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ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКІ СТАТТІ

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The Image of People with Disabilities in the Ukrainian Online Media *Ukrainska Pravda*

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This study aims to identify trends in the coverage of people with disabilities in the online media outlet *Ukrainska Pravda* from 2015 to 2019 and investigate whether these trends changed in 2025.

Method. The following keywords were chosen for the study: disabled people, people with disabilities, individuals with limited abilities, individuals with special needs, persons with disabilities, and people with additional needs. **Results.** The analysis revealed that the number of materials published between 2015 and 2019 fluctuated, depending on social events. Coverage increased during the Paralympic Games, highlighting the victories of athletes with disabilities. However, during other periods, coverage was limited to isolated materials about these people. The findings demonstrate that social, legal, and sports aspects received the most attention, while medical and educational aspects were less frequently addressed. Political, scientific, and cultural aspects were largely absent from the information space. Among the main genres covering people with disabilities, notes and articles were the most common, followed by reports, author columns, and life stories. Content about people with disabilities draw attention when centered around achievements. In early 2015, the coverage mostly focused on the challenges faced by people with disabilities. In subsequent years, it shifted to their physical and moral accomplishments. There were also notable changes in how individuals with disabilities perceived themselves, with journalists aiming to reflect these positive developments to society, encouraging recognition of their equality and the creation of conditions for their comfortable living. The year 2018 saw the highest number of materials – 50. Compared to 2025, the trend changed, with the number of materials reaching 103. This increase is attributed to the full-scale war, which heightened this medium's focus on medical issues, as many people have been wounded and have become disabled. Conversely, sports coverage marked a decline. In 2025, materials about people with disabilities continued to appear in the same genres as those from 2015 to 2019, with the addition of interviews and surveys that journalists used to foster dialogue with society, particularly with people with disabilities.

Keywords: people with disabilities, media, social issues, inclusion, image, medical aspects, legal aspects, sports aspects, political aspects, social aspects

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Образ людей з інвалідністю в українському інтернет-виданні «Українська правда»

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У статті головною метою було з'ясувати тенденції щодо висвітлення на сторінках інтернет-видання «Українська правда» образу людей з інвалідністю з 2015 по 2019 рік, а також дослідити, чи змінилися ці тенденції у 2025 році. **Метод.** Промоніторено публікації українського інтернет-видання «Українська правда», для цього обрано ключові слова для аналізу: інваліди, люди з інвалідністю, люди з обмеженими можливостями, люди з обмеженими функціональними можливостями, люди з особливими потребами, особи з інвалідністю, неповносправні люди, люди з додатковими потребами. **Результати.** Установлено, що кількість публікацій, оприлюднених протягом 2015–2019 років, змінювалася залежно від тих подій, які відбувалися в суспільстві. Участь людей з інвалідністю в Паралімпіаді та здобуті ними перемоги активно висвітлювалися в даному медіа, натомість в інший період про цих людей трапляються поодинокі публікації. Доведено, що в соціальному, правовому, спортивному аспекті акцентовано найбільше, медичному та освітньому аспектах менше, майже відсутні в інформаційному просторі політичний, науковий та культурний аспекти. Із основних жанрів про людей з інвалідністю найбільше представлені замітка та стаття, меншою мірою – репортаж, авторська колонка та життєва історія. Установлено: історія людини з інвалідністю привертає до себе увагу в контексті певних здобутків. Якщо на початку 2015-го йдеться, хоч і побіжно, більше про проблеми таких осіб, то в наступні роки – про досягнення як у фізичному, так і моральному плані. Помітними є зміни й у свідомості самих людей з інвалідністю, відповідно журналісти намагаються ці позитивні зрушення спроектувати на суспільство, щоб те визнавало рівноправність людей з інвалідністю та створювало всі умови для їхнього комфортного життя. У 2018 році опубліковано найбільшу кількість матеріалів – 50. У порівнянні з 2025 роком тенденція змінилася. Повідомлень утричі більше – їх 103. У зв'язку з повномасштабною війною в даному медіа посилилася увага до медичної тематики, оскільки люди зазнають поранень та набувають інвалідності. Натомість спортивний аспект фактично не висвітлюється. Повідомлення про людей з інвалідністю у 2025 році представлені у таких жанрах, як і в 2015–2019 роках, додалися інтерв'ю та опитування, за допомогою яких журналісти налаштовують діалогічність із суспільством, зокрема з людьми, які мають інвалідність.

