

Tiktokers and disability. Entertainment, inclusion and dissemination of values among Spanish-speaking youth

Tiktokers y discapacidad. Entretenimiento, inclusión y difusión de valores entre los jóvenes de habla hispana

Tiktokers e deficiência. Entretenimento, inclusão e difusão de valores entre os jovens de língua espanhola

Inés Méndez-Majuelos^{1*} 

Pilar José López López^{2**} 

Maritza Sobrados-León^{3***} 

¹ University of Sevilla (US), España

² University Rey Juan Carlos (URJC), Madrid, España

³ University of Sevilla (US), España

* Professor, Department of Journalism II

** Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Corporate Communication, Faculty of Communication Sciences

*** Professor, Department of Journalism II

Received: 31/03/2023; Revised: 08/05/2023; Accepted: 20/09/2023; Published: 08/11/2023

Translation to English: Charles Edmond Arthur

To cite this article: Méndez-Majuelos, Inés; López, Pilar José; & Sobrados-León, Maritza (2023). Tiktokers and disability. Entertainment, inclusion and dissemination of values among Spanish-speaking youth. ICONO 14. *Scientific Journal of Communication and Emerging Technologies*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v21i2.2026>



Abstract

Young people use social networks and information technology as tools for their education and to interact with their environment. People with disabilities, especially the youngest, have found social networks to be a way of communicating with people of their own age, as well as a means of letting them know how they lead their daily lives. They also use these networks to share the problems they face in coping with the world around them and to find their place in society. This article presents the results of research into how Spanish-speaking youth with a disability use TikTok for self-portrayal, with the aim of discovering whether they use their posts for entertainment, or as a powerful tool to normalise the representation of their disability, so that it can be seen as merely another aspect of the diversity of life. Through a descriptive methodology, the authors have carried out a content analysis based on a sample of 180 videos created by the nine tiktokers with disabilities who have the most followers. The results indicate that TikTok is a platform with resources and tools of great interest to users with disabilities, where content that reflects inclusion, and even advocacy for their disability can be found, with an approach based on entertainment.

Keywords: TikTok; Spanish-speaking youth; disability; integration; entertainment; interaction

Resumen

Los jóvenes utilizan las redes sociales y las tecnologías de la información como herramientas para su formación y para relacionarse con su entorno. Las personas con discapacidad, especialmente los más jóvenes, han encontrado en las redes sociales un espacio para comunicarse con personas de su edad y hacerles llegar cómo viven su día a día, los problemas para desenvolverse en el mundo que habitan y hacerse un hueco en nuestra sociedad. Este artículo muestra los resultados de una investigación sobre cómo los jóvenes hispanohablantes con algún tipo de discapacidad recurren la red social TikTok para su autorrepresentación, con el objetivo de conocer si utilizan sus publicaciones para el entretenimiento o como un potente escaparate para normalizar la representación de su discapacidad como un aspecto más de la diversidad de la vida cotidiana. A través de una investigación de tipo descriptiva se realiza un análisis de contenido de una muestra de 180 vídeos de los 9 usuarios con discapacidad con más seguidores. Los resultados indican que Tiktok es una plataforma con unos recursos y herramientas de gran interés para los usuarios con discapacidad, donde se pueden encontrar contenidos de carácter inclusivo, e incluso reivindicativo, de su discapacidad, y un enfoque basado en el entretenimiento.

Palabras clave: TikTok; jóvenes hispanohablantes; discapacidad; integración; entretenimiento; interacción

Resumo

Os jovens utilizam as redes sociais e as tecnologias de informação como ferramentas para a sua formação e para interagir com o seu meio. As pessoas com deficiência, principalmente os mais jovens, têm encontrado nas redes sociais um espaço para comunicar com pessoas da sua idade e prejudicar a forma como vivem o seu dia-adia, os problemas para funcionar no mundo em que habitam e ganhar um lugar na nossa sociedade. Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma investigação sobre como jovens falantes de espanhol com algum tipo de deficiência usam a rede social TikTok para sua auto-representação, com o objetivo de saber se eles usam suas publicações para entretenimento ou como uma vitrine poderosa para normalizar o exibição de sua deficiência como mais um aspecto da diversidade da vida cotidiana. Por meio de pesquisa descritiva, é realizada uma análise de conteúdo de uma amostra de 180 videos dos 9 usuários com deficiência com mais seguidores. Os resultados indicam que o TikTok é uma plataforma com recursos e ferramentas de grande interesse para usuários com deficiência, onde podem encontrar conteúdos de caráter inclusivo, e até mesmo de reivindicação, de sua deficiência, e uma abordagem baseada no entretenimento.

Palavras-chave: TikTok; jovens falantes de espanhol; incapacidade; integração; entretenimento; interação

1. Introduction

Approximately 10% of the Spanish population suffers some kind of disability (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, 2020. [National Institute of Statistics], while in Europe one in four adults is disabled (Council of the European Union, 2022). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of persons with disabilities comprises 14.7% of the population (World Bank Group, 2021). However, traditional media have not always displayed neither interest nor sufficient sensitivity toward these groups, despite these outlets being considered “effective instruments of collective awareness” (Martín-Herrera, 2007), with an undisputed ability to influence public opinion (Berrio, 2000; Lippmann, 2003; Terán & Aguilar, 2018).

Martín-Herrera (2007) reviewed the evolution of the media's coverage of disability. From the late 19th century until about the Second World War, disability was portrayed in the media as a tragedy that aroused feelings of pity and discrimination.

A positive change in this portrayal took place when a new attitude was adopted by news programmes in the 1950s and 60s of the past century. Moreover, from the 1980s up to the present time, a more favourable type of coverage has prevailed, focusing on the social and professional integration of people with disabilities.

