

Summary

Discourses on disability in social media

Content published in social media is not only informative or entertainment-oriented in character. With time, such media have become the primary source of knowledge about the world, as well as a significant part of the process of developing and shaping certain worldviews of their users. Within the scope of this dissertation, the focus is put on discourses on disability among social media users. Detailed research questions have been formulated to analyze events from the lives of disabled individuals touched upon in conversations, tone of conversation, positive and negative messages conveyed, stereotypes, mechanisms of manipulation and discrimination, traces of ideology, as well as the image of the societal environment that can be observed in those discourses. The analysis carried out covers both statements and graphic materials published in social media.

The gathered materials have been examined by opting for the Critical Discourse Analysis. The assumptions of both critical and post-colonial theories have been taken advantage of to analyze said content. The research outcomes have made it possible to distinguish six major discourse types: discriminative, charitable, affirmative, normative, humorous, and the one considering disability to be a problem to be solved. In all discourses, negative phenomena have been identified, such as stereotype enforcement (sometimes unaware), discriminatory patterns of behavior, or distorting the image of disability – starting from presenting the life of handicapped individuals as a constant misery up to idolizing disability. At the same time, the analyzed content has shown some important and innovative initiatives aiming at dealing with harmful stereotypes and changing the way of perceiving such people in a much more efficient way than it is in the case of traditional media. Social media turn out to be the source of knowledge, medium for sharing one's problems with other, and informing vast groups of individuals about the troublesome nature of disability. Thanks to the said medium, Internet users can grow accustomed to dissimilarity, which results in a greater societal awareness.