Ключові слова: люди з інвалідністю, медіа, соціальна проблематика, інклюзія, образ, медичний аспект, правовий аспект, спортивний аспект, політичний аспект, соціальний аспект

The Soviet era left us a legacy of a stereotypical attitude towards people with disabilities, making it crucial at the present stage to shape a more accurate image of these individuals. The media play a significant role in this process by influencing public opinion and decision-making. Media outlets facilitate image formation of specific groups of people, including politicians, individuals with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and others. According to the Center for Content Analysis, some of the most influential Ukrainian media are *TSN*, *Obozrevatel*, *Korrespondent*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, and *Radio Svoboda*. For this study, we have chosen the online media outlet *Ukrainska Pravda*. Given that the formation of the image of a person with disabilities in media texts is complex, it is necessary to clarify the subject matter of stories that cover their lives, as well as the genres and the quantity of these materials, which highlights the relevance of our study.

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Ukrainska Pravda ranks among the top 50 most visited media websites in the Ukrainian internet segment. Prior statistics indicate that about 500,000 people visit the website every day. On January 24, 2014, *Ukrainska Pravda* saw a record number of users, reaching 1.6 million visitors, and from January 22 to 24, the total number of visits exceeded 15 million, demonstrating its prominence among Ukrainian online media (Dmytrenko, 2014). This status is further evidenced by an Internews-Ukraine study titled "Ukrainian Media: News Consumption and Trust in 2025". According to it, *Ukrainska Pravda* is among the top five nationwide media sources for news, and its Facebook page ranks among the top three (Oliynyk, 2025).

Musayeva (2020) notes that every morning, 300,000 readers engage with *Ukrainska Pravda*, with daily readership ranging from 1 to 1.5 million on weekdays. As an independent and self-sustaining media, it offers impartial and unbiased content. Its journalists primarily cover social issues, economics, politics, history, sports, and more. In 2025, *Ukrainska Pravda* was recognized as one of the top five most transparent and responsible media outlets for compliance with professional standards according to a monitoring report issued by the NGO "Institute of Mass Information".

Ukrainska Pravda devotes attention to people with disabilities, with most content featured in the section *Ukrainska Pravda – Life*. Given its wide audience, this media outlet influences public opinion about this community.

The purpose of the study is to identify trends in the coverage of the image of people with disabilities in *Ukrainian Pravda* from 2015 to 2019, as well as to examine potential changes in these trends in 2025. Additionally, we aim to assess the level of interest among journalists in covering this group of people.

Our hypothesis posits that there is a surge in narratives about people with disabilities during key events, such as the Paralympic Games, the adoption of legislative changes, observances for national and international days dedicated to people with disabilities, etc.

Theoretical Framework

The image of people with disabilities in the media is a topic of interest for both Ukrainian and international researchers. Scholars focus on the role of the media in shaping the image of people with disabilities, providing recommendations on the principles of covering social issues (Bondarenko, 2014; Butyrina, 2014; Mykhaylova, 2014; Svintsitska, 2015; Fudorova, 2012). Shenderovsky (2011) identifies the prerequisites that can contribute to the institutionalization of the media and the promotion of socially significant journalism. Fudorova (2012) insists that one of the most effective methods of combating the stigma of being "disabled" is showcasing the achievements of people with disabilities via mass media channels. Butyrina (2014) emphasizes the importance of genre representation of media content about people with disabilities, particularly through dialogic genres such as interviews, which will allow this group to voice issues that matter to them.

Stereotypes about people with disabilities and their presence in the media are investigated by international researchers (Brown, n.d.; Brevig, 2022; Cryer, 2021; Thompson, 2019).

Brevig (2022), in her article "The Case for Authentic Disability Representation in Media and Why Our Society Desperately Needs It" stresses that people with disabilities are extremely rarely represented in the media. The author draws on her personal experience with her brother, who has had a disability since childhood. As a result of a lack of information and predominantly stereotypical portrayals of people with disabilities in the media, her brother became socially isolated. Furthermore, the lack of accurate representation in the media reinforces societal ableism, where people without disabilities are given priority over persons with disabilities.



Method

According to the State Statistics Service, 2,703,000 persons in Ukraine live with one form of disability or another. This figure is constantly rising due to the ongoing military operations. However, there exists an imbalance in the coverage of information about people with disabilities; topics related to them often receive little attention, leaving society insufficiently informed about their lives.