Benavides-Delgado (2010) has observed two media approaches that coexist in the media for making disability more visible. The first began at the end of the 20th century, which

aimed at highlighting the difference between what is normal and what is not, with a focus on integration. This discourse has evolved, partly due to the relationship between disability organisations and the media, which have become more professional. This has resulted in overcoming a lack of knowledge and sensationalist coverage (Barriga, 2008; Vázquez-Barrio et al., 2021).

In fact, the very terms used to label people with disabilities “pre-empt a lower value for society” (Vega & Martín, 1999, p.113). Thus, he stresses the importance of language in structuring reality (García, 2006), which is essential for changing “the ways of naming this group, integrating new content, and avoiding certain topics and censored terms” (Fernández-Cid, 2010, p.108).

The next developmental phase was geared toward approaching disability as merely another aspect of the diversity of everyday life, a discourse that appeared at the end of the first decade of the current century, which started to incorporate social networks as a component of change (Rodríguez-Fuentes & García- Guzmán, 2009; Suriá, 2012). At that point, the diversifying factor coexisted with the previous model based on the differences involved (Benavides-Delgado, 2010).

This coexistence of two ways of dealing with disability explains the fact that even today there is still room for improvement in the journalistic approach to this issue, although people with disabilities have gained visibility and prominence in the news in recent years. Nevertheless, discourse that is stereotyped, biased and sensationalist lingers on (Vázquez-Barrio et al., 2021).

Thus, studies published on this subject have shown renewed interest in the ways that people with disabilities have been portrayed in communication studies over the years, and have done so from the perspective of those involved, calling for specific communication campaigns to advocate their situation. In this way, they can be treated with the maximum level of equality (Utray et al., 2010; Vázquez-Barrio et al., 2021). Furthermore, media professionals themselves must also take responsibility for their approach, in which the egalitarian coverage of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, has not yet been standardised (Cebrián Herreros, 2010; Zalbidea-Bengoa et al., 2012). Literature regarding the image of disability in the media is more extensive, where the difference in coverage between the more sensationalist local press and the rigorous national outlets is reflected. Nevertheless, in both cases disability is usually displayed in the society or events sections of these spaces, where people with disabilities (PwD) are portrayed as not having a voice. Moreover, the image of their real situation is distorted (Barriga, 2008; Fernández-Cid, 2010; López-Sánchez et al., 2020; Soto-Rosales, 2015).

The emergence of the Internet, followed by the new media, platforms and other communication models have had a positive impact on the discourse involving the normalisation of disability, which is due to the expansion of the previously limited geographical space, and the possibility of interacting with a larger number of people.

However, “it is not simply a question of greater visibility. It is also a matter of conveying an image of disability adjusted to reality, which is free of stereotypes, prejudice, paternalistic attitudes, and negative connotations” (Balas, 2007, p. 316).

The most recent studies have shown that the expansion of social media, together with the advantages they offer for a more dynamic communicative response among participants, have generated a solid foundation of research that has delved into the changes produced by these networks in disseminating information about disability, especially among young people. However, despite the popularity of TikTok, there are very few studies regarding the presence of disability on this social network (Bonilla-del-Río et al., 2022; Cornú et al., 2022; Duval et al., 2021; Huang & Wang, 2023; Olvera et al, 2021; Terradez- Álvarez, 2020). Nevertheless, among the entire body of research that exists, there is unanimous agreement that social media and the new video platforms are tools that are accessible and easy-to-use, with a strong impact on people with disabilities in allowing them to display their needs and potential to all of their followers, thereby heightening awareness.

2. TikTok as a model of social representation

TikTok is a multimedia network that is widely used by young people for leisure and entertainment. It offers people with disabilities the option of establishing relationships with other members of society based on communication that proceeds from the environment of PwD themselves, as well as their interests and needs from their own individual perspective, rather than from an outside point of view that could distort the perception of this group.

According to Cohen-Almagor (2011), ever since the emergence of social networks in 2003 with Mypace, the Internet has been filled with the contributions of millions of users seeking to socialise with others by exchanging a plethora of information, ideas, and comments. TikTok is a video-based social network created in 2017 by the Chinese company ByteDance, which is intended for exclusive use on mobile phones. As of January 2023, this social network had a potential reach of 1.051 million users over the age of 18, according to company itself (Silverio, 2023). Thus, Tiktok has become the fastest growing network, reaching 40% of users aged 18-24 worldwide in 2022, with a much higher presence in Latin America, Asia and Africa than in the United States or Northern Europe (Newman, 2022).

The success of TikTok is due to its technology and content. With regard to the latter, the authors of this study have found that based on a conceptual narrative that is very limited, yet unlimited in terms of topics, a high level of virality can be achieved. In other words, such narratives can be spread exponentially, thereby “infecting” social networks with what could be called an “ideological code” disguised behind an informative or entertaining appearance (Dafonte, 2014; Rushkoff, 1996), which is further enhanced by applying algorithms that generate a filter bubble with similar content (Pariser, 2011). Virality is achieved when the content of a social network manages to identify with factors such as emotion, the need

for acceptance, consumption habits, and the transmission of ideas and opinions (Picazo, 2016). It can also be attained when some benefit is sought, whether economic, informative, emotional, or propagandistic (Dobele et al., 2007; Luque-Ortíz, 2022; Sarmiento-Guede et al., 2017; Teixeira, 2012).

These aspects can undoubtedly be considered of great importance in understanding the way in which young people with physical or mental disabilities confront and make use of social networks (Olvera et al., 2021; Pretorius et al., 2022), specifically TikTok. As such, groups that have been excluded from the ideal of social representation, which has been generally based on either beauty, or a particular skill in some type of sport, have found social networks to be a platform from which they can display a positive self-portrayal that enables prejudice to be broken down, giving rise to visibility, consciousness-raising, and sensitivity (Mañas-Viniegra et al., 2022).

