

Research on Visibility and Resistance to Marginalization of We-media limb-impaired Creators—Body Practice and Narrative Construction

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Abstract:

In the digital ecology of We-media platforms, short video platforms such as Bilibili provide unprecedented spaces for disability groups to assert social visibility and conduct resistance against marginalization. Through a qualitative case study of one Bilibili disabled content creator, “Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei”, this research analyzes video content and attainment of visibility through a framework of body techniques, mediated visibility and social presence. The findings reveal that visibility is constructed through a synergy of semiotic recoding of disability symbols, embodied praxis in public spheres, and skilled engagement with technology. This study contributes to disability sociological and media studies by reframing visibility beyond a mere visual paradigm to an embodied and practiced one, offering theoretical insights for designing inclusive digital platforms and policies.

Keywords: Digital visibility, Disability, resistance, Body practice, Self-presentation, Narrative construction

1. Introduction

In the digital ecology of We social media platforms, the visibility of marginalized limb-disabled communities finds new and potent routes for expression and re-construction. Among them, platforms exemplified by Bilibili provide unprecedented space for physical expression and resistance for limb-disabled individuals. Bilibili is uniquely suited for this study due to its distinctive community-driven system. This enables disability content creators to express nuanced narratives about disability experience through longer

video platforms, fostering a more sustainable and ethically grounded representation. This study aims to thoroughly examine the following research question by sample analysis: How do individuals with physical disabilities on short-video platforms, especially Bilibili, utilize bodily practices (including narrative construction and self-presentation strategies) to construct social visibility and conduct resistance to marginalization? By exploring this question, this study would not only contribute to reveal the micro practices through which marginalized groups assert their visibility in the digital age but also provide valuable

insights into which platforms are designed to optimize accessibility and promote a more inclusive online environment.

2.Literature review

2.1 Visibility and marginalized group's resistance against exclusion

The notion of visibility has emerged as a critical framework for understanding marginalized groups, including those people with physical disabilities, to solicit social recognition and resist social exclusion. In 2013, Daneil Dayan proposed the concept of visibility aiming at the current shift of the digital public sphere caused by the emergence of the Internet, defined as the state of being observed or perceived (Dayan, 2013). This theory focuses on the problem of the right of individuals to being seen and capturing attention.

Moreover, the notion of visibility involves complex practices of discursive visibility and recognition visibility, involving narrative construction and audience validation. Disabled content creators employ narrative strategies such as performative resistance and emotional storytelling, to promote solidarity and counter dominant narratives (Jiang & Kai, 2017). For instance, limb-disabled content creators on Kuai Shou showcase economic independence and life optimism through profile curation and daily vlogs, transforming weakness into agency (Yuan, 2023).

However, visibility is also paradoxical. While it empowers groups, it also risks reinforcing stereotypes or causing sympathetic fatigue among audiences. Algorithmic preferences may prioritize sensational contents, reducing complex disable experience become visible (Mafra et al., 2024). Therefore, disabled content creators should navigate between authenticity and algorithmic demands, often leading to what scholars' term "commodified resistance", where resistance is diluted for marketability (Duan & Zhang, 2024).

2.2 Historical inquiries into disabled bodies and digital empowerment

The historical construction of disabled bodies reveals complex socio-cultural, religious and medical narratives that have shaped contemporary comprehensions of disability. Ancient societies, such as Greek, incorporated blind prophets as revered figures, while Roman law established sophisticated categories for disabled groups based on utilitarian principles (Sneed, Jordan, & Bateman, 2025). These historical images established patterns of disabled integration and marginalization that continue to inform modern disability representation.

The medical model of disability, prevalent throughout

most of the 20th century, positioned disability as an individual pathology needing correction or cure. This analytical framework is termed by Micheal Foucault as the "medical gaze", a power dynamic that renders disabled bodies as objects under scientific scrutiny rather than subjective agents (Foucault, 1978). This social model subsequently developed as the paradigm shifted from locating disability within social structures and barriers rather than individual bodies (Oliver & Barnes, 2024).