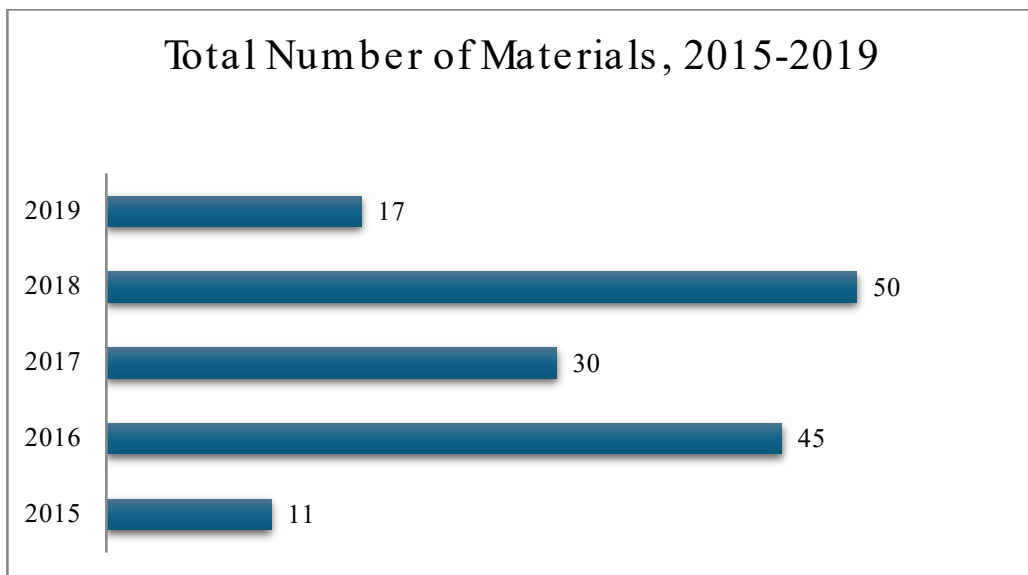
To investigate these issues, a content analysis was used. We monitored materials about people with disabilities on the website of *Ukrainska Pravda*, focusing on the category "health status, mental and physical abilities". We used a range of keywords, including "disabled people," "people with disabilities," "people with amputations," "people with limited abilities," "people with limited functional abilities," "people with special needs," "persons with disabilities," "disabled people," and "people with additional needs." Our analysis encompassed 153 pieces published between 2015 and 2019, along with an additional 103 materials published in 2025 to establish trends in the coverage of people with disabilities.

Through quantitative content analysis, numerical data on the frequency of dissemination of information related to people with disabilities were collected. Statistical analysis was employed to identify trends. Qualitative content analysis allowed us to analyze the data, in particular, the thematic and genre aspects of this content, which provided insights into media trends. The descriptive method allowed us to record and systematize the information.

Results and Discussion

The number of materials between 2015 and 2019, as shown in Figure 1, fluctuated in accordance with social events. Most content was published during the Paralympic Games, wherein people with disabilities demonstrated remarkable achievements. Additionally, extensive coverage occurred during the adoption of a law that prioritized the individual over the disability, officially approving the use of the term "person with disabilities" across all contexts.

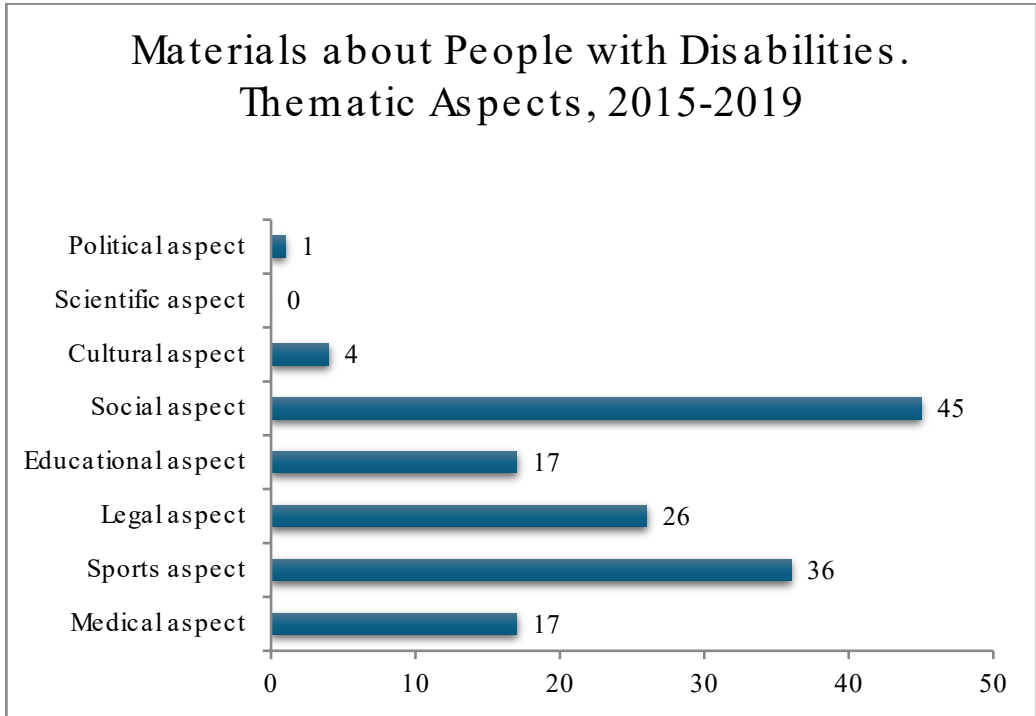
Figure 1. Total Number of Materials in *Ukrainska Pravda*, 2015-2019