The explosion of content creation on TikTok during the COVID 19 pandemic is striking, as it seems to have been a reaction to the reality that was being experienced worldwide at the time (Olivares-García & Author, 2020). This surge offered an opportunity for people with disabilities to connect with their environment in a way that was more proactive compared to the period preceding the health crisis (Arthur, 2023), which advocated not only their disability but, above all, their abilities and rights.

Thus, TikTok is clearly much more than just a mobile application for sharing short videos. It mirrors a lifestyle. It is a way of seeing and relating to the world, as well as a display of the consumption habits of a community of millions of young people around the world (Herrman, 2019), where users themselves are the managers and auditors of the network (Rodríguez-García and Magdalena-Benedito, 2016). Moreover, for the users addressed in this study, TikTok is a space for advocacy, inclusion, the development of social relations and, naturally, a domain for entertainment and enjoyment as well (Duval et al., 2021; Huang & Wang, 2023).

Based on the increasing number of videos on TikTok that address disability, the overall objectives of the present study are as follows:

- RO1.** Identify the most active tiktokers with disabilities on this platform, and the interactions they generate.
- RO2.** Analyse the videos that people with disabilities have uploaded to TikTok in order to identify the most recurrent content in these videos, in addition to the objectives pursued by the creators.
- RO3.** Determine whether TikTok is a suitable platform for this issue, and whether it is being used to enhance the visibility of PWD.

Based on these overall objectives, the following specific research questions have been posed:

RQ1. Do TikTok users with a disability receive interaction and follow-up from other users of the platform? If so, in what way?

RQ2. Is the content generated by these tiktokers oriented toward integration, recognition, and entertainment, or a mix of all three?

RQ3. Is TikTok a suitable tool for allowing people with disabilities to make their daily lives more visible and raise social awareness?

Based on these questions, this study is focused mainly on discovering whether disabled people use their publications on this social network solely for entertainment, or as a powerful tool for normalising the portrayal of their disability and depicting the impediment as merely another aspect of the diversity of life.

3. Materials and methodology used

This paper has used a descriptive methodology. The object of study is the self-representation of Spanish-speaking tiktokers with a disability.

In order to study both the media and the purpose for which the selected users develop their stories, a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis was chosen (Aguaded et al., 2022), with seven variables along with their respective categories. The validity of using both procedures is supported by Bardin (1986), who states that although they do not share the same field of action, the quantitative approach obtains descriptive data using a statistical method that appears to be more objective and reliable, while a qualitative analysis is more flexible and allows inferences to be made about the relationships between variables. Moreover, certain non-frequency indicators, such as presence or absence, enable the development of a deductive process, which can be equally productive, and even more so than a quantitative indicator.

The sample extraction and analysis was carried out in three phases:

Phase 1: A search was conducted of Spanish-speaking tiktokers with a disability on this social network. The exploration was carried out from different terminals, with the application having been recently installed in order to avoid distortions resulting from its algorithm. To carry out the search, key words were used with the main disabilities listed in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), provided by the World Health Organisation (2001).

The search and selection of the sample was conducted from 1 December 2022 to 14 January 2023, which yielded 60 tiktokers. An analysis of the profiles of those users with the most followers was then carried out, resulting in a final sample of nine tiktokers.

Table 1. Selected sample of Tiktokers

Avatars	Followers	Disability
@alberto_boniato	916.8 K	Physical disability
@brianeitor2002	2.0 M	Degenerative muscular atrophy
@desivila98	863.4 K	Physical disability
@gutavotocame	7.2 M	Autism
@soy_sarah_almagro	732.6 K	Physical disability
@tenientedance	1.2 M	Degenerative disease
@adrianamaciasoficial	1.2 M	Physical disability
@Alanelruedas	1 M	Reduced mobility
@selinamaravilla	866.4 K	Cerebral palsy

Source: created by the authors.

In Table 1, the following indicators can be seen: username or avatar on the TikTok social network; the number of followers they had as of 14 January 2023; and a short description of their disability.

Of these network accounts, a total of 180 stories were analysed, which were composed of the last 20 posted by each tiktoker, as this number was considered sufficient for observing the patterns of activity of these users on the social network.

Selecting a larger sample would not have provided additional information capable of enhancing the research, as all the individuals examined use a continuous strategy over time.

Phase 2: Once the sample was obtained, the 180 selected videos were viewed. For the coding of the sample, a table was created with seven analysis variables, which were applied by using a Google form.

Table 2. Analysis variables

No. of followers	Interaction	Content	Values transmitted	Narrative resources	Use of collaborators: Yes or No	People who collaborated	Main objective
	Likes	Talks about disability	Overcoming obstacles	Humour	Yes	Friends	Advocacy
	Shared	Does not talk about disability	Integration	Music	Yes	Family	Divulgement
	Comments		Tolerance	Captions			Entertainment
	Hashtags		Other	Fashion			Other
				Effects			
				Twitch			
				Other			

Source: created by the authors.

The selection of variables was based on works such as those carried out by Figuero Benítez et al. (2022) and Bonilla del Río et al. (2022), which were adapted to the work in progress, as well as the creation of specific variables after viewing the videos, which were validated with a pre-test.

Phase 3: All the selected stories were analysed, and all of the keywords and hashtags used to position their videos on the platform were monitored. After coding, the data was entered into the Excel statistical analysis programme, and data visualisation was carried out using Gephi and Datawrapper software.

The combination of these tools the most active disabled tiktokers on the platform to be identified, thus achieving **RO1** and responding to **RQ1**. This allowed the authors to identify another of the fundamental aspects of the qualitative analysis with regard to **RO2** and **RQ2**, which are the characteristics and objectives that lead such users to create content on TikTok. It also enabled the researchers to determine the resources used by the tiktokers in creating their videos, as well as the role played by such resources in producing meaning. Finally, for the reasons stated above, this methodology enabled the authors to achieve **RO3** and answer **RQ3**, thereby allowing them to assess the suitability, effectiveness, and impact of this social network on tiktokers with disabilities.

