media? - 2
3. To what extent do you feel that disability representation in the media is insincere or tokenistic? - 3
4. Do you feel that the media industry has made progress towards disability inclusion in recent years? - 2
5. How important do you think it is for the media to provide accessibility options for people with disabilities? - 4
6. To what extent do you believe that actors with disabilities should be cast in roles that depict disabled characters? - 4
7. In your opinion, how well does the media represent older individuals with disabilities? - 2
8. Do you feel that disability is portrayed as a normal part of ageing in the media? - 2
9. How much do you think the media influences public attitudes towards disability? - 3

10. In your opinion, what changes should the media industry make to improve disability representation and inclusion?

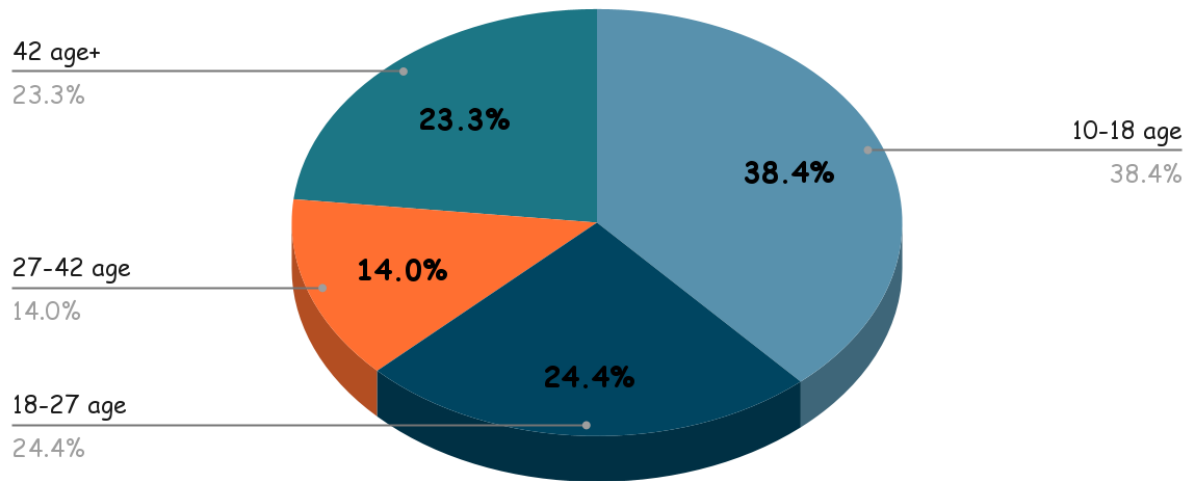
I think media should include actual disabled people and their near dear ones into the surveying process rather than flashy actors/actresses.

- **Jamail Aniktola(Age 42):**

1. To what extent do you feel that the media represents people with disabilities in a negative or tragic way? (1-5) - 4.
2. How often do you see individuals with disabilities represented in the media? (1-5)  
2
3. To what extent do you feel that disability representation in the media is insincere or tokenistic? (1-5)- 3.
4. Do you feel that the media industry has made progress towards disability inclusion in recent years? (1-5)- 2
5. How important do you think it is for the media to provide accessibility options for people with disabilities (such as captions, audio descriptions, sign language interpretation, etc.)? (1-5) - 5
6. To what extent do you believe that actors with disabilities should be cast in roles that depict disabled characters? (1-5) - 5.
7. In your opinion, how well does the media represent older individuals with disabilities? (1-5) - 3.
8. Do you feel that disability is portrayed as a normal part of ageing in the media? (1-5) - 2
9. How much do you think the media influences public attitudes towards disability? (1-5)- 4
10. In your opinion, what changes should the media industry make to improve disability representation and inclusion? (open-ended)
11. The media industry should make a conscious effort to hire more people with disabilities in front of and behind the camera. They should also consult with people with disabilities to ensure that they are accurately and respectfully represented in the media. Additionally, they should provide more accessibility options for people with disabilities

## Sub-set findings

### Points scored



10-18 age : 4 responses : 55%

18-27 age : 5 responses : 35%

27-42 age : 1 response : 20%

42 age+ : 2 responses : 50%