We selected several thematic aspects (see Figure 2) that relate to people with disabilities to understand which topic is most relevantly covered by journalists of *Ukrainska Pravda*.

Figure 2. Materials of *Ukrainska Pravda* about People with Disabilities. Thematic Aspects, 2015-2019



The medical aspect includes content related to the health of people with disabilities. We observe a trend that the number of materials on this topic has increased since 2018. The positive developments are due to a growing societal interest in the health of people with disabilities, as parents have become more open about their children's illness—topics that were previously considered taboo. This openness has contributed to the fact that parents of children with disabilities began to form support communities and jointly seek solutions to common problems. The opening of the "Early Intervention Institute", which provides high-quality assistance to both children and their parents, has played a major role in this process.

The sports aspect encompasses content about the achievements of people with disabilities in sports. A surge in such materials coincided with the Paralympic Games. For example, in 2016, when the Paralympic Games were held in Rio de Janeiro, *Ukrainska Pravda* published between 10 and 12 pieces within two to three months. This was an important moment for advocating the visibility of people with disabilities, prompting Ukrainian society to recognize them as equal citizens. Consequently, the media started to cover their stories more prominently.

The educational aspect is represented in materials about children with disabilities, particularly those with special educational needs. In 2017, amendments were made to the Law of Ukraine "On Education" to ensure equal access to education. According to this law, the state is required to ensure the identification and removal of barriers that hinder the realization of the rights and the fulfilment of the educational needs of these individuals. During 2017, the highest number of



materials about inclusive education appeared, with pieces such as "Ukraine Has Signed a 5-million Contract with China for the Development of Inclusive Education," "Everyone Has a Place Here. How Special Children Get Along in Schools," "Osnova" is Friendship. 10-year Experience of a School Without Restrictions," The Council Adopted a Law on the Education of Children with Special Needs," "Must Have" Article of the New Law "On Education," among others. In the following years, information about educational needs for children with disabilities has declined. This trend indicates that while legislative progress stimulates the media coverage of certain topics, discussions about challenges in inclusive education tend to fade over time, even though issues persist. Occasionally, we read about these problems through social networks, but they are not always featured in the media.

The political aspect is illustrated in one material about G. Kernes, a politician, the mayor of Kharkiv, who became disabled following an assassination on April 28, 2014. This context arose when G. Kernes did not appear in court regarding a case involving kidnapping, torture, and threats to kill. Politicians A. Gerashchenko and A. Avakov believed that G. Kernes was using his disability as a shield. In contrast, G. Kernes stated that he had not registered his disability and wished to attend city council sessions. By underscoring this point, the authorities reinforced the stereotype that a politician with a disability is unable to reach their workplace and, therefore, is unfit to lead a large city.

The scientific aspect is absent from any content, which makes it impossible for readers to form an image of a scientist with a disability. One piece does mention Stephen Hawking as a writer of books for children, which he co-authored with his daughter, and includes an excerpt from one of those books.

The legal aspect is covered by materials that have appeared regularly in the media over the past five years. These articles mainly report on changes to legislative norms regarding people with disabilities and the violations of the rights of this group of people. Examples include: "Parents of Children with Special Needs Will Have Additional Leave," "Poroshenko Established a Department of the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Presidential Administration," "How to Provide Appropriate Social Services for Persons with Disabilities", "Parents of Special Children Asked Lyashko not to Use the Word 'Down'", "The Smell of Mattiola, or How I Registered My Mother for Disability". Other topics address employment rights for individuals with disabilities, such as "After the Uproar on Social Networks, Ukrzaliznytsia Reinstated a Man Who Became Disabled in the ATO," and "The National Police Employ Veterans and Disabled Members of the ATO", among others.