Roland Barthes's concept of mythologization provides essential theoretical tools for understanding how disabled bodies become cultural symbols. For Barthes, disability frequently functions as a "myth" where its particularities are erased and naturalized into signifiers for concepts such as "tragedy" or "suffering" (Chambers, 2007). The digital era has enabled new forms of counter-semiotic practice through which disabled content creators reclaim their physical expression. On digital platforms such as BiliBili, creators engage in scriptable practices that actively produce new meanings rather than passively conform to cultural myths (Wang, 2023). By doing so, disabled netizens performed tactical resistance (Ahearne & de Certeau, 1985) through media illustrations of routine life. Through active self-presentation strategies, such as prosthetic decoration, wheelchair fitness, or activity documentation, disabled creators disrupt the myth of disability as a monolithic identity and present it as multifaceted personhood.

The social model of disability, while transformative in shifting focus from individual deficiencies to societal barriers, requires further refinement in digital contexts. Digital platforms introduce new complexities where accessibility coexists with algorithmic commodification (Ellcessor, 2016). This tension reflects how technological advances simultaneously enable empowerment and introduce new forms of regulation.

Contemporary representation on BiliBili must be understood as a historical continuum, as both the continuation of bodily myth and resistance to mythological representation. The platform's specific features should also be considered, including its bullet comment system (danmu system) and community-oriented structure, which provide distinctive opportunities for resisting historical stereotypes meaning-creation and communal validation.

2.3 Platform mechanisms and Disability content

BiliBili's ecosystem supports disability content through community-driven engagement and narrative depth. The platform prioritizes substantive content via AI algorithms, favoring videos and contents that stimulate detailed discussion and subcultural interconnections (Yuan, 2023).

Unlike common short video platforms, Bilibili's algorithmic structure prioritizes content that stimulates in-depth discussion and subcultural development (Lin & Tang, 2024), enabling disability content creators to express nuanced narratives about the disability experience. The platform's technical structure contributes both opportunities and constraints: while it implements supportive techniques including AI captioning and basic screen reader compatibility to enhance content consumption, there persists significant gaps for disabled users, reflecting what researchers identify as the "creator accessibility gap" in digital platforms (Bao, 2021).

The danmu system (bullet system) generates distinctive interactive possibilities for disability discourse. Audiences actively co-construct meaning around disability content through multi-layered commentary (Yuhong, 2023). Research demonstrates that this communal engagement model allows for challenging ableist perspectives through knowledge building, as viewers may provide contextual explanations, emotional support and insights that enrich the original context (Alper, 2017).

Disabled creators on Bilibili have developed sophisticated adaptive strategies that leverage the platform's unique affordance (Lai, Li, Wen & Huang, 2025). These include utilizing the danmu culture and subscription system to build sustainable community networks rather than pursuing viral metrics and creating detailed educational content that benefits from the platform's tolerance for longer durations (Han & Xie, 2023). These approaches must constantly negotiate the tension between community values and algorithmic preferences, though evidence suggests Bilibili's algorithmic system shows more capacity for promoting disability content that generates in-depth discussion (Gillespie, 2018). This community-orientated structure provides protection against the commodification observed on more algorithmically driven platforms, allowing a more sustainable and ethically grounded representation of disability experiences (Ellis & Goggin, 2015).

The platform's specific mechanisms significantly shape the possibilities for resistance. Compared to other Chinese short-video platforms, Bilibili offers a distinctive ecosystem:

Bilibili's community-oriented algorithm favors in-depth, substantive content that stimulates detailed discussion and subcultural development, allowing for nuanced disability narratives (Yuan, 2023). The danmu (bullet system) enables real-time, communal interpretation and validation of body practice, co-constructing meaning around real-time commentary (Liu, 2022). This structure could offer protection against the commodification seen on more algorithm-driven platforms and provide accessible in-depth narratives and sophisticated body practice to explore.

2.4 Body practice and digital visibility

The concept of body practices has become central to understanding how marginalized groups construct digital visibility on social media platforms. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1980) theory of habitus, which emphasizes how social structures are embodied through body practices, and contemporary research, this research attempts to conceptualize the body as an active agent that produces meaning through daily performances and platform-mediated interactions.

For disabled creators, visibility represents a strategic practice rather than a passive state. As Johnson and Kennedy (2020) observe, visibility becomes a tactical resource for disabled individuals navigating social spaces. This strategic approach is facilitated by what Lin & Tang term "visual affordances", the specific ways that platform interfaces like Bilibili's danmu system enable distinctive forms of body representation.

