

## REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN UAE NEWSPAPERS: GULF NEWS AND KHALEEJ TIMES AS A CASE STUDY

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**Citation:** Emam, S., Bouri, S., Soliman, N., Fahim, B. & Alhamami, H. (2020). Representation of People with Special Needs in UAE Newspapers: Gulf News and Khaleej Times as a Case Study. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 90-104

### ABSTRACT

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This study investigates how people with special needs are represented in UAE's national newspapers, Gulf News, and Khaleej Times. 80 randomly selected news reports were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method. Using the media framing theory, the reports were analyzed according to the following frames: illness, support, burden, empathy, and empowerment. The findings revealed that people with special needs are represented positively in both newspapers since the empathy and empowerment frames were the most present in the news reports examined. The coverage tends to enhance the public awareness of people with special needs, assimilate people with special needs into society, and endorse their social communities' participation.

**Keywords:** Content Analysis, Special needs, People of determination, Khaleej Times, Gulf News, United Arab Emirates

### INTRODUCTION

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An individual with special needs has an impairment, which can be intellectual, mental, or physical. Special needs can be found from birth or brought by a tragic occurrence, causing a physical inability. Because of well-being limitations, those with special needs face obstructions to incorporation (Morgan, 2015). Some have delinquent behaviors and particular demands, or on the other hand are gifted. It is a significant issue as an excessive number of individuals with unique requirements have been sidelined or treated differently because of their inability as individuals with uncommon necessities. In some countries,

people with special needs are positioned in special requirements centers, kept out of typical schools, or not permitted to participate in society.

As specified by the World Health Organization (WHO), a special needs individual is anyone who has "an issue in body capacity or structure, a movement constraint, has trouble in executing an undertaking or activity; with an interest limitation." During 2019, there were approximately 2 billion impaired individuals worldwide, 37.5% of the total populace (Disabled People in the World in 2019: facts and figures, 2020). According to the World Report on Disability, disabilities will be a considerably more significant concern in the years ahead since its commonness is on the ascent. That is due to ongoing medical issues, mental health disorders, natural disasters, accidents, etc. (World Report on Disability).

This study examines how the United Arab Emirates newspapers portray special needs. Employing media framing theory, the content analysis examines 80 newspaper articles published between 2015 and 2020 in Gulf News and Khaleej Times. The UAE alludes to the individuals with special requirements or inabilities as 'people of determination' to acknowledge their accomplishments in various fields. According to The United Arab Emirates' Government portal, as per Federal Law No. 2 of 2001, people of determination can receive monthly help subject to terms. In 2018, UAE dispatched the primary 'Emirati sign language dictionary,' which tries to create and normalize the signs utilized by special needs with hearing debilitations over the UAE. In 2019, Minister for Community Development said the digit of Emiratis with disabilities stood at 19,151. "784 have vision loss, 2,335 are autistic, 5,510 are physically disabled, 6,227 have intellectual disability, 2063 have a hearing impairment, and 2,232 have multiple disabilities" (Haza, 2019).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the newspaper portrayal of people with special needs in the UAE. Two major newspapers were analyzed for the study, Gulf News and Khaleej Times, the time period from 2015 to 2020. The study observes what frames are used in the media coverage of special needs in UAE's newspapers through the framing theory. This topic has been chosen since special attention is directed towards children with special needs in the UAE.

### Research Questions

The content analysis aims to answer the following questions:

- i. How are people with special needs described in UAE newspapers?
- ii. What types of disabilities are described in the newspapers used?

- iii. How is the UAE's treatment of people with special needs framed in the news reports?

### Limitations

This research's limitations should be highlighted; therefore, the research is committed to a specific time frame, which are the years from 2015 until 2020. The newspapers that are used in this study are Gulf News and Khaleej Times. Around 214 news reports highlighted topics about people with special needs. The findings do not generalize and symbolize the world; it only represents the United Arab Emirates. Since it is a textual study, it does not cover those with special needs' personal experience. These limitations should be taken into consideration because it helps the researchers to understand and develop their findings and research.

### Significance of the Study

Individuals will strongly depend on media news to figure out the world, particularly on issues that are not in usual surroundings. People with special needs have been represented in-depth in the UAE newspapers. However, this study aims to raise awareness even further for individuals who lack further information on how special needs people are represented. It will also inspire and provide them with enough information about future opportunities and advantages given for these groups of people. Finally, the study will act as an image and encourage other countries to follow the UAE and their representation of individuals with special needs and how they are taken seriously.