The social aspect is represented in 45 materials, which is the highest on this topic. In 2015, 2016, and 2017, such materials were scarce, with only 18 being published during those years. However, the number began to actively increase in 2018, with 18 pieces in that single year. Most of these materials focus on inclusion. This surge can also be attributed to changes in legislation, increased attention to persons with disabilities from various public organizations, monitoring city for accessibility, inclusion, and, in general, the attitude of the public towards people with disabilities, as well as their inclusion in public life. A series titled "Convenient City," created in collaboration with people with disabilities, Ulyana and Vitaly Pcholkin, deserves special attention. They are public activists who advocate for inclusiveness of cities and institutions. Key publications in this series include "A Convenient City: Accessible Room – How Hotel Rooms for People with Disabilities in Kyiv Are Equipped," "A Convenient City: What Accessible Fashion and Art Should Look Like," "A Convenient City: What It Is – Accessible Football at the NSC 'Olimpiysky'," "People with Disabilities Dance Twerk," "Stairs Are Not a Sentence, But an Obstacle. How Dmytro Shchebetnyuk Destroys Curbs in People's Heads," "Without Taboo, or How Persons with Disabilities Fight for the Right to Be Parents," "Buy a Sling and Grow Zen: 9 Secrets from a Blind Mom." Starting in 2019, the number of such materials decreased from 18 to 7, which indicates a decline in journalists' interest in topics related to people with disabilities.

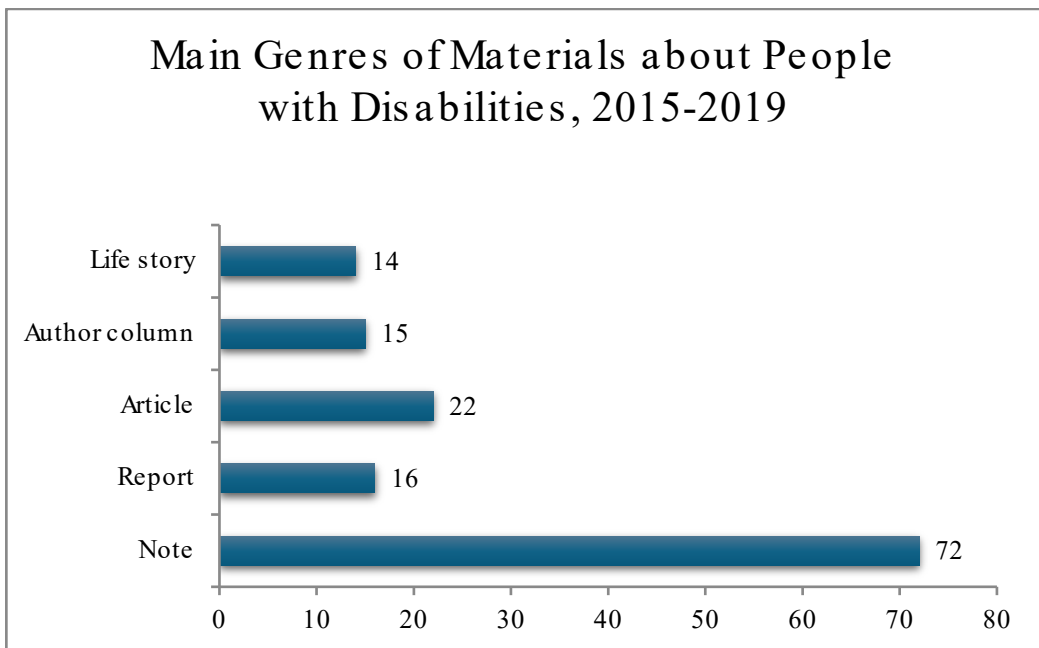


Coverage of the cultural aspect includes only four materials published over five years. Journalists began to write about people with disabilities, namely, artists, actors, and dancers, including stories such as "'I Do Not Want to Be Loved for My Disability': How an Artist with Atrophy Sold 1,000 Works," "'Recognize Us': How Art Destroys Stereotypes About Persons with Disabilities," "Hear the Voice of the Body: How British Theater Teaches Ukrainians About Intimacy Through Dance," and "18 Photos That Prove Persons with Disabilities Can Create Art."