4. Results

Once the sample was selected and the content analysis was applied to the selected variables, the results of the analysis were grouped into three categories. Firstly, the authors were able to confirm the level of recognition and impact of the content produced by tiktokers with disabilities based on the number of followers, Likes, comments, and types of tags. Secondly, the objectives and values pursued by the users when posting their videos were assessed. Thirdly, the authors examined the ways in which the resources and tools available on TikTok are used, as well as the links between TikTok and other social networks or video platforms.

4.1 Recognition and impact on disability

The tiktokers analysed do not talk about their disability in all their videos. They only do so in 68 of the 180 stories analysed (36.11%), compared to 112 (62.22%) in which they do not mention their disability (Table 3). However, videos dealing with disability received the most Likes (Table 4). When tiktokers talk about their disability as just another aspect of their daily lives, as in the case of @alberto_boniato or @gutavotocame, they normalise a situation that would not be so at first sight, thereby helping to reinforce a positive response from their followers.

Table 3. TikTok stories on disability

Avatars	Disability mentioned - No	Disability mentioned - Yes
@alberto_boniato	6	13
@brianeitor2002	20	0
@desivila98	18	2
@gutavotocame	9	10
@soy_sarah_almagro	9	12
@tenientedance	16	4
@adrianamaciasoficial	17	3
@Alanelruedas	11	9
@selinamaravilla	9	11

Source: created by the authors.

With the exception of @brianeitor2002, who does not mention his disability in any of his stories, @desivila98 and @adrianamaciasoficial are the ones who talk about disability the least, with 2 and 3 videos, respectively. Along the same lines, both tiktokers also receive the fewest Likes from their videos in relation to their disability.

Table 4. Likes versus content regarding disability

	Disability mentioned - No	Disability mentioned - Yes
@adrianamaciasoficial	96,691	18,666
@alanelruedas	45,411	858,462
@alberto_boniato	22,605	5,030,350
@brianeitor2003	120,399	0
@desivila98	310,232	1,652
@gutavotocame	2,247,100	2,497,100
@selinamaravilla	62,794	435,001
@soy_sarah_almagro	2,192	30,572
@tenientedance	530,610	22,573,021

Source: created by the authors.

In this regard, the content of tiktoker @gutavotocame showing the daily life of his autistic brother is remarkable, as he delegates a voice to the person with the disability, in which the impediment and the environment surrounding it take centre stage, rather than the tiktoker himself.

Table 5. The maximum and minimum number of Likes obtained by a single video for each tiktoker

Avatars	Maximum number of Likes	Minimum number of Likes
@tenientedance	2,500,000	110
@alberto_boniato	1,700,000	731
@gutavotocame	793,600	63,000
@alanelruedas	536,500	520
@desivila98	271,300	117
@selinamaravilla	241,700	1,300
@adrianamaciasoficial	31,400	827
@brianeitor2002	28,100	799
@soy_sarah_almagro	22,600	98

Source: created by the authors

The content with the most impact can vary according to subject matter. In fact, it can fluctuate from being highly complex to what might be considered frivolous. Thus, some videos focus on the disability of the protagonist, along with its causes and consequences, as well as the influence of the impediment on their daily lives and its relationship to their environment. Other videos reflect on which disability would present less of an impediment in achieving success in romance. Still other content with a strong impact on users of this social network are those that provide testimony of overcoming social discrimination related to their disability, or in which the tiktokers interact directly with their followers. On the other hand, the use of dark humour, advertising, or simply testing the application's filters appears to generate discomfort and disinterest and is therefore often penalised in terms of impact among followers.

Comments are another way in which tiktokers interact with their followers. The 180 stories analysed received a total of 102,486 comments, and a close correlation was found throughout the sample between the videos that received the most Likes and those with the most comments.

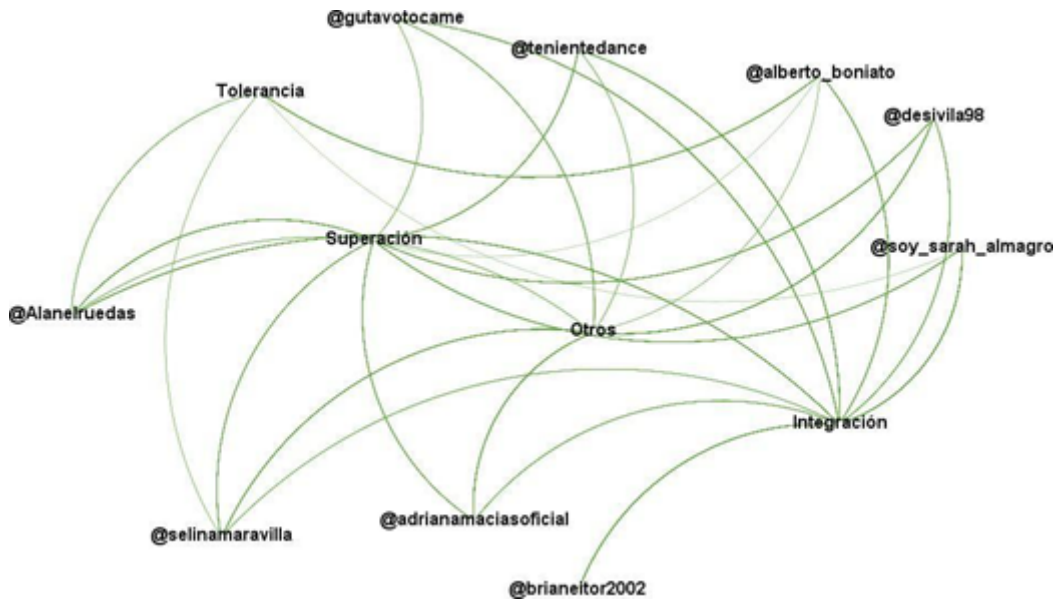
Table 6. Maximum and minimum number of comments obtained from a single TikTok video

Avatars	Largest number of comments made about a tiktok video	Smallest number of comments made about a tiktok video
@tenientedance	39,000	2
@gutavotocame	3,797	411
@Alanelruedas	2,765	5
@selinamaravilla	1,802	15
@desivila98	1,769	1
@adrianamaciasoficial	1,575	8
@alberto_boniato	2,980	12
@brianeitor2002	238	13
@soy_sarah_almagro	139	3

Source: created by the authors.

