

Disability, Education and Social Media: a Systematic Review

 [10.34623/2184-8661.2025.alfamed.385](https://doi.org/10.34623/2184-8661.2025.alfamed.385)

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Abstract

Social media can support the inclusion of people with disabilities by improving their participation, enhancing their social connections and by providing them with personalised learning opportunities. This article presents a systematic review of the scientific literature on the use of social networks for educational purposes for people with disabilities. The research focused on identifying studies published in the last decade and examining their implications in the field of education, considering methodological aspects and the selection and exclusion criteria using the PICO strategy. The review revealed increasing interest in this topic in recent years, although there continues to be limited representation at the global level, due to the low number of studies identified (31 articles indexed in Web of Science or Scopus). Conclusions point to the essential role that social networks play in the lives of people with disabilities because of the

educational and social benefits they can bring, although certain risks associated with their use are also detected. The review emphasizes the importance of designing digital environments that are accessible to all users, which can enhance their educational experiences. It also highlights the need for continuous support and training for families and educators to ensure the effective use of these platforms.

Keywords

Disability • Digital Platforms • Teaching-Learning Processes • Social Media • Training

Artigo recebido em 2025-01-24
Artigo aceite em 2025-04-30
Artigo publicado em 2025-04-30

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Bonilla-del-Río, M., Estrada-Molina, O., & Pérez-Rodríguez, A. (2025). Disability, education and social media: a systematic review. *Rotura – Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Artes*, 27-39. <https://doi.org/10.34623/2184-8661.2025.alfamed.385>

1. Digital Inclusion and Inclusive Education

It is estimated that more than 1 billion people worldwide have some kind of disability, representing approximately 15% of the world population (World Health Organization, 2020). The term disability, as well as its social conception, has evolved throughout history. It has changed since the models of exclusion/disregard (Velarde, 2012) and later biological models, which focused on intervention, treatment and rehabilitation, putting the focus on deficits and medical aspects from an excessively individualistic approach. More recent models consider disability to have a social character, whose limitations are imposed by cultural, social and economic attitudes and issues that hinder the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in society (Viquez *et al.*, 2020).

In the school context, there is a tendency to catalogue the difference as a “problem, deficiency or difficulty” (Contreras, 2002). In this sense, traditional educational culture tends to categorise students by focusing on their limitations, through the diagnosis and psychosocial construction of “patterns of normality”, thus pigeonholing human beings into a common and uniform rhythm and style of teaching and learning (Navas, 2021). However, according to Booth and Ainscow (2002), diversity shouldn’t be perceived as a conflict to resolve, but rather a source of richness and learning for all. Based on this premise, emphasis is placed on the need to modify the planning processes regarding the elements of the curriculum and school organisation, in order to minimise exclusion in favour of increasing the participation of all learners from a Universal Design for Learning approach (Delgado, 2021). This concept of teaching is based on a framework which addresses the diversity of students and the accessibility of learning content by minimising barriers, making it a key pedagogical focus in the education systems that aim to promote inclusive and equitable education (Flood & Banks, 2021).

The importance of inclusive education is highlighted in key international frameworks, such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which advocates for “inclusive and equitable quality education” (ONU, 2015). However, the presence of students with disabilities in mainstream schools is not enough; effective inclusion requires tailored pedagogical approaches, teacher training, and a supportive educational community (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación la Ciencia y la Cultura, 2010).

Advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer new opportunities to address accessibility challenges. Concepts like “e-inclusion” emphasize reducing the digital divide by providing

accessible technologies that enable active participation in learning and society (Benigno *et al.*, 2019; Rice & Dykman, 2018). Social networks, in particular, hold potential to enhance teaching and learning processes, support collaborative environments, and foster a sense of belonging for students with disabilities (Parmigiani *et al.*, 2021). Despite these advantages, barriers such as limited accessibility and discriminatory attitudes persist, necessitating systemic changes in education and technology design (Greco, 2019).

Therefore, it is about the need to promote inclusive strategies and policies which allow us to overcome or reduce the digital divide (Cho & Kim, 2021). This disparity is evident in the barriers that hinder the opportunities for development and participation of these groups in the social, cultural, political, economic, academic and employment spheres, among which, within the digital sphere, low media accessibility stands out.

The concept of media accessibility has evolved from particularist accounts to a universalist account of access. In this sense, it has, in turn, meant a shift from reactive to proactive approaches, and a shift from manufacturer-centred to user-centred approaches (Greco, 2019). To achieve true digital inclusion, it is essential to address contextual factors that influence participation, such as technological accessibility and the availability of resources (World Health Organization, 2020). Education systems must prioritize universal access to digital platforms and ensure their usability for all students, particularly those with disabilities, to foster academic and social development equitably (UNESCO, 2012).