Additionally, there were materials reprinted from foreign media, such as *The Guardian*, which featured "Lego Has a Figure of a Person in a Wheelchair for the First Time" and *The Independent*, with "Argentinean with Down Syndrome Becomes Kindergarten Teacher for the First Time." There were also stories highlighting the experiences of people with disabilities in various countries, such as "Teddy Dog from Northern Ireland Saved a Boy with Down Syndrome," "Girl with a Prosthesis Traveled All Over Europe and Made an Entertaining Project Out of It," and "Teacher of a Class for Children with Down Syndrome Invited Students to Her Wedding." This is a positive trend, as it allows readers to have information about people with disabilities from around the world, emphasizing the equality of people with special needs and their active integration into society, with a reflection on the Ukrainian context.

After conducting research, we found that the materials published by *Ukrainska Pravda* relating to people with disabilities fall into both informational and analytical, as well as literary-journalistic genres. Figure 3 presents the main genres of content about people with disabilities found in *Ukrainska Pravda*.

Figure 3. Main Genres of Materials about People with Disabilities, 2015-2019



Among the genres, the most common format in *Ukrainian Pravda* is a note, followed to a lesser extent by reports and photo reports. Notes tend to increase during periods of significant changes impacting the lives of people with disabilities. They are characterized by their brevity and dryness of presentation. In 2018 and 2019, reports and photo reports began to appear, indicating a shift in the approach to covering information about people with disabilities. The author's emotions

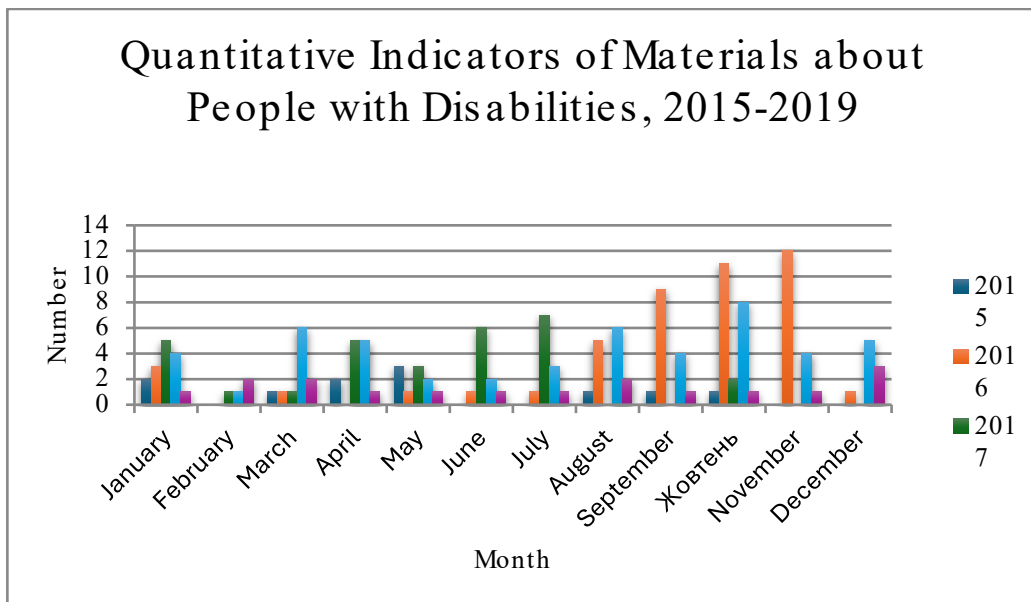


and personal attitudes towards these people became more apparent. Notably, the photo reports of the "Convenient City" series show every movement of persons with disabilities and the degree to which urban environments are adapting to their needs.

Within analytical genres, articles are the most prevalent. In the analytical materials of *Ukrainian Pravda*, journalists provide readers with insights into the lives of people with disabilities, the challenges they face, and the diverse perspectives of experts on various situations. Examples of these articles include "Inclusion Does Not Concern You? Why This Isn't So," "When the Child Comes First: Explaining the Reform of Boarding Schools in Ukraine," and "Dictionary of an Educated Ukrainian: How to Speak Appropriately About People."

Across the literary-journalistic texts about persons with disabilities, the genre of life story is presented in the series "The Price of a Medal: Stories of Paralympic Champions in Rio". In addition, a popular author column, where contributors such as politicians, educators, human rights advocates, and parents of children with disabilities express reflections on related issues, for example, pieces by O. Tkachenko, "Deputies Can Save My Child Now," R. Hreba, "How to Simplify Life for Parents and Teachers of Inclusive School Students," Yu. Sachuk, "The Struggle Continues: What the UN Finally Heard About the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine," and I. Vyrtyosa, "Leaders, or How girls with disabilities change themselves and the community." Between 2015 and 2019, the quantitative indicators of materials about people with disabilities changed (see Figure 4). Stories about people with disabilities attracted attention only in the context of their achievements, particularly in sports, highlighting their talent and uniqueness. If at the beginning of 2015, the focus was placed on the challenges faced by these people, then in the following years, it shifted to their achievements in both physical and moral aspects. This change is also reflected in how people with disabilities perceive themselves. As a result, journalists are striving to convey these positive developments to society, encouraging recognition of the equality of people with disabilities and advocating for the creation of an environment that supports their comfortable living.