On the other hand, an analysis of the tags shows the way in which users incorporate the terms selected in Figure 1, with *#parati* standing out, followed by *#inspirar* and *#humor*. It has been noted that there is no common pattern in the selection or creation of hashtags. Despite the existence of common features, it is striking that all the influencers have their own communication style, which is expressed when inserting tags in their publications.

Figure 2. Values transmitted in the tiktoker publications



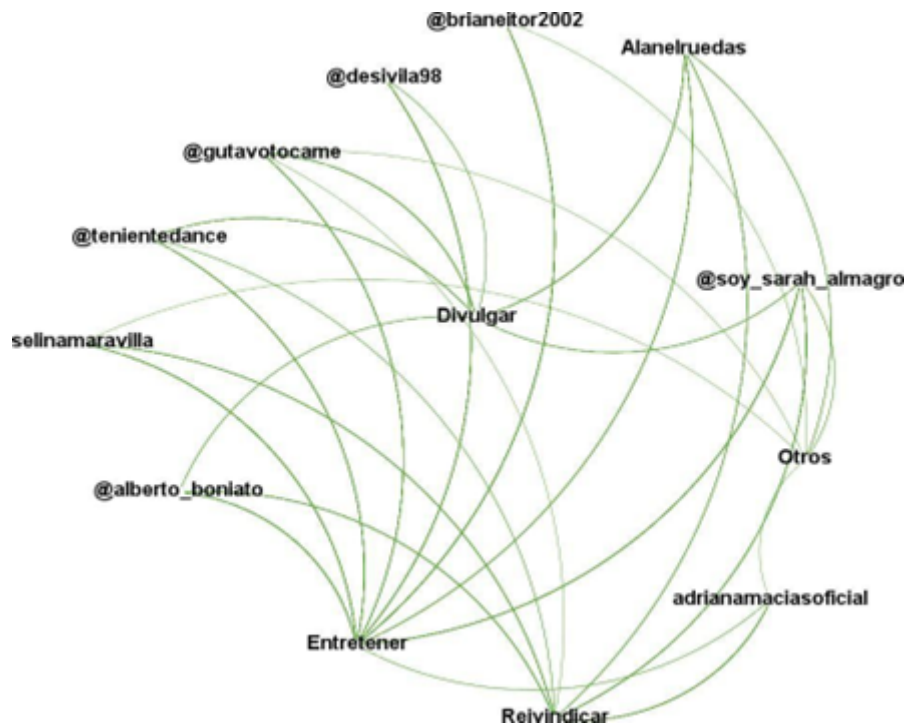
Source: created by the authors using Gephi software.

The majority of the users analysed introduce other people into their stories. Only 22% of tiktokers do not make use of this resource, compared to 88% who do so. These guests are mostly friends and family members.

With regard to the objectives pursued by the tiktokers in their videos (Figure 3), of the 180 studied examined, 107 mostly seek to entertain users, while 40 try to advocate for disability, 24 attempt to divulge information, and 9 have other purposes. Stories of advocacy are those in which tiktokers talk about the problems they face in their daily lives as a result of their disability. Informative narratives are mainly those in which users explain their disability or the disease that led to the impediment. As entertainment is TikTok's primary objective, the network's amusing approach is also present in videos and stories that show disability. In the study at hand, the amount of technical resources provided by TikTok enhances the impact of this content, which can be seen in the following section. While the main objectives of entertainment, advocacy, and dissemination are seen as unique in most of the stories, it has been observed that in some videos these goals are combined in order to have a stronger impact on followers.

In the category known as Other, the following goals have been aggregated: to advertise products used by the tiktoker; to inspire; motivate; normalise disability; and recall situations or people.

Figure 3. Objectives pursued by the influencers



Source: created by the authors using Gephi software.

4.3. Tools and resources provided by TikTok to make disability more visible

TikTok offers a variety of technical resources to make content more eye-catching.

Of these, the most commonly used features are music, captions, humour, and effects. As seen in Table 7, music is present in 91 out of the 180 stories, captions in 90, and humour in 69. Effects are used in 36 of the 180 stories; the clip from the Twitch channel appears in 20 videos; fashion is seen in only 2; and in 44 of the stories, there is a variety of filters, videos, photos and recordings, which have been classified as Other.

Linking TikTok with other platforms is only evident in the content of one of the profiles analysed, specifically @brianeitor2003, who shares videos from this social network on the Twitch platform, and does so in all of his stories. Although this occurs in only one of the nine tiktokers analysed, it confirms that social media and video platforms are becoming highly effective tools that are preferred by certain users for interacting with their environment and having a stronger impact with the stories they tell.

Table 7. Resources used by influencers in their stories

	Music	Captions	Humour	Effects	Twitch Channel	Fashion	Other
@adrianamaciasoficial	7	0	4	3	0	0	2
@alanelruedas	8	6	11	4	0	1	7
@alberto_boniato	10	20	9	0	0	0	0
@brianeitor2003	0	0	0	0	20	0	0
@desivila98	18	14	12	7	0	1	10
@gutavotocame	12	20	1	0	0	0	0
@selinamaravilla	7	4	11	1	0	0	1
@soy_sarah_almagro	12	7	3	14	0	0	10
@tenientedance	17	19	18	7	0	0	14

Source: created by the authors.