2. Use of Social Media for Educational Purposes in People with Disabilities

Current society, characterised by the era of digitalisation and information, allows easy and fast communication thanks to continuous and constant technological development (Acosta *et al.*, 2020). In this context, social networks are undeniably established as key and predominant resources in contemporary societies, and so not having access to this type of platform can be a major limitation in terms of social, academic, employment and leisure opportunities for people with disabilities. However, despite the widespread use of smartphones and the popularity of social media among youth, the way in which people with disabilities interact with emerging technologies has not yet been studied in depth (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Pacheco *et al.*, 2020). Social networks have drastically changed the way that people communicate and interact, encouraging the exchange of information and the processes for sharing content in virtual environments (Alsobayel, 2016). Its purposes include promoting and

building relationships, creating professional networks, consulting information and news, and even academic and professional development (McNamara *et al.*, 2021).

Studies in this area have shown both benefits and drawbacks in the use of social networks by people with disabilities (Bonilla-del-Río & Sánchez-Calero, 2022). Regarding the advantages and in line with Miller (2017), it is worth highlighting the increased social possibilities they offer. For example, they can reduce the feeling of isolation, facilitate new contacts, make it easier to connect with other people and can sometimes be used selectively, allowing people with disabilities to decide whether to use them anonymously and avoid the stigma associated with disability, or to decide to what extent they disclose their disability, especially in cases where it is not easily visible. According to Shpigelman and Gill (2014), social networks allow people with disabilities to connect and meet other people with similar disabilities; to raise awareness, organise and participate in politics, increasing their civic participation; and to improve their self-esteem and the formation of a positive self-identity. In this sense, despite the potential uses of social networks in the empowerment of people with disabilities, their full benefits are not yet being effectively exploited (Shpigelman & Gill, 2014). More specifically, on an educational level, assistive technologies or technical aids can favour accessibility to the curriculum, interactions and relationships of students with disabilities (Pastor & Zubillaga-del-Río, 2012). Furthermore, these young people benefit from the potential that social networks offer them to stay informed, using them for educational and work-related purposes (Quainoo *et al.*, 2021). According to this study, social networks allow students with disabilities to stay in contact with members of their educational community, allowing them to feel a sense of belonging, helping them to feel valued and integrated in the group, as well as to improve their social, communication and interaction skills.

Among the disadvantages are the lack of accessibility when using social networks, as well as technical and privacy-related problems, since social networks are sometimes not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, as they do not have functions that allow them to access the platform itself or the content and messages they offer. Caron and Light (2016) have noted drawbacks and negative experiences, such as cyberbullying, in the inappropriate use of networks, stemming from the interaction challenges of digital platforms for people with disabilities and the preference of some users to have face-to-face conversations. However, although it has been shown that the use of the internet helps people with disabilities to live an independent life (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2021) and despite the fact that there are still access problems that limit the possibilities for this group to use the devices (Hafiar *et al.*, 2019), there is still little research on how technology

can help children and young people with disabilities to acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours to cope in virtual environments and on the moral responsibility of educational institutions towards the media education of this group (Hashizume *et al.*, 2020).

3. Related Studies

Research focusing on the educational use of technologies for people with disabilities is scarce in academic databases (Gabarron *et al.*, 2023). This is confirmed by the very few systematic reviews published in this line of research and indexed in Scopus or WoS (Table 1). An initial search identified 63 results (WoS: 32 and Scopus: 31).

Studies	Documents	Databases	Areas of interest
Gabarron <i>et al.</i> (2023)	9	PubMed; EMBASE; Biblioteca Cochrane; PsycInfo; ERIC; Education Source; Web of Science; and IEEE Xplore	Use of social media by people with autism
Leung <i>et al.</i> (2021)	10	Medline, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Education Resources Information Centre and Social Science Citation Index	The use of mobile technology to develop cognitive and social skills in people with autism
Sánchez-Serrano <i>et al.</i> (2020)	96	Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, ERIC, SciELO and Google Scholar.	The use of ICT in students with disabilities
Saxena <i>et al.</i> (2019)	11	Medline, PsycINFO, Embase, CINAHL and Education Research Complete (ERIC)	Online peer tutoring in children and adolescents with neurodevelopment disabilities
Pandya and Ávila (2016)	14	Academic Search Complete, ERIC via EBSCO and PsycInfo	Digital literacy in special education

Table 1. Systematic reviews

These studies show that publications related to the educational use of digital technologies by people with disabilities have a low level of application, focusing on qualitative studies. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies that analyse the scientific production related to the use of social networks for educational purposes aimed at people with disabilities, as most of them focus on a specific disability or on the use of technology in a general sense.