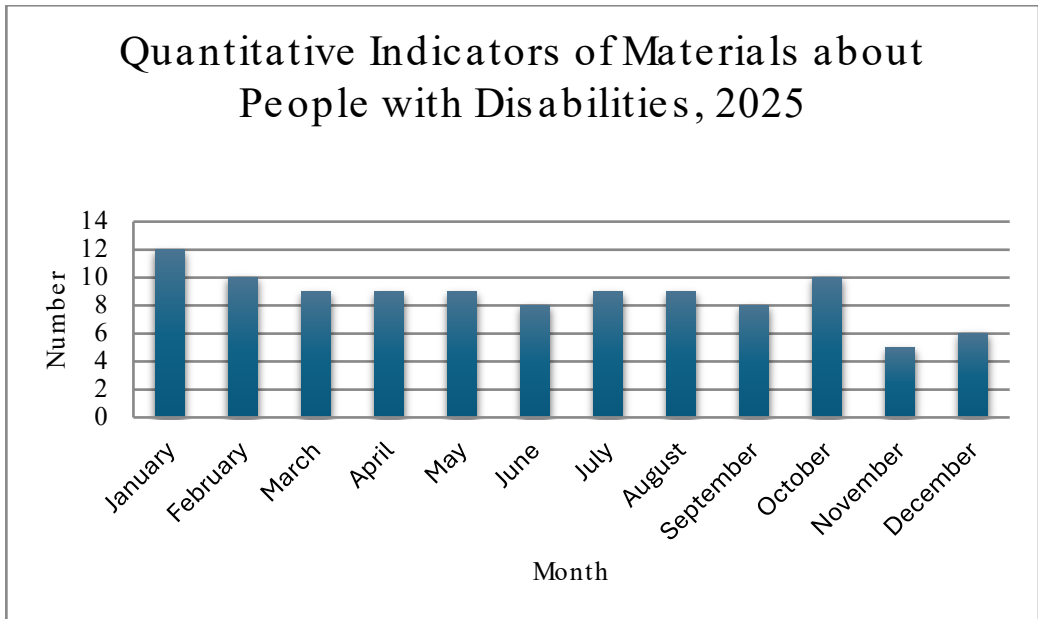
Figure 4. Quantitative Indicators of Materials about People with Disabilities, 2015-2019





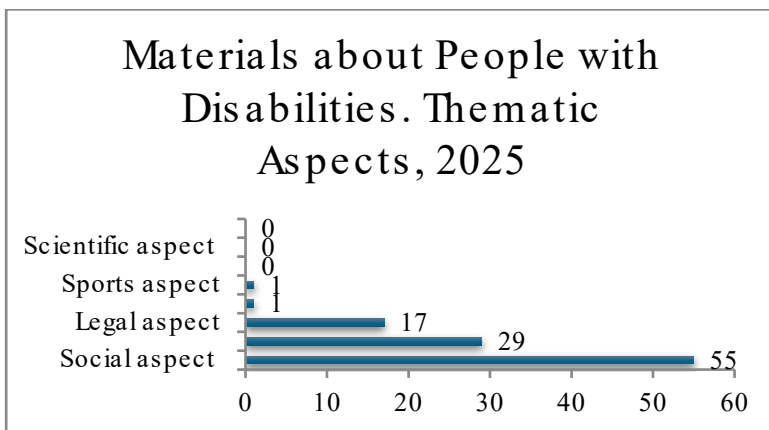
An analysis of content during 2025 shows positive trends: if the highest number of materials in 2018 was 50, then in 2025 it is 103. Accordingly, the number has demonstrated monthly growth from between two and three to between 8 and 10 pieces. This signals that people with disabilities are becoming more visible.

Figure 5. Quantitative Indicators of Materials about People with Disabilities, 2025



The thematic focus of content has shifted from sports to medical issues, given the fact that during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, the number of people with disabilities has significantly increased. Social, medical, legal, and rehabilitation-related topics have come to the fore, while sports and education for people with disabilities lack coverage. People with disabilities from political, scientific, and cultural domains remain absent in the information space.