Empirical research on Chinese platforms illustrates how these body practices operate. Yuan's (2023) study of limb-impaired creators on Kuai Shou shows how daily vlogs and optimistic self-presentation can transform perceived weakness into a narrative of agency. The work of "Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei" on Bilibili exemplifies this practice, where routine activities like navigating urban spaces or using assistive devices are framed not as limitations but as demonstrations of competence and skillful adaptation.

This literature review examines key aspects of disabled creators' visibility practices via body practice on We media platforms, particularly Bilibili: their strategic negotiation of digital visibility through resistance and narrative construction, the historical and semiotic contexts shaping disability representation, and the platform's unique mechanisms that could enable communal engagement. These findings collectively demonstrate how disabled creators challenge stereotypes while navigating the constraints of visual-centric environments. This research provides theoretical contributions to disability media and sociological studies expanding visibility beyond visual paradigms and offering practical insights for developing platform designs and inclusive digital policies.

3. Methodology

This study employs a triangulation approach to examine the social visibility of limb-disabled content creators, via a case study of prominent Bilibili video producer "Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei" (大程子好妹妹). "Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei" is a long video account ran by "Hao Mei Mei" (HONGCHENG ZHAO), the video producer who

appears in camera, usually on wheelchairs, and her husband, “Da Cheng Zi”, editing the videos and supporting recordings. This account owns 90,000 subscribers, produces 121 videos, and receives 647,377 likes in total. This account possesses a steadily updating rate of 2-3 videos per month. Among those videos, one video on Su Zhou’s travel and accessibility facility testing, titled “3 年后再来苏州, 变化逆天了! 苏州旅游无障碍体验” reached a maximum view of 2.8 million. The content producer, “Hao Mei Mei” is currently a full-time accessibility evaluator, as well as a drama actor, producing video contents during her assessments and drama performances. Despite those videos, genres including short interviews on disability life and daily life sharing are common. This content creator could represent genuine social issues under disabled indi-

vidual’s perspective, while deeply mirroring the general life image of limb-disabled individuals under both public participation and body performance. Moreover, this creator still holds some uniqueness, such as abundant working experience and high income, which might influence the generalizability of the research. This research aims to integrate qualitative content analysis and case study to explore how disability is performed, witnessed, and contested under body performances.

The qualitative source (video) is selected based on view amounts and genre divisions. Videos are categorized into two primary strata: public space navigation and private space adaptation. For each category, videos are selected independently, ensuring representativeness and uniqueness.

Table 1. Video Categorization and visibility framework

Practice category	Specific practices	Visibility mechanism
Mobility performance	Transportation interactions, barrier negotiation strategies	Making public space practices visible and legible
Technical engagement	Assistive device usage Technology adaptation Tool manipulation	Demonstrating body-technical interactions
Social encounters	Public space occupations Interaction patterns	Establishing presence through social bodily practices
Self-presentation	Body positioning Spatial orientation	Curating visibility through presenting bodily practices through media

The operationalization of analysis is divided into three subsets:

- (1) Body techniques, including movement patterns and adaptations, device interaction proficiency, and environmental strategies.
- (2) Mediated visibility, including camera framing of body practices, narrative contexts, platform-specific presentation choices.
- (3) Social recognition, audience engagement with bodily performances, community interaction patterns, validation of embodied practices.

This research will be conducted based on qualitative analysis of video contents, while analyzing the video under media and sociological frameworks, cooperating with symbolic and narrative theories. This research will also follow ethical guidelines for studying online content: respect for the creator’s agency and self-representation, consideration of privacy in body presentation, and acknowledgement of the researcher’s positionality.

Supplementary data comes from a two-hour secondhand interview with the content creator, which provides a more diverse and flourish understanding of her production mo-

tivations, audience interactions and personal reflections. This document will be used to identify important narratives and perceptions that complement other video contents.

4. Research analysis

This section aims to provide a detailed analysis of several representative videos from “Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei” to illustrate how body practices construct visibility and facilitate resistance to marginalization. Each analysis also aims to identify specific mechanisms through which disability narratives are reconfigured through embodied digital practices.

