



# A STUDY ON DISABILITY REPRESENTATION IN INDIVIDUALLY-CURATED VIDEO CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BY **ESHANA SESHADRI** | AUGUST 2020

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability as “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” The World Bank estimates fifteen percent of the world’s population are specially abled people, a population of approximately one billion. Video-based content curated by individuals and uploaded to platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, and NGOs serves the purpose of informing and normalizing the representation of PWDs. The listed platforms serve the general purpose of highlighting individual content-creators and media hubs, such as Youtube, are the current frontrunners in the mobile streaming market. Author Michael Hartley’s findings from the journal ERIC on digital media education and advocacy found that “exposure to first-person narratives of disability via social media are fundamental in increasing education on college campuses.” However, much of video-based content streamed through platforms such as Youtube and Twitter simultaneously serve to further bias, characterizing PWDs as “inspirational” or “courageous.” These portrayals center the narrative on the disability, rather than the person.

As a result, there is evident stigma and lack of representation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in individually-curated video content; content creators have historically excluded PWDs when producing content for education, leading to disparities in the comprehensive understanding of PWDs. Currently, there is also no central database that exclusively highlights individually-curated video content from and about PWDs for the consumption of abled and disabled populations. In response to this need and lack of awareness surrounding various disabilities, individually-curated video content within four sectors of disabilities—locomotive, visual, auditory, learning—were compiled for the addition of a feature to the VOSAP web-based and phone application platforms. The creation of a data-driven model based on survey results serves to inform a compilation and comparative analysis of relevant media. The VOSAP video content library will, moreover, be used to demonstrate necessities to drive change and consult with non-governmental organizations, as well as serve as an library of video content on the VOSAP platform. This paper will begin with the summarized documentation of survey responses on video-based content and its contextualization with the internal survey mechanism created to analyze compiled video-content for the VOSAP mobile application. The discovered variances between disability sectors will be analyzed and documented, as well as the long-term call for reform in representation of PWDs. The mission and future of the compiled video content library will be



established with biannual survey-based check-ins in order to continue improvements to the VOSAP content library.

As video-content continues to be compiled in the long-term, media will be analyzed and uploaded through updated survey mechanisms. Despite the numerous users engaging with disability-related advocacy media, individuals between the ages of 14 and 30 have been identified as “youth activists,” with technology as the backbone of the modern youth movement. 81% of 15 through 25 year olds in the United States use Youtube as it is considered the largest social media platform and website, second to Google. The VOSAP video compilation feature will serve to designate the platform as a trailblazer in its efforts for media-related advocacy and education.

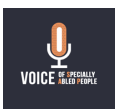
An internal metric (secondary data collection) was integral in order to effectively gather research in order to inform the creation of PWD content for the content library. This scale was used as the primary mechanism to inform the selection process of videos for the content library, one that encompasses video content in the context of the four categories of disabilities. The secondary research was compiled in an excel spreadsheet with responses to each survey metric, allowing for a long-term assessment of prevalent biases in video content and an informed selection process for the video content library on the VOSAP application base.

In the external surveying, there are clear discrepancies between the perception of adequacy and accuracy between the population of PWDs and able-bodied individuals. Commentary responses to the primary survey scale call on content creators to:

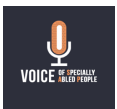
1. Present PWDs as “any other main character,” pulling away from stories that draw sympathy and inspiration from the community.
2. Create content on platforms such as Youtube and TikTok to garner greater views, as well as prioritize the production of video content under five minutes.
3. Center the narrative around PWDs. However, a combination of content creation by PWDs and educated able-bodied individuals will heighten awareness across sectors. PWDs should not have to bear the burden of advocating for accessibility and education on their own.

The internal metric creates a visual representation of individually-curated content in the media. The analysis of video content calls for:

1. Educators should begin posting lectures on disability-related topics to platforms such as Youtube. Content creators should heighten awareness through interview-style and vlog-style formats that center the narrative around PWDs.



2. Display more individually-curated video content on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Social media platforms are largely lacking in video-based representation of disabilities.
3. Increase representation of locomotive, auditory, and visual disabilities in individually-curated video content.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Eshana Seshadri** is a student at the University of Southern California majoring in Computational Neuroscience and minoring in Disruptive Innovation. On campus, she is involved in USC Project RISHI as the Director of Narrative Media and she's a research assistant at the Mara Mather Emotion and Cognition Lab. She is interested in the intersection of science & technology for social impact.

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## WHY THIS MATTERS TO VOSAP

Advocacy is best supported by content and Video content is most effective. VOSAP has thousands of visitors every week and to help them learn more, this research project was conducted. It is an extension of VOSAP's vision by building a Video Content Library through the VOSAP website for users to view individually-curated content by and about 4 major types of disabilities. VOSAP is excited to use the VOSAP Video Content Library as a trailblazer in its efforts for media-related advocacy and education.

## ABOUT VOICE OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE INC.

The Voice of Specially Abled People (VOSAP) is a global advocacy organization built on the principles of Empowerment of Specially Abled People. In Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, VOSAP is working to create an Inclusive and Accessible world by accelerating implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and goals of UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) treaty. The organization has created the VOSAP Mobile App through which volunteers can take a pledge to volunteer and rate the accessibility of public places, creating a crowdsourcing platform to aggregate demand for accessibility.