### Theoretical Framework

In this content analysis, the theoretical framework used is framing theory. The Framing theory helps understand how the media structure their messages (Bajracharya, 2018). As the media assumes a significant part in individuals' observations, the negative outlining can significantly affect the individuals. Media is a commanding tool; thus, the content must be outlined with values as it impacts and controls the crowd. Indeed, in many countries, special needs stories barely get covered in the media (Haller, 2010).

Colin Barnes, a professor of Disability Studies at Leeds Centre for Disability Studies, finds that a large part of the portrayal of individuals with special needs in the media is negative. He contends that this elevates their underestimation and isolation from society (Barnes, 1992). "How the attributes of news stories about disability are played in the news media can potentially sway public opinion about disability issues and toward the cultural representations of people with disabilities in general" (Haller, 2010).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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The purpose of this section is to expand the understanding of current research on the representation of disabilities in different countries. The study of media framing disability in Daily Nation Newspaper in Kenya, written by Abwao (2019), analyzed how newspapers in Kenya portray disabilities with regard to social exclusion. Also, the study inspected what frames are utilized in the media inclusion of incapacity in Kenyan newspapers. The method used was quantitative content analysis. This method contemplated the frames that existed in terms of inability portrayal in the media, the potential advancements that have been made in incapacity commentary, and assisted societal changes over time. There were 341 Daily Nation newspapers examined that were published from 2016 to 2017. The study's findings showed an equivalent balance in the utilization of the traditional and progressive frames. Apparent inability is more featured in the media than an undetectable inability. The media dramatically covers incapacity utilizing the sweeping term "disability," it doesn't express the sort of inability being referenced. Disability issues stay a test for the government in Kenya as there are no plainly set rules plot to viably address the difficulties that people with disabilities face in media coverage and real life.

The study of framing disability in north-central and southwestern newspapers in Nigeria, published by Ogundola (2013), evaluated how the media outlined the individuals with disabilities and issues concerning them to acknowledge how news media outlines sway society's perception of them. The method used was qualitative textual analysis. Using the analysis, the study examined how Nigerian newspapers represented disability in a time-frame between 2001 and 2010. The study's findings uncovered a resemblance between the two locales' media as they regularly utilize characteristically hostile language when detailing inability stories. Media frames that underlined charity, inequality, and derogatory names left space for stereotypes, bias, and disgrace. This had a contrary effect on how society related to individuals with incapacities in Nigeria. However, the north (mostly Islamic) media depicted individuals with disabilities as noticeable in northern networks. Conversely, the south (mostly Christian) media illustrated them as isolated in southern communities through institutionalization.

The study of labeling and framing disability in Uganda, written by Cobbinah (2013), examined specific labels for people with special needs in Uganda's newspapers. This content analysis aimed to change the keywords or the offensive titles that they use for people with special needs and to change the treatment, improving their point by giving many examples about how the media treat people with special needs and whether the media should be forced to portray people with special needs or not. The method used in this study was qualitative textual analysis. The study findings showed how the story of special needs in the media world was influenced by the cultural framing of disabilities in Uganda. The disability rights groups in Uganda did not do much of a change to the negative societal attitudes. The

Ugandan media outlined special needs as charity cases, appalling tragedies, irregularity of incapacity, making space for stereotyping and discrimination. In spite of the fact that the media sometimes depict disabilities as not 'inabilities', negative frames have exceeded positive frames.

The study of understanding disabilities in Sudan, published by Nyerere (2011), covered one of the researcher's areas that Sudan did not investigate disabilities. This research aimed to examine how people with special needs face barriers towards engaging and participating in society. The method used in this study was a qualitative research design to gather data information about special needs. This study's result was that people with special needs have a hard time participating in society because of the many barriers they face like unemployment, a sense of hopelessness, low economic status, and religious factors. People with special needs received negative attitudes caused by the Sudanese themselves.

