

Capstone Project Proposal

Working Title: Like, Comment, and Subscribe: An Investigation Into the Current Accessibility of Social Media for Individuals With Disabilities and the Call for Expanded Access

Brief explanation of the project: With the rise of social media expansion and its growing use as a hub for information dissemination, online accessibility has become more important than ever. However, access barriers are still present on platforms such as Instagram, which raises concerns about the ability of individuals with disabilities to be able to access information equitably. In this project, I launched an investigation into a two-fold research question: understanding the current awareness of available accessibility features on social media as well as exploring the online experiences of students with disabilities. Accessibility features include closed captioning, color contrast, camel case, and much more. Through an accessible survey that garnered over 2,000 responses and focus group interviews with UCLA students who identified as having disabilities and were between the ages of 18 and 26, I gathered data on the current awareness of available accessibility features. I also drew patterns of themes among students with disabilities regarding their desires for specific changes to be made to social media platforms.

Impact on the field of Disability Studies: As a Child of Deaf Adults, seeing informational videos during COVID-19 that lacked captions motivated me to pursue social media accessibility research. With this research, I've been able to meet with individuals who have different kinds of disabilities and present with different access needs—this diversity in perspective will help contribute an intersectional understanding of how accessibility needs transcend beyond the physical world into the larger, vast meta world. With our society's new shift to social media as a form of communication and news, we need to understand how to provide accessibility in such an experimental and evolving space—the most representative way to do so would be to invite input from the community, a movement I have joined through my research and focus groups.