4.1 Sports performance and assistive technology demonstration

In her video “跳舞, 篮球, 游泳 ... 坐轮椅也能运动! 生命不息, 运动不止”, the creator engages in physical activities traditionally considered inaccessible to wheelchair users. Rather than emphasizing struggle, the video showcases technical proficiency in wheelchair maneuver-

ing during basketball games and swim transitions. These practices organize isolated physical activities into a coherent narrative of capability. This counters medicalized narratives that position disability as an individual deficiency. She also emphasizes how accessibility facility is deficient in public sport spaces, to gain social solicitudes. Danmu comments predominantly focus on emotional validation such as cheering “Her movements are amazing” and encouragement, indicating body signification.

In “厨艺小白初次体验炒菜机：在翻车边缘不断试探!”, the creator engages with assistive cooking technology, which preserves moments of difficulty and improvisation, showcasing those interfaces as sites of learning rather than perfected outcomes. Shots of her hands operating the device highlight the integration of body technique and technological assistance, challenging the ableist dichotomy between natural ability and artificial support.



Figure 1.1. Published video content by “Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei” on sports



Figure 1.2. Published video content by “Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei” on cooking

4.2 Urban accessibility testing and artistic participation as spatial claim

The video “3 年后再来苏州，变化逆天了！苏州旅游无障碍体验” exemplifies how systematic documentation of urban navigation. These contents reveal that the creator uses her wheelchair and body as measuring tools, assessing ramp angles, doorway width, and pavement accessibilities. This body practice makes visible the hidden labor of disabled navigation while positioning the body as an instrument of environmental critique. These moments challenge urban planning that ignores disabled body needs. Unlike natural vlogs, the video includes explicit

evaluations, transforming personal experience into public advocacy.

Another video, “当我作为中国演员代表，与英国艺术家们讨论无障碍！”，which documents her participation in an international art exhibition. This video demonstrates visual presence to challenge accessibility barriers in high-cultural institutions. This video frames accessibility as an international artistic concern rather than a special interest, expanding disability discourse beyond national boundaries and situating it within global cultural conversations.

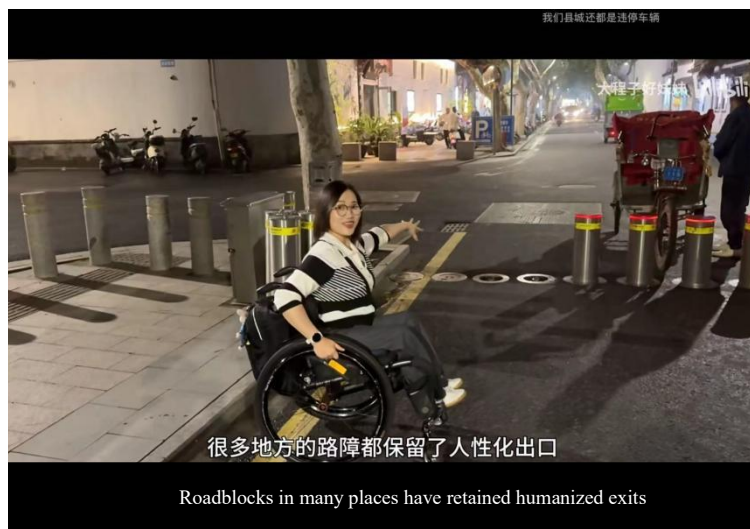


Figure 1.3. Videos showcasing her accessibility testing

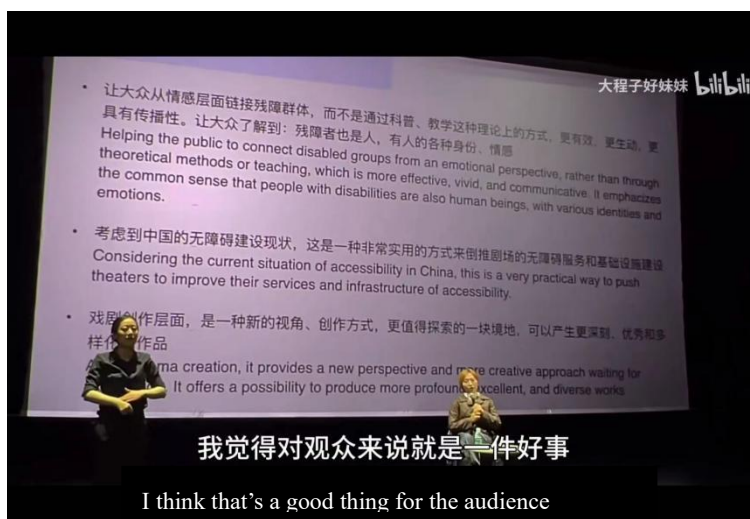


Figure 1.4. Videos showcasing her art conference participation

5. Theoretical analysis

These findings demonstrate how body performance gener-

ates social visibility through multiple simultaneous mechanisms: semiotic, spatial, technical and embodied praxis. This study demonstrates how visibility is operated not

merely through representation but through digital practice architectures that connect body techniques to social recognition. This suggests the need to conceptualize visibility as emerging from the interplay of embodied practices, technological mediations, symbolic representations and narrative construction.