The study of framing disability inclusiveness of government responses to COVID-19 in South America, written by Sakellariou, Malfitano, and Rotarou (2020), examined how people with disabilities are introduced to the risks of COVID-19, the steps taken to resolve it, and its effects. Therefore, the study analyzed how discrimination is linked to people with disabilities; in other words, lacking access to different facilities and services. The method used in the analysis was documentary research, using framework analyses to examine reports, enactment, orders, and other authority records that imparted measures taken because of the pandemic, published from February to May 22nd, 2020. The research was conducted in four South American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, to analyze the disability inclusiveness of policymakers to COVID-19. The findings emphasized that while some positive steps have been taken, the needs of people with disabilities have not been thoroughly addressed. Proposals for a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19 were issued by many countries without enforcing their translation into effect. All countries have taken at least certain procedures to improve access to financial assistance, health, and education for people with disabilities, while at the same time implementing policies that have had a negative effect on people with disabilities. The media frameworks also showed how, in some cases, the communities most vulnerable to the consequences of COVID-19, including disabled adults living in residential care, were covered only by guidelines rather than by laws. They are also classified as "poor" people who are unemployed and do not have insurance to cover their health care. In addition to living in dangerous and ghettoized homes, mostly in shanty towns such as Favelas in Brazil and having clean water, which is the least for any human being's necessities.

As for sports recreation and leisure, the study of sports management and people with disabilities written by Shapiro and Pits (2014), aimed to have a descriptive analysis of the degree to which the field of disability sports is discussed in sports business management

research. The method used was a selection of journals that contained a questionnaire that evaluated a four step approach: identifying the domain of interest, appointing a panel of judges, making judges review the method, and selecting suitable objects. For people with a disability, the writers have created a list of potential sports-related topics that could be used to overview the sport management curriculum. This list of topics was analyzed by 34 sport management journals over the ten years. The experts were chosen in compliance with Yun and Ulrich's (2002) guidelines, which outlined methods for finding and recruiting experts who understand the area under investigation. The report suggested that a framework and a range of information, including the wide variety of the sports sector field, including disability sports, should be offered to sports business management students. However, the keywords used to describe this part of this industry were too broad and somewhat discriminating. The term disability was used throughout the journals as "handicapped" and "disabled athletes".

The study published by Mu and Válková (2007) examined eight Chinese children's newspapers to study the characteristics of reporting and understand how the press broadcasts and show reports on disability and persons with disabilities. The authors argued that disability is a new idea and a big phenomenon in Chinese society that needed to be addressed differently, especially among the youth. They also highlighted the adverse impacts that the press and social media have on Chinese children's upbringing and attitude development towards people with disabilities. In this regard, the authors have chosen eight Chinese newspapers from 2003 to 2006 based on national reach, media coverage of disabilities, and availability of intent to understand the media's efforts to portray the image of disability among youngsters from the age of preschool up to secondary school. Following the qualitative methodology, the authors examined a total of 152 articles obtained from Chinese children's newspapers. Based on preliminary analysis, it was shown that disability was given poor media coverage with only 139 issues contained in published articles out of 2496 issues. Many newspapers attempted to use graphics and pictures to depict their stories and explain the underpinning phenomenon of disability. The authors stated that many newspapers were explicit in expanding further and breaking down types of disability such as visual impairment, mental, physical, injuries, etc., and their root causes: activity, sport, birth, medical, etc. Based on the findings published by Mu and Válková, it was pointed out that financial and mobility problems were most often cited as the problems experienced by people with disabilities in the articles examined.

The study published by Léséleuc, Pappous, and Marcellini (2010), assessed the media coverage of female athletes with disabilities. The purpose of this work was to understand the depth and infiltration of mediatization in the life of an athlete woman dealing with disability from four European countries during the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games. The authors argued that women might be less represented than men as their image is mainly linked to their social roles like a wife or a mother. However, in the realm of sports coverage

and athleticism, this balance is rather restored as both genders, especially those who suffer from a sports injury or disability, get equal coverage and attention from the media. The authors based their investigation on both qualitative and quantitative approaches by analyzing the media coverage, including widely circulating national newspapers, from four European countries during the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games. The initial analysis was based on 108 articles in newspapers, including 58 photographs between the 16th and 30th of October in 2000. In addition, the author quantitatively calculated the space granted to disabled sportswomen in the written press during the Paralympic Games and the frequency at which related articles appeared. Given that women's participation was evidently lower than men during the Paralympic Games, it was obvious that women would be mentioned less than men based on the respective degree of presence. Having said that, the authors showed that contrary to what is typically circulated in the media about women being only housewives, French, German, Spanish, and English newspapers showed women's competence with disability in the Paralympic Games. Based on the results, it was proved that disabled sports' women are just as important as men. However, the authors noticed that non-disabled female athletes were featured more in the media than disabled ones, which raises disparity among the same gender. Overall, the authors conclude that discrimination did not occur, and equal mentions were given to females with disabilities compared to their male counterparts.