In short, the narrative resources offered by the platform, as well as those created by the tiktokers themselves, are highly diverse and widely used for generating and enhancing content. Users of this type of social network, both with and without disabilities, know how to exploit all the tools within their reach in order to attract an increasingly large audience, thereby gaining not only followers, but more interaction as well.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study has revealed that social networks that are more visual enable users with disabilities to engage in self-representation (Mañas-Viniegra et al., 2022). In addition to the ease of access to these applications from mobile devices at any time of day, and with flat rates that are low-cost (Suriá, 2012), there is a myriad of resources and topics that users can find in such apps, ranging from humour (Busurkina, 2021; Wang, 2020) to fashion and beauty.

Society still has a long way to go in normalising and responding to all the needs and demands of vulnerable groups, including young people with disabilities. On some occasions, disability is adequately addressed in educational or social settings (Criado et al., 2018), providing education based on attitudes and values (Bonilla-del-Río et al., 2022) from a positive point of view (Tollan, 2022), reaching groups which, due to their youth, are no

longer consumers of traditional media (Martín-Herrera, 2007; Utray et al., 2010; Vázquez-Barrio et al., 2021; Zalbidea-Bengoia et al., 2012).

TikTok has become a highly successful and rapidly developing application for an audience of young, hyper-connected, socially-networked, digital prosumers (Ankuash-Kaekat et al., 2021). As such, this study has examined the space that young people with disabilities occupy on this platform, as well as the type and scope of the content they generate, which is used as a tool for communicating with all other users, and for normalising their daily lives.

According to RO1, the tiktokers identified as having some type of disability show a high level of activity and receive a wide variety of interactions. Undoubtedly, among the features and functionalities offered by TikTok to its users, entertainment is first and foremost, along with the possibility of allowing them to rapidly viralise their content. In response to RQ2, this allows tiktokers to obtain a large number of interactions, views, and followers thanks to the ease of access to the tool from mobile devices at any time of day with flat rates that are low-cost, as mentioned above. This is highly appealing to younger users, who have focused their attention on Instagram, Twitch and TikTok. Other benefits include the ease of video production, immediate access, and the quick response from other users.

With regard to RO3 related to content, the analysis shows a capability for adaptation, inclusion, and self-representation of disability, covering all the usual topic options on TikTok, for users with and without disabilities. All types of content based on the representation of values have been identified, most of which focus on entertainment. Among this content, videos have been found that are either humorous or related to fashion, music, videogames, social relations, and even romance. All content is approached from the perspective of integration, with a clear desire to raise awareness and recognition of abilities that are different from those that are normalised by the environment around them. Thus, in response to RQ3, it can be affirmed that TikTok is an effective application for transmitting positive values related to disability, mainly through entertainment-based videos.

Based on the results obtained, the authors have found that TikTok offers multiple options to users with all types of disabilities, as proposed in RO3 and RQ3, especially for increasing the visibility of their message and allowing them to reach a wider and more diverse audience. This can be achieved by using videos related to one of the main objectives of this social network, which is entertainment, yet by transmitting values of tolerance, inclusion and self-improvement.

To conclude, in line with the majority of research that has addressed this platform, it can be confirmed that the content generated on this social network by tiktokers with disabilities has become another communication tool at their disposal, which they can use in their struggle to become integrated into their surroundings. Together with this social network, these users are starting to explore other platforms, such as Twitch, which would be a highly interesting object of study for future research.

Authors' contribution

Inés Méndez-Majuelos: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing-original draft, Supervision and Writing-review and editing. **Pilar José López López:** Formal analysis, Writing-original draft and Writing-review and editing. **Maritza Sobrados-León:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing-original draft and Writing-review and editing.

Acknowledgments

In the selection and coding phase, this research paper was carried out with the collaboration of the statistics team at the Department of Journalism II, Faculty of Communication, University of Sevilla, whose members include the following: Inmaculada Calahorra Jiménez, Virginia Giráldez Gracia, Judit Laguna Fernández, Clara Pérez López, Mario Sánchez Martín, and Andrei Theodor Stamate.

References

- Aguaded-Gómez, José-Ignacio; Vizcaíno-Verdú, Arantxa; Hernando-Gómez, Ángel; & Bonilla-del-Río, Mónica. (2022). Edutokers: Estrategias de éxito y promoción de valores sociales [Data set]. *Redes sociales y ciudadanía*. Ciberculturas para el aprendizaje. Grupo Comunicar. <https://n9.c/1qx40>
- Ankuash-Kaekat, L., Peralta-Herrera, N., & Suquilanda, M. (2021) TikTok en el ocio de los jóvenes. Torrestoukoumidis, Á., De-Santis, A., & Vintimilla-León, D. (Eds). *TikTok: más allá de la hipermedialidad* [online]. Quito: Editorial Abya-Yala, 2021, pp. 33-50. ISBN: 978-9978-10-600-6. <https://doi.org/10.7476/9789978106815.0003>.
- Arthur, Tori-Omega. (2023). Hello Ableds, Is It Vacation Yet?: Disability, Domesticity, and Digital Alchemy During COVID-19. *Persona Studies*, 8(2), 27– 41. <https://doi.org/10.21153/psj2022vol8no2art1644>
- Balas-Lara, Montserrat. (2007). El tratamiento de la discapacidad en los medios de comunicación. En Álvarez Pousa, Lois et al. (coords.), *Comunicación y Discapacidades* (315-320). Pontevedra: Colexio Profesional de Xornalistas de Galicia, Observatorio Galego dos Medios. <https://acortar.link/ZNaojY>
- Bardin, Laurence. (1986). *Análisis de contenido*. Ediciones Akal.
- Barriga, José-Julián. (2008). Imagen social y visibilidad de la discapacidad. En Ledesma, Juan-Antonio (Ed.), *La imagen social de las personas con discapacidad* (15-55). CERMI. <https://n9.cl/niogg>
- Benavides-Delgado, Juan. (2010). Aproximación histórica, en Cebrián-Herreros, Mariano. (Dir.) *Percepción de la imagen de las personas con discapacidad por los profesionales de los medios audiovisuales*. Fundación ONCE, 17-32.
- Berrio, Jordi. (2000). *La comunicación en democracia. Una visión sobre la opinión pública*. Servicio de publicaciones, Universidad de Valencia, Universidad Pompeu Fabra y Universidad Jaume I.
- Bonilla-del-Río, Mónica; Di-Cintio, Antonella & Pérez-Rodríguez, Amor. (2022) Percepción del humor, challenges y discapacidad en TikTok. Aguaded-Gómez, José-Ignacio; Vizcaíno-Verdú, Arantxa;