4. Method

4.1. Objective

This study aimed to conduct a systematic review of the use of social media for educational purposes aimed at people with disabilities. The review sought to identify research trends, platforms used, and key concepts in the scientific literature from 2013 to 2023, using the PICoS framework for rigorous selection and analysis (Methley *et al.*, 2014).

Research Questions (RQs)

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What type of research predominates (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) in studies on the educational use of social media for people with disabilities?
2. Which social networks are used for educational purposes aimed at people with disabilities?
3. What are the key concepts and relationships represented in the scientific literature on this topic?

4.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection criteria were based on the PICoS framework:

- Population: Studies focusing on people with disabilities or educators working with them.
- Interest Phenomenon: Research addressing the use of social networks for educational purposes, exploring benefits, barriers, and outcomes.
- Context: Studies situated in educational settings involving digital social networks.
- Study Design: Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, including experimental, non-experimental, cross-sectional, or longitudinal designs.
- Publication Scope: Peer-reviewed articles in English or Spanish indexed in WoS or Scopus (2013–2023).

Excluded studies were those unrelated to social media or education, and non-peer-reviewed documents such as theses or conference papers.

4.3. Procedure

1. Search Process: A systematic search was conducted in WoS and Scopus using descriptors such as “Social media,” “SNS,” “Education,” and “Disability.” A total of 611 articles were retrieved after removing duplicates.
2. Screening:
 - Phase 1: Titles and abstracts were independently screened by two reviewers based on inclusion criteria.
 - Phase 2: Full-text reviews were conducted to confirm relevance. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, achieving a Cohen’s kappa of 0.85.
3. Final Selection: Thirty-one articles meeting the criteria were included in the final review.

4.4. Data Extraction and Analysis

Quantitative data were extracted using a structured rubric to capture variables such as publication year, methodologies employed, social media platforms studied, and sample characteristics. These data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify research trends, methodological preferences, and the distribution of studies over time and across geographical regions.

For qualitative data, a thematic coding approach was applied to identify recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts. The analysis began with open coding, where articles were reviewed to extract relevant themes without predefined categories. This was followed by axial coding, which established relationships between the themes and refined categories to synthesize insights. Finally, the themes were grouped into overarching categories, such as barriers, opportunities, and educational outcomes of social media use for people with disabilities. To ensure consistency, two reviewers independently applied the coding framework to a pilot sample of articles, resolving discrepancies through discussion. Inter-coder reliability was maintained, and thematic saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged. Additionally, co-occurrence analysis of keywords was conducted using VosViewer 1.6.19 software to visualize conceptual relationships within the literature. This analysis identified clusters of related terms, such as “inclusive education,” “social media,” and “disability,” and highlighted their connections to other critical concepts. The co-occurrence mapping revealed dominant research trends and gaps, offering a comprehensive view of the field.

5. Results

Overall, 31 articles met the selection criteria and were included in this systematic review (Table 2).

The growing interest in studying social networks for educational purposes for people with disabilities is evident in the increasing number of publications over recent years, peaking in 2022 (N=6) (Figure 1). However, no publications related to the study's focus were identified up to May 2023, underscoring the need to encourage further research in this area.

Regarding the first research question (Q1: What type of research predominates, and what methodological focuses and instruments are used?), most studies (Appendix: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.23781471>) employ a qualitative design (N=16), followed by quantitative (N=10) and mixed methods (N=5). The studies primarily use qualitative approaches, employing techniques such as interviews (Deliyore-Vega, 2021; Hartley *et al.*, 2016; Schaafsma *et al.*, 2017; Miller, 2017) and focus groups (Simó-Pinatella *et al.*, 2022; Buchholz *et al.*, 2020), or combining these with observation and researcher diaries (Pacheco *et al.*, 2017; 2019; 2020). Quantitative approaches include surveys (Kasperski & Blau, 2022; Cleaver & Wood, 2018), discourse analysis (Hartley *et al.*, 2016), and advanced statistical methods such as linear regressions (Gao *et al.*, 2022). Exploratory techniques like manual video categorisation (Acosta *et al.*, 2020) and social network analysis (Schuster *et al.*, 2021; Spencer *et al.*, 2021) are also notable.

However, there are also studies whose research design uses a questionnaire as the main instrument (Touloupis, 2022; Ellison *et al.*, 2019; McNamara *et al.*, 2021; Hafiar *et al.*, 2019; Bosse *et al.*, 2020; Hashizume *et al.*, 2020; Fisher & Shogren, 2016; Sharabi *et al.*, 2016). Meanwhile, the study by Raghavendra *et al.* (2018) presents a mixed approach, using a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures.