5.1 Semiotics and narratology of the disabled body

This analysis reveals that Da Cheng Zi Xiao Mei Mei's videos constitute what Barthes (1972) would characterize as a "symbolic revolution", a signification of the disabled body through daily practice. The wheelchair, which is often coded as limitation and dependency, becomes a floating signifier of mobility and competence. In her video of mobility performance, such as "跳舞, 篮球, 游泳... 坐轮椅也能运动! 生命不息, 运动不止", the video producer performed several sports that are not normally considered as suitable to disabled individuals, reconstructing the symbol of disabled body and image, including a wheelchair as mobile and legible, which re-coded the traditional disability signification through daily practice, along with the genuine issues that she faced in routine life. Moreover, her storytelling practices create counter narratives that employ what White (1980) terms "emplotment" to organize body experience into resistance strategies. This narrative work operates by constructing coherent life stories from daily practices that challenge medicalized tropes. A video of wheelchair experiencing, titled "带朋友体验坐轮椅的一天 | 路人: 坐轮椅了干嘛还要出来?", created consistent routine life experiences for disabled groups under an able individual's perspective, challenging social bias concerning medical gaze and stereotypes via a harnessing wheelchair in public spaces on a routine life base, constructing body narratives and resisting social invisibility (marginalization). The audience's interaction with the content creator mostly exhibits technical rather than inspirational aspects, improving reasons in communications, and increasing visibility through narrative rationality.

5.2 Urban facility testing as embodied praxis

The content creator's urban accessibility facility testing exemplifies lived bodily experiences through digital platforms. She has conducted several distinct urban facility testing experiences, such as demonstrated in "3年后再来苏州, 变化逆天了! 苏州旅游无障碍体验", transforms every day mobility into what Brighenti (2010) termed "visibility practices". These performances make visible the normally invisible labor of disabled movement, creating mediated digital visibilities through embodied expe-

riences, where private body knowledge becomes publicly accessible. The wheelchair—body—environment image functions as what Ihde (1990) termed "technological relation", where the wheelchair becomes both the representation of body capability and a signifier of embodied experience.

5.3 Assistive technology as visibility apparatus

Assistive devices functions as that Ellcessor (2016) termed as "accessibility interfaces" that enable and document body performance simultaneously. The content creator's device usage—particularly in the video titled "厨艺小白初次体验炒菜机: 在翻车边缘不断试探!", representing her competence exhibition through technology and bodily performance. These performances create visibility through technical mastery, where skilled interactions with technology become claims for social recognition. Moreover, the camera's focus on device-body interactions makes the physicality of disability both visible and legible as competence rather than a limitation.

5.4 Social spatiality: presence in public space

The content creator's spatial practices demonstrate what Brighenti (2010) conceptualizes as "visibility as a social relation." Her deliberate occupation of public spaces -documented through careful framing of social interactions, evident in "当我作为中国演员代表, 与英国艺术家们讨论无障碍!", creates what Goffman (2023) termed as "front stage performances" that challenge spatial norms and improve visibility through public presence: "the emphasize of the common sense that people with disabilities are also human beings, with various identities and emotions." The analysis of audience responses focused on technical competence, which indicates successful negotiation of visibility. These interactions and presence function as what de Certeau would term "daily practices" that reclaim public space through visible body presence.

6. Discussion & conclusion

This study demonstrates how disabled content creators, such as "Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei" employ sophisticated body practices—from mobility performance and technology demonstrations to urban accessibility tests and social spatial interactions—to construct social visibility and resist marginalization on Bilibili. These practices are deeply embodied, mediated (technologically), and narratively constructed which challenge the historical and cultural myths surrounding disability.