- Hernando-Gómez, Ángel; & Bonilla-del-Río, Mónica. (coords.) *Redes sociales y ciudadanía: ciberculturas para el aprendizaje*, 325-331. <https://n9.cl/1qx40>
- Busurkina, Irina. (2021). Ethics and values in the digital environment: By the example of parody videos on TikTok. *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies*, 3(3), 374-389. <https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v3i3.137>
- Cebrián-Herreros, Mariano. (2010). *Percepción de la imagen de las personas con discapacidad por los profesionales de los medios audiovisuales*. Fundación Once. Gráficas Marte.
- Cohen-Almagor, Raphael. (2011). Internet history. *International Journal of Technoethics*, 2(2), 45-64. <https://doi.org/10.4018/jte.2011040104>
- Consejo de Unión Europea (2022). *La discapacidad en la UE: datos y cifras*. <https://n9.cl/t4t1r>
- Cornú-Cornu, Ángel; Parra-Flores, Daniela; & Pérez-Domínguez, Miguel-Ángel. (2022) Estrategias para visibilizar a las personas con discapacidad física a través de TikTok. Trabajo final de Licenciatura. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. México. <https://n9.cl/flrj54>
- Criado, Ignacio; Pastor, Vicente; & Villodre, Julián. (2018). Internet y discapacidad. Un análisis de las oportunidades y de los desafíos de las redes sociales digitales en el ámbito de la discapacidad. *Revista Tecnología, Ciencia Y Educación*, (11), 99-117. <https://doi.org/10.51302/tce.2018.225>
- Dafonte, Alberto. (2014). Aproximación teórica al concepto de viralidad desde el punto de vista de la comunicación: Aplicación y repercusiones en los contenidos publicitarios audiovisuales. En VV AA. *El nuevo diálogo social organizaciones, públicos y ciudadanos*. Valencia: Camp Gràfic, 601-612. <https://n9.cl/w9ngg>
- Dobele, Angela; Lindgreen, Adam; Beverland, Michael; Vanhamme, Joëlle; & Van Wijk, Robert. (2007). Why pass on viral messages? Because they connect emotionally. *Business Horizons*, 50(4), 291-304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2007.01.004>
- Duval, Jared; Altarriba-Bertran, Ferran; Chen, Siying; Chu, Melissa; Subramonian, Divya; Wang, Austin; & Isbister, Katherine (2021). Chasing play on TikTok from populations with disabilities to inspire playful and inclusive technology design. In *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1-15. Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445303>
- Fernández-Cid-Enríquez, Matilde. (2010). Medios de comunicación, conformación de imagen y construcción de sentido en relación a la discapacidad. *Política y Sociedad*, 47(1), 105-113. <https://n9.cl/jsyuh>
- Figueroa-Benítez, J.C; Oliveira, J-S & Mancinas-Chávez, R. (2022). TikTok como herramienta de comunicación política de los presidentes iberoamericanos. Aguaded-Gómez, José-Ignacio; Vizcaíno-Verdú, Arantxa; Hernando-Gómez, Ángel; & Bonilla-del-Río, Mónica. (coords.) *Redes sociales y ciudadanía: ciberculturas para el aprendizaje*, 103-113. <https://n9.cl/1qx40>
- García Fernández, Román. (2006). La construcción de la realidad a través del lenguaje. *Eikasía: Revista de Filosofía*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.57027/eikasía.03.660>
- Grupo Banco Mundial (2021). *Inclusión de las personas con discapacidad en América Latina y el Caribe: Un camino hacia el desarrollo sostenible*. <https://n9.cl/hr0m1>
- Herrman, John. (2019). How TikTok Is Rewriting the World - The New York Times. *The New York Times*. <https://n9.cl/9t4wat>
- Huang, Shiwei; & Wang, Yuwei. (2023). How People with Physical Disabilities Can Obtain Social Support through Online Videos: A Qualitative Study in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(3), 2423. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032423>