Due to the characteristics of the collective and the type of studies carried out, the research samples are small. Of the 31 articles, 20 use samples composed of individuals, of which only four have more than 100 participants. In this regard, Fisher and Shogren's (2016) research is the one that includes the most subjects, with a total of 350 participants, followed by the publication by Sharabi *et al.* (2016) which collected the responses of 178 female students in a special education programme, the study by Almadanin *et al.* (2019) involving 176 students with hearing, visual and physical disabilities and Grace and Raghavendra's (2019) research involving 123 students with disabilities.

Among the research with smaller samples, we find several studies that have fewer than ten participants, such as, for example, that of Hemsley *et al.* (2018), in which only three subjects participated; the study by Hartley *et al.* (2016), where eight people with disabilities

Descriptors	WoS Results	Total	Scopus Results	Total
1. Social media	82	211	332	536
2. Social Networking Sites	5		5	
3. SNS	2		4	
4. Social networks	86		155	
5. Facebook	192		22	
6. Instagram	2		4	
7. Twitter	4		6	
8. YouTube	11		8	
No duplicates per database	179		432	
No duplicates between database	611			
Total no. of articles (inclusion and exclusion criteria)	31			

Table 2. Initial and final results of the information search in WoS and Scopus (January 2013 – May 2023)

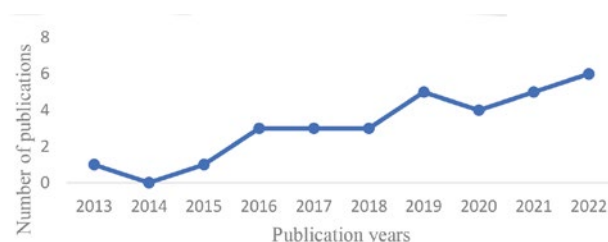


Figure 1. Scientific production (n=31)

took part or the study conducted by Raghavendra *et al.* (2019) whose sample amounts to 9 individuals. In most studies, the sample is made up of people with disabilities, with the exception of the research by Schaafsma *et al.* (2017), which involves twenty members of organisations for people with disabilities; the study by Ellison *et al.* (2019), which considers the responses of professionals from 31 programmes offering innovative internships for “young adults with serious mental health conditions”; the publication by McNamara *et al.* (2021), which includes the responses of physical educators who teach students with disabilities; the study by Buchholz *et al.* (2020) in which 21 support figures (family members or workers) of people with disabilities took part; the research by Hashizume *et al.* (2020) involving 84 support teachers, as well as those publications that do not include subject

participation, as they analyse studies (Cleaver & Wood, 2018) or YouTube videos (Acosta *et al.*, 2020).

With regards to the second research question (Q2. Which social networks are used for educational purposes aimed at people with disabilities?), the majority of the studies focus on analysing the generic use of social networks or at least two of these platforms (N=25), while those investigating the use of a specific network are more limited (6): Twitter (Schuster *et al.*, 2021; Hemsley *et al.*, 2018), Facebook (Touloupis, 2022), YouTube (Acosta *et al.*, 2020), Pinterest (Cleaver & Wood, 2018) and, Who's Here (an educational social network similar to Facebook) (Kasperski & Blau, 2022).

Thus, most of the studies refer to social networks in general, i.e., they don't focus their research on a specific platform (Hartley *et al.*, 2016; Schaafsma *et al.*, 2017; Ellison *et al.*, 2019; Almakani *et al.*, 2019; Miller, 2017; McNamara *et al.*, 2021; Raghavendra *et al.*, 2018; Grace & Raghavendra, 2019; Buchholz *et al.*, 2020; Bosse *et al.*, 2020; Hashizume *et al.*, 2020; Fisher & Shogren, 2016; Raghavendra *et al.*, 2015; Deliyore-Vega, 2021; Bonilla-del-Río & Sánchez-Calero, 2022; Spencer *et al.*, 2021; Gao *et al.*, 2022; Hatakka *et al.*, 2013; Pacheco *et al.*, 2019). Other studies focus on the generic use of social networks, but single out at least one specific platform, e.g., Heitplatz *et al.* (2022) refer to WhatsApp and Facebook, Simó-Pinatella *et al.* (2022) also specify WhatsApp and Hafiar *et al.* (2019) mention Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. In contrast, the study by Sharabi *et al.* (2016) discusses the use of smartphones and the Internet, while the publications by Pacheco *et al.* (2017; 2020) refer to digital technologies. Despite this more generic approach, such research looks specifically and significantly at the use of social networks by people with disabilities.