This process forges a crucial link between visibility, body practice, and resistance to marginalization. Through daily

body practice, from navigating inaccessible public transport to demonstrating wheelchair sports—directly resist dominant narratives including: the medicalized narrative that frames disability as an individual pathology to be cured; the narrative that reduces disabled bodies to objects of non-disabled motivation; and the spatial narrative that excludes impaired bodies from public and digital spaces. By transforming routine body struggles into publicly accessible content, they claim their bodies as sites for agency.

The findings align with and extend theories of visibility theories, by illustrating how visibility is not only achieved through visual exposure but through embodied praxis, in ways that the body makes hidden labor and marginalized experiences publicly legible. The semiotic recoding of a wheelchair reflects Barthes' concept of myth-breaking, while the narrative construction of daily life experiences reflects White's notion of "emplotment" as a form of resistance.

Moreover, Bilibili's platform specific features, especially its algorithm that favors in-depth content, its bullet comment system, and its community-oriented structure enable a form of visibility that is interactive, and less prone to commodification. This supports the arguments of Ellcesor (2016) and Gillespie (2018) regarding the role of the media as both enabling and regulating marginalized voices.

The video production process itself constitutes a form of strategic agenda-setting that reshapes public discourse around disability. Rather than following trending topics, these creators consciously set their agenda around the mundane yet politically charged aspects of disabled life. This includes methodically documenting urban accessibility tests, which reframe public discussion from abstract sympathy to concrete evaluation of environmental barriers. The process involves careful framing—selecting specific camera angles to highlight spatial constraints, editing sequences to show problem-solving processes, and using direct linguistic critique of poorly designed facilities. This operationalization of bodily experience into media content transforms individual struggle into collective social critique, effectively setting a public agenda focused on accessibility and inclusion.

Furthermore, this research highlights how these digital practices illuminate the broader disability community. The videos provide visceral evidence of the social and physical barriers that constitute everyday life for many disabled individuals, from inadequate public infrastructure to discriminatory social attitudes. The platform's features, particularly its community-oriented algorithm and interactive danmu system, enable the formation of a supportive environment where experiences are validated, technical

advice is shared, and collective identity is strengthened. This digital solidarity offers some protection against the commodification of disability narratives often observed on more algorithmically driven platforms like Douyin, allowing for more authentic and sustainable representation.

However, this form of visibility remains constrained by both algorithmic biases and platform gaps, as well as stereotyping. The qualitative study of the case "Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei" also highlights how factors like socioeconomic status (as a former employee of a major Internet company) and professional background (as a postgraduate in UBC, major "gender, race, sexuality and social justice") may influence the representativeness of visibility, suggesting that not all disabled content creators are potent to access the resources needed to achieve widespread visibility.

Further research could expand this inquiry by incorporating comparative studies across platforms (e.g. Douyin vs. Bilibili), examining intersections with other marginalized identities, or employing participatory methods to center the voices of disabled creators themselves, or even making empathies and understandings of algorithmic oppression and ableist discriminations.

This research examines how limb-disabled content creators on Bilibili utilize body practice to construct social visibility and resist marginalization. Through a detailed case study of "Da Cheng Zi Hao Mei Mei", several important mechanisms of digital visibility construction of limb-disabled content creators. This includes:

- (1) Semiotic and narrative recording that reconstructs the meaning of disability through their daily practices and storytelling, creators challenge dominant cultural myths and offer counter-narratives.
- (2) Embodied spatial praxis that makes visible of unseen labors and daily presence through urban accessibility and public space performance, thereby claiming visibility through public presence.
- (3) Using assistive devices and digital tools as amplifiers for visibility, enabling creators to demonstrate skill and adaptability rather than deficiency.
- (4) Bilibili's community-oriented features, such as the danmu system, allow audiences to engage and construct meaning, provide both emotional and rational support (technical and instrumental support), reinforce social recognition and validate embodied experiences.

These findings could contribute to the fields of broader fields of disability studies, digital sociology, and media theory by reframing visibility as an embodied, practiced, and technologically mediated process instead of a static state of being seen. They also offer practical implications for platform designers and policymakers: To foster a more inclusive digital environment, platforms should not only

improve technical accessibility but also algorithmically promote nuanced and community-validated contents that challenges reductive stereotypes. Ultimately, this study sheds light on the transformative potential of digital self-presentation—not as a mere performance of identity, but as a profound practice of resistance and freedom.

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