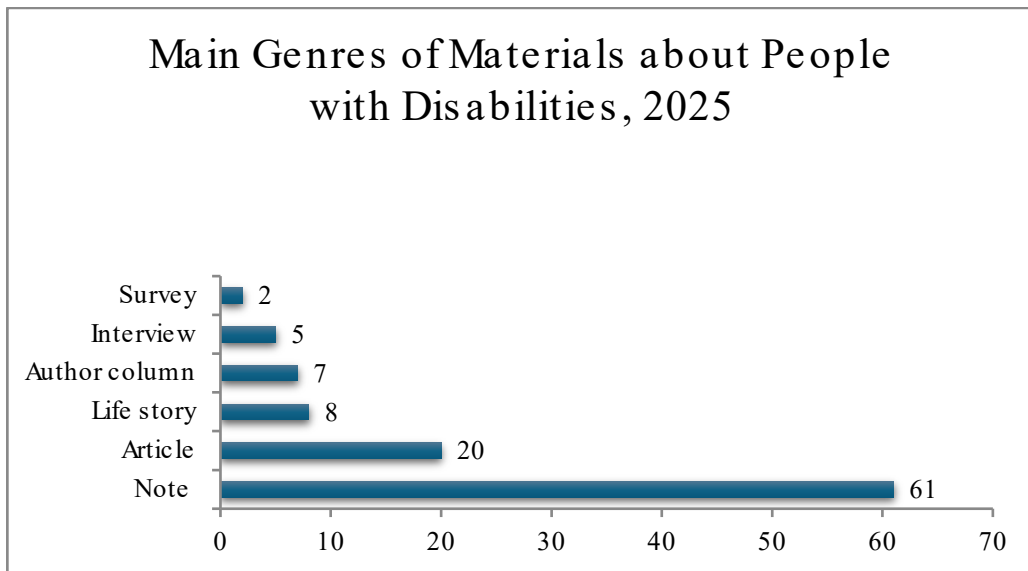
Figure 6. Materials about People with Disabilities. Thematic Aspects, 2025





As demonstrated in Figure 7, among the main genres represented in *Ukrainska Pravda* are a note, an article, a life story, an author column, along with interviews and surveys, which indicates an intensification of dialogue, allowing for the exchange of opinions between people with disabilities and those who want to deepen their knowledge about this community.

Figure 7. Main Genres of Materials about People with Disabilities, 2025



Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the content of online media *Ukrainska Pravda*, we can conclude that the limited number of materials over the past five years reflects a lack of interest among journalists in issues related to people with disabilities. This may indicate a certain level of intolerance and, at times, indifference from the media toward this group of people. While specific events can spur an increase in content volume, this rise does not become consistent, highlighting a lack of systematic and regular coverage. The topics addressed in *Ukrainska Pravda* predominantly focus on the social aspects of the lives of people with disabilities. Over the last two years, noticeable progress has been made in the coverage of inclusivity and the integration of people with disabilities into social life. Public activists with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities significantly contribute to this evolution. The sports-related topics rank second, often highlighting the achievements of athletes with disabilities, which positively influences their public perception. However, athletes with disabilities often feel that, despite occasional spikes in media interest, public attention quickly fades, and many are not even recognized for their accomplishments. Legal topics primarily relate to the protection and advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities, though sometimes the portrayal leans toward a victim narrative, wherein people are depicted merely as tools for achieving broader objectives. Coverage of medical and educational topics has demonstrated improvement, particularly after the adoption of the law on inclusive education in 2017 and 2018. Such coverage sometimes features teachers with disabilities. Unfortunately, politicians with disabilities lack representation as well as scientists with disabilities, whose representation is absent altogether, which results in a significant information gap regarding their activities in these domains. A positive shift is the transition from informational to analytical genres, suggesting a deeper engagement in



discussing the lives of people with disabilities and enhancing public understanding of their experiences. In literary-journalistic materials, there has been a tendency to write about reflections of authors on topics related to people with disabilities. By 2025, we anticipate a shift, as the increasing number of materials and a change in thematic focus—from sports to medical, social, and legal topics—indicate a growing interest in improving dialogue around the lives of people with disabilities. Nevertheless, we still register fluctuations in publishing frequency during significant events related to people with disabilities.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The author confirms that no artificial intelligence tools were used to create, write, or edit the text during the preparation of this manuscript except for translation. All results are original and obtained without the help of AI.

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