Figure 2 shows the countries in which studies have been conducted, with the United States leading the way (Gao *et al.*, 2022; McNamara *et al.*, 2021; Spencer *et al.*, 2021; Ellison *et al.*, 2019; Cleaver & Wood, 2018; Miller, 2017; Hartley *et al.*, 2016; Fisher & Shogren, 2016), and limited global representation due to the small number of localised studies.

With regards to the third research question (Q3. What are the conceptual co-occurrences of the publications and their relationships?), it should be borne in mind that the conceptual approach to the terms most frequently used in the studies is relevant for understanding the representation and relationships of each term, allowing us a first insight into the subject matter, interests and concerns of the researchers.

Through the analysis of co-occurrences of the key-words in the articles (Figure 3), 71 related items were identified, divided into a total of 10 clusters, of which five have fewer than eight related items:

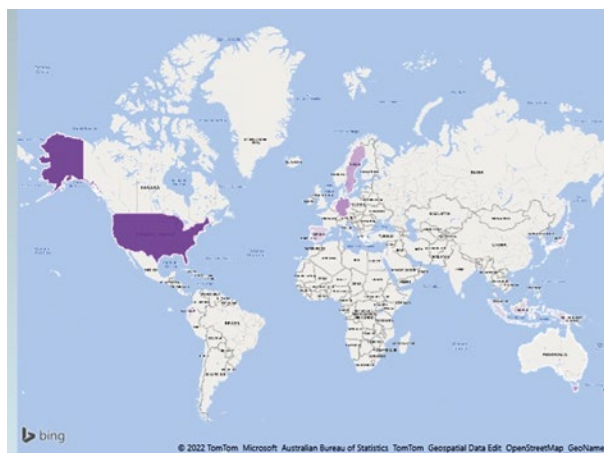


Figure 2. Geographical map of studies on social networks in the field of education for people with disabilities

1. “disability”, related to “digital technologies”, “higher education”, “ICTs”, “internet use”, “mobile devices”, “self-determination”, “transition”, “vision impairment”, “young adults” and “young people”.
2. “internet”, related to “augmentative and alternative communication”, “communication”, “communication and information technology”, “intervention strategies”, “remote communication”, “students with visually impaired”, “technology”, “teenagers”.
3. “social media use”, related to “adapted physical education”, “career networking”, “college students with disabilities”, “informal learning”, “physical education”, “professional development”, “social media addiction”.
4. “inclusive education”, related to “diversity”, “global governance”, “inclusion”, “media competence”, “policy networks”, “social networks analysis”, “special education”.
5. “social networks”, related to “academic tracking”, “adolescents”, “communication”, “information and computer technology”, “pandemic”, “social capital”, “virtual education”.

These data allowed us to identify some of the concerns in the use of social networks in relation to inclusive education and special education, highlighting the studies conducted mainly with adolescents and young people.

Furthermore, thanks to overlay visualization, we were able to verify the recent trends of our object of study. This tool allows the classification of articles using a colour-coded time scale according to the year of publication. Thus, the most recent terms in our case correspond to the year 2022 and are represented in yellow whereas those from 2017 are in blue.