- INE. (2020). *Encuesta de Discapacidad, Autonomía personal y Situaciones de Dependencia (EDAD). Principales resultados*. Madrid: Instituto Nacional de Estadística. <https://n9.cl/qumg1>
- Lippmann, Walter. (2003). *La opinión pública*. Madrid, Langre.
- López-Sánchez, Gema; Utray-Delgado, Francisco; & Ruiz-Mezcua, Belén. (2020). Representación de la discapacidad en la prensa digital española. *Revista Española de Discapacidad*, 8(2), 33-55. <https://doi.org/10.5569/2340-5104.08.02.02>
- Luque-Ortiz, Sergio. (2022). Millennials y centennials. Dos generaciones de prosumers a través de instagram y de tik tok. *Comunicación y pluralidad en un contexto divergente* / coord. por Álvarez-Chávez, Martha-Patricia; Rodríguez- Garay, Gloria-Olivia & Husted-Ramos, Silvia. 2022, ISBN 978-84-1377-923-2, 116-138
- Mañas-Viniegra, Luis; Llorente-Barroso, Carmen; & López-Cepeda, Ismael. (2022). La auto-representación de las personas con discapacidad en redes sociales. coord. por Álvarez-Chávez, Martha-Patricia; Rodríguez- Garay, Gloria-Olivia & Husted-Ramos, Silvia. (2022) *Comunicación y pluralidad en un contexto divergente*. Colección Conocimiento Contemporáneo. Dykinson S.L. <https://n9.cl/amxj5>
- Martín-Herrera, Inmaculada. (2007). El papel de los medios de comunicación en la imagen social de la discapacidad. *Comunicación y discapacidades: actas do Foro Internacional*, 2007, ISBN 978-84-690-4140-6, 77-86
- Newman, Nic. (2022). Digital News Report 2022. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. <https://n9.cl/2dglld>
- Olivares-García, Francisco-José; & Autora. (2020). Análisis de las principales tendencias aparecidas en TikTok durante el periodo de cuarentena por la Covid-19. *Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud*. 243-252. <https://doi.org/10.20318/recs.2020.5422>
- Olvera, Caroline; Stebbins, Glenn; Goetz, Christopher; & Kompoliti, Katie. (2021). TikTok Tics: A Pandemic within a Pandemic. *Movement Disorders Clinical Practice*, 8: 1200- 1205. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mdc3.13316>
- Organización Mundial de la Salud (2001) Clasificación Internacional del Funcionamiento, de la Discapacidad y de la Salud (CIF) Accesible en: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43360/9241545445_spa.pdf
- Pariser, Eli. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You*. Penguin UK.
- Picazo-Sánchez, Laura. (2016). Narrativas del vídeo viral. 99 claves para un contenido contagioso. *Mediaciones Sociales*, 0(15), 115-132. <https://doi.org/10.5209/meso.54546>
- Pretorius, Claudette; McCashin, Darragh; & Coyle, David. (2022). Mental health professionals as influencers on TikTok and Instagram: What role do they play in mental health literacy and help-seeking?. *Internet interventions*, 30, 100591. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2022.100591>
- Rodríguez-Fuentes, Antonio-Vicente; García-Guzmán, Antonio. (2009). Medios de comunicación y discapacidad: entre la accesibilidad y la interactividad. *Icono 14*, 15: 303-319. <https://n9.cl/52edu>
- Rodríguez-García, Lorena; & Magdalena Benedito, José Rafael. (2016). Perspectiva de los jóvenes sobre seguridad y privacidad en las redes sociales. *Revista ICONO 14. Revista Científica De Comunicación Y Tecnologías Emergentes*, 14(1), 24-49. <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v14i1.885>
- Rushkoff, Douglas. (1996). *Media virus!: hidden agendas in popular culture*. Ballantine Books.
- Sarmiento-Guede, José-Ramón; de-Esteban-Curiel, Javier; & Antonovica, Arta. (2017). La comunicación viral a través de los medios sociales: análisis de sus antecedentes. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 72, 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2017-1154>

- Silverio, Mario. (2023) *Estadísticas de TikTok*. PrimeWEB. <https://n9.cl/wfn0i>.
- Soto-Rosales, Antonio. (2015). Periódicos y discapacidad: conformación de una imagen. *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, 21(2), 1241-1254. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_ESMP.2015.v21.n2.50913
- Suriá-Martínez, Raquel. (2012). Redes sociales online y su utilización para mejorar las habilidades sociales en jóvenes con discapacidad. *Escritos de Psicología* 5, 16– 23. <https://doi.org/10.5231/psy.writ.2012.1809>
- Teixeira, Tales-S. (2012, March). The New Science of Viral Ads. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://n9.cl/d945f>
- Terán-Villegas, Oswaldo-Ramón; & Aguilar-Castro, José-Lisandro. (2018). Modelo del proceso de influencia de los medios de comunicación social en la opinión pública. *Revista Venezolana de Educación. Educere*, 22(71), 179-191. <https://n9.cl/9hyel>
- Terradez-Álvarez, Natalia. (2020). *Tik Tok: una exploración sobre la difusión de los estereotipos sociales*. Trabajo de Fin de Grado. Universidad de Valladolid. <https://n9.cl/9v27h>
- Tollan, Kristen. (2022) Exploring the Development of Disability Identity by Young Creators on Instagram. *Review of Disability Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 4 Special Issue: Disability and Film and Media. <https://n9.cl/eyva1>
- Utray-Delgado, Francisco; Echegaray-Eizaguirre, Lázaro; & Ruiz-Mezcua, Belén. (2010). Actitudes y expectativas del colectivo de personas con discapacidad hacia la televisión. *Pangea: revista de la Red Académica Iberoamericana de Comunicación*, 1(1), 54-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52203/pangea.v1i1.11>
- Vázquez-Barrio, Tamara; Sánchez-Valle, María; & Viñarás-Abad, Mónica. (2021). Percepción de las personas con discapacidad sobre su representación en los medios de comunicación. *Profesional De La información*, 30(1). <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2021.ene.06>
- Vega-Fuente, A., & Martín, R. (1999). Los medios ante la discapacidad: más allá de los estereotipos. *Comunicar*, 12, 111-116. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C12-1999-17>
- Wang, Yunwen. (2020). Humour and camera view on mobile short-form video apps influence user experience and technology-adoption intent, an example of TikTok (DouYin). *Computers in Human Behavior*, 110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106373>
- Zalbidea-Bengoña, Begoña; Pérez-Fuentes, Juan-Carlos; Urrutia-Izaguirre, Santiago; & López-Pérez, Susana. (2012). Los periodistas españoles ante el tratamiento informativo de los grupos minoritarios y desfavorecidos. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 17(2), 457-476. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_ESMP.2011.v17.n2.38125