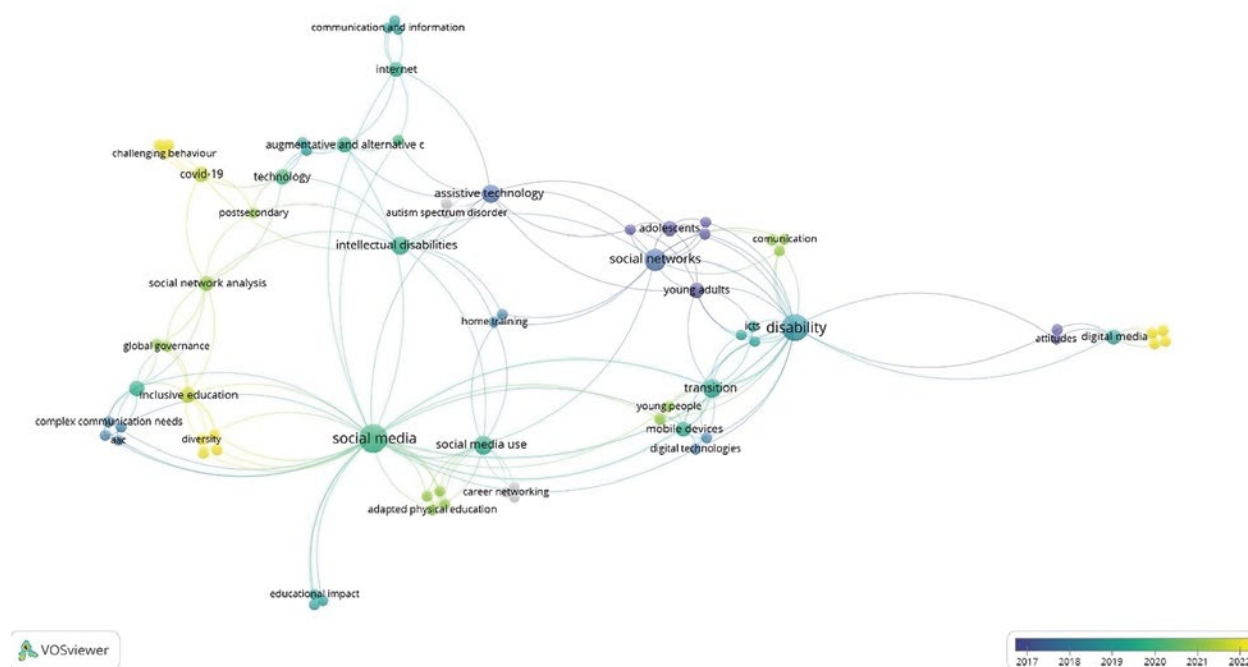


Figure 3. Conceptual co-occurrence network of publications

This allowed us to verify a temporal evolution of the research topics, since up to 2019 we identified a concern with “social networks”, “assistive technology”, “home training”, “e-mentoring social network in schools”, “social capital” and “academic tracking”, while from 2020, attention started to be focused on topics such as “social media”, “inclusive education”, “diversity”, “inclusion”, “communication”, “pandemic” or “covid-19”. This corresponds to the moment of the social and health emergency resulting from the consequences of the global spread of the coronavirus.

Studies that combine the descriptors “disability” and “education” with the different terms related to social networks have different purposes. Some publications focus on the educational possibilities of social networks. To this end, we have analysed interventions in different contexts to assess the impact of their use on variables such as the relationships of young people with disabilities (Raghavendra *et al.*, 2015; Raghavendra *et al.*, 2018); the attitudes or experiences of social network use by people with disabilities and their teachers or caregivers (Deliyore-Vega, 2021; Heitplatz *et al.*, 2022); learning how to use a particular social network effectively (Hemsley *et al.*, 2018); the increase or decrease in the opportunities they offer to students (Hatakka *et al.*, 2013); or the understanding of ableism (a form of social discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities) (Hartley *et al.*, 2016). Other studies also

examine the development of educational materials or the use of social media to improve educational practices proposed by teachers working with students with disabilities (Cleaver & Wood, 2018; Hashizume *et al.*, 2020; McNamara *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, the research aims to examine the professional services that people with disabilities receive (Ellison *et al.*, 2019) and to analyse support workers’ perceptions of remote communication on the part of people with disabilities, as well as factors that promote self-determination and participation (Buchholz *et al.*, 2020) within the framework of professional services and support workers, which are more external factors than materials and learning.

We should also mention those studies which aim to uncover how students with disabilities use the Internet and digital platforms (Hafiar *et al.*, 2019) and analyse the types, frequency and duration of Internet and social media use by students with a disability, comparing their practices to students without disabilities (Bosse *et al.*, 2020).

Some studies aimed to determine the impact of social media use by people with disabilities and its repercussion in terms of variables such as the development of self-determination skills (Pacheco *et al.*, 2019); psychological and educational impacts (Almakanin *et al.*, 2019); loneliness, academic self-efficacy (ASE), virtual activities and three personal strengths (hope, optimism

Study	Variables of study	Sample characteristics
Bonilla-del-Río & Sánchez-Calero (2022)	Influences of social networks (use, benefits and barriers)	39 people (family members, education staff and users of a special education centre)
Gao <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Social media and addiction	193 university students with a disability
Heitplatz <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Social media and attitudes	24 trained caregivers and 50 people with intellectual disabilities
Kasperski & Blau (2022)	Online tutoring	58 participants (14 high-school students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); 11 high-school students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities (ID); 3 teachers (T); 9 mentors with special needs (M-SN, undergraduates with CP, hearing impairments, etc.); 9 undergraduates without special needs (M-US); and 12 high-school students in a community service curriculum (M-HS)).
Simó-Pinatella <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Pedagogical actions to reduce challenging behaviours	22 teachers in special education schools
Touloupis (2022)	Level of self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, use of Facebook and participation in cyberbullying	211 sixth grade students with learning problems
Deliyore-Vega (2021)	Social networks and their use during the pandemic	5 special education and occupational therapy teachers
McNamara <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Professional Development	94 physical educators who teach students with disabilities
Pacheco <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Transitioning to higher education (academic system, social connections, disability support, family involvement and their own impairment(s)).	19 students with visual disabilities
Schuster <i>et al.</i> (2021)	People with disabilities and inclusive education.	1,638 tweets
Spencer <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Resilience	10 students from a post-secondary programme for people with intellectual disabilities and their families
Acosta <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Accessibility	91,421 videos
Buchholz <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Factors enabling self-determination and participation	21 support figures of people with communicative and cognitive difficulties
Bosse <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Social Media and Internet Use Patterns	44 students with complex communication need and motor difficulties
Hashizume <i>et al.</i> (2020).	Moral education	84 support teachers
Almakanin <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Psychological effects	176 students with hearing, visual and physical disabilities
Ellison <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Professional services	31 programmes which offer innovative internships for young adults
Hafiar <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Use of the Internet	41 students at the special School for Blind
Grace & Raghavendra (2019)	Participation in online conversations with peers and social participation.	123 students using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).
Pacheco <i>et al.</i> (2019)	ICT-enabled self-determination	19 young people with visual disabilities
Cleaver & Wood (2018)	Evidence-Based Practices	Qualitative analysis of studies
Hemsley <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Augmentative and Alternative Communication	3 participants with little or no functional speech, who used AAC systems
Raghavendra <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Development social media skills	9 young people with disabilities
Miller (2017)	Queer identity and disability	25 students with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ
Schaafsma <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Sexuality, sexual education, social networks and support.	20 members of organisations who provide services to people with disabilities
Pacheco <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Transition to university	19 students with visual disabilities
Fisher & Shogren (2016).	Academic Tracking	350 students
Hartley <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Social construction of disability in the media	8 students, of which 3 were people with disabilities
Sharabi <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Loneliness, academic self-efficacy, virtual activities and personal strengths (hope, optimism and sense of coherence).	178 female special education students
Raghavendra <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Social media online and offline	8 young people with communication disabilities
Hatakka <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Personal use of the computer in education and social media	827 student participants

Table 3. Variables and samples of each study

and sense of coherence) (Sharabi *et al.*, 2016); as well as personal and environmental factors and social activities with their peers (Fisher & Shogren, 2016).

Other studies focus on the area of sexuality. In this sense, what is noteworthy are objectives such as identifying the needs of people with disabilities and problems related to sex education, sex, relationships, the use of social networks and the role of families (Schaafsma *et al.*, 2017) or exploring queer identities in relation to disability through digital platforms such as social networks (Miller, 2017).

Some studies also aim to examine how people with disabilities use digital technologies, including social media, to transition to university (Pacheco *et al.*, 2017; Pacheco *et al.*, 2020).

Lastly, studies such as Acosta *et al.* (2020) aim to evaluate the accessibility of a specific social network, in this case YouTube, while the study by Grace and Raghavendra (2019) aims to analyse the possible benefits of online participation for young people with disabilities.

Finally, the last research question (Q4. What are the variables studied in each research study?), shows that the variables studied are diverse (Table 3), with the following occurring the most:

- Influence or effects of social networks (Bonilla-del-Río & Sánchez-Calero, 2022; Gao *et al.*, 2022; Heitplatz *et al.*, 2022; Deliyore-Vega, 2021; Bosse *et al.*, 2020; Raghavendra *et al.*, 2015).
- Professional development (McNamara *et al.*, 2021; Pacheco *et al.*, 2021; Ellison *et al.*, 2019; Pacheco *et al.*, 2017).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of this study was to systematically review the use of social media for educational purposes aimed at people with disabilities, applying the PICoS framework to analyze 31 articles indexed in WoS and Scopus. The findings highlight the role of social media in enhancing the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating expanded social networks, improved communication, decision-making, professional development, and psychological well-being (Schaafsma *et al.*, 2017; Pacheco *et al.*, 2017; Hemsley *et al.*, 2018; McNamara *et al.*, 2021; Hafiar *et al.*, 2019; Grace & Raghavendra, 2019; Buchholz *et al.*, 2020). Teachers benefit from platforms like Pinterest, which support sharing and implementing evidence-based practices (Cleaver & Wood, 2018).

Despite these benefits, challenges persist. Risks such as unwanted messages, online marginalization, and

concerns over cyber safety and inappropriate content remain significant barriers (Schaafsma *et al.*, 2017; Miller, 2017; Raghavendra *et al.*, 2018). Addressing accessibility and safety in digital environments is essential.

Intervention programs demonstrate the potential of ICTs, including social networks and mobile devices, to enhance skills, critical thinking, and self-representation, while promoting participatory communication (Pacheco *et al.*, 2019; Ellison *et al.*, 2019; Hartley *et al.*, 2016). Such programs combat discriminatory representations of disability in the media, empowering individuals to create content reflecting their experiences (Hartley *et al.*, 2016).

Social media use is also linked to mitigating loneliness, reducing psychological stress, and fostering social participation (Sharabi *et al.*, 2016; Almadanin *et al.*, 2019; Fisher & Shogren, 2016). However, disability type and educational context significantly influence social relationships and participation in digital activities.

The analysis emphasizes the need for educational institutions to prioritize media literacy and ensure accessible technologies (Bosse *et al.*, 2020; Acosta *et al.*, 2020). Institutions should develop materials that ethically guide technology use for individuals with disabilities and promote collaborative digital tools to foster inclusion (Hashizume *et al.*, 2020; Pacheco *et al.*, 2020). Training families and support workers is also critical to maximizing the benefits of social media while addressing ethical challenges (Raghavendra *et al.*, 2018; Buchholz *et al.*, 2020). Finally, further research is needed to deepen understanding of social media's benefits and limitations for this group and develop strategies to enhance digital participation and inclusion (Bosse *et al.*, 2020; Miller, 2017).

6.1. Summary of Findings

This study concludes that qualitative research dominates the literature analyzed, with interviews (e.g., Heitplatz *et al.*, 2022; Deliyore-Vega, 2021; Spencer *et al.*, 2021; Pacheco *et al.*, 2021, 2019, 2017; Miller, 2017; Schaafsma *et al.*, 2017; Hartley *et al.*, 2016) and focus groups (e.g., Heitplatz *et al.*, 2022; Simó-Pinatella *et al.*, 2022; Pacheco *et al.*, 2021, 2019, 2017; Buchholz *et al.*, 2020) as the most common methods. Quantitative studies primarily use questionnaires (e.g., Touloupis, 2022; Bosse *et al.*, 2020; Hashizume *et al.*, 2020; Almadanin *et al.*, 2019; Hafiar *et al.*, 2019; Fisher & Shogren, 2016; Sharabi *et al.*, 2016), while mixed-methods research combines these tools (e.g., Bonilla-del-Río & Sánchez-Calero, 2022; Ellison *et al.*, 2019; Hatakka *et al.*, 2013). This methodological diversity, found in

prestigious databases like WoS and Scopus, supports robust analysis of variables related to social media use in education for people with disabilities.

Regarding platforms, only two studies examine multiple networks, such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Heitplatz *et al.*, 2022) or Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Hafiar *et al.*, 2019). Six articles focus on a single platform, including Twitter (Schuster *et al.*, 2021; Hemsley *et al.*, 2018), Facebook (Touloupis, 2022), YouTube (Hafiar *et al.*, 2020), Pinterest (Cleaver & Wood, 2018), and Who's Here (Kasperski & Blau, 2022). However, 74.19% of the studies refer generically to digital social networks, reflecting an exploratory approach to understanding their implications for this group.

Conceptual co-occurrence analysis highlights terms such as “disability,” “Internet,” “social media use,” “inclusive education,” and “social networks,” closely linked to inclusive and special education. Most studies focus on adolescents and young adults (13–25 years), even though no age restrictions were applied in the inclusion criteria, suggesting a demographic bias in the research.

While core variables include the influence of social networks and professional development, others, such as the effectiveness of online tutoring (Kasperski & Blau, 2022), self-esteem, loneliness, cyberbullying participation (Touloupis, 2022), and factors promoting self-determination (Buchholz *et al.*, 2020) or personal strengths like hope, optimism, and academic self-efficacy (Sharabi *et al.*, 2016),

are less frequently addressed. These gaps underscore the need for further research to fully explore the educational impact of social media on people with disabilities.

6.2. Limitations and Educational Implications

This study is limited to articles written in Spanish and English indexed in WoS and Scopus. To complement these findings, future research should include other databases, such as ERIC and PsycInfo, and analyze literature in additional languages. Despite this limitation, the study provides valuable educational implications by synthesizing and analyzing existing scientific literature, offering an overview of research trends and their evolution over the last decade.

The findings highlight pedagogical practices involving social networks for people with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of designing accessible digital environments and the critical role of training and support for families and educators. These insights contribute to raising awareness of the potential benefits of social media, while also addressing the risks and challenges associated with their use. Promoting digital inclusion and equal educational opportunities for people with disabilities is essential, reinforcing the need for greater consideration of this group within educational and digital contexts.

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