In the study: "The Representation of People with Disabilities in China," Ye and Zeldes (2019) discussed the fundamental changes in the portrayal of people with disabilities in an official Chinese newspaper. This article aims to know the organizations representing the job rights of people with disabilities. Moreover, the aim of this paper is to analyze the strategies that have been used to facilitate equal working rights among different forms of disability organizations and examine facilitators and challenges faced by disability groups while advocating job rights for disabled people. Finally, the paper explored the discrepancies in terms of different geographical areas between organizations. A mixed-method approach was used in this article. Moreover, the study indicated that the representation of people with disabilities has increased since the living conditions of people with disabilities in China have improved dramatically, and there have been many major events affecting people with disabilities during the decade under review. However, the substance investigation did not back the common presumption. In fact, it appears that the amount of news scope and the utilizations of the beat three prevailing news models and the best three primary news sources did not increment essentially from year to year. As a result, the amount of news articles and the utilizations of the best three overwhelming news models and the best three major news sources in 2009–2013 did not increment essentially compared with 2003–2007.

The study of competing narratives in framing disability in the UK media, published by Garrisi and Johanssen (2018), compared and contrasted the journalistic coverage of the story of a

beauty blogger with facial disfigurement with her blog by using discourse analysis. In the context of disability-related problems, this study aimed to investigate the logic of the Network news and even more optimistic ways to portray disability can be created by online platforms. However, the issue of whether a new model for reinterpreting disability is generated by the modes of self-representation provided by the virtual world requires further critical study. This paper is a qualitative comparative case study on UK disfigurement representation and self-representation. It demonstrated the degree to which a self-representational account will comply with journalistic coverage, enhancing rather than contesting conventional disability representations. On the other side, it illustrated how an individual could use blogging with disfigurement to regain her own identity and question her body's medical objectification perpetuated by mass media. This study found that journalism and blogging may play a complementary role in shaping society's perception of the nuances and inconsistencies concerning disfigurement, rather than being mutually exclusive. The features specific to the topic under scrutiny are outlined in a case study (Altheide and Johnson 1994). It provides the ability to perform an in-depth analysis of a specific phenomenon but does not generalize it.

Overall, there is a decent number and percentage of news published covering special needs or disabilities. However, the words indicating disabilities are not positively connotated. In most countries, they are often being referred to as 'handicap' or 'charity'. Nevertheless, there were helpful changes and procedures that were done for special needs people; however, more should be done to reach their full needs and requirements. This paper will fill in the gap since it focuses on special needs in the United Arab Emirates, concentrating on two national newspapers, Gulf News and Khaleej Times, in a specific time frame.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling method and data analysis

Simple random sampling is used in this study. 80 news reports were randomly selected from 214 reports from Gulf News and Khaleej Times. The time frame is from 2015 to 2020.

**Table 1:** The sample

| Newspapers in the United Arab Emirates |                      |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <u>Gulf News</u>                       | <u>Khaleej Times</u> |
| 48                                     | 32                   |

## Method of data analysis

The study uses content analysis that focuses on a set of thematic codes for frames derived from the literature on coverage of people with special needs, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** : Frames and their indicators

| <u>Frames</u> | <u>Indicators</u>                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Illness       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Portrayed as ill people</li> <li>- Portrayed as handicap</li> <li>- Portrayed as impaired/autistic</li> </ul>                                                 |
| Support       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Viewed as people in need of care</li> <li>- Viewed as people in need of support</li> </ul>                                                                    |
| Burden        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referred to as people who need constant help, in a negative way</li> <li>- Referred to as people with financial burden as a society</li> </ul>                |
| Empathy       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Described as people who need sympathy towards them</li> <li>- Warmth and welcoming towards them</li> <li>- Humanity</li> </ul>                                |
| Empowerment   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Described as inspiration</li> <li>- Described as people who have full rights</li> <li>- Described as brave people</li> <li>- Described as powerful</li> </ul> |

## FINDINGS

As shown in the table below, the content analysis focused on two national newspapers in the UAE, Gulf News, and Khaleej Times. 80 out of 214 news reports were randomly selected. 48 news reports were chosen from Gulf News, and 32 news reports were chosen from Khaleej Times.

**Table 3:** The Percentages of the Presence of Frames

| <b><u>Frames</u></b> | <b><u>Indicators</u></b>                                                                                                                                                                               | <b><u>Gulf News</u></b> | <b><u>Khaleej Times</u></b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Illness              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Portrayed as ill people</li> <li>- Portrayed as handicap</li> <li>- Portrayed as impaired/autistic</li> </ul>                                                 | 7.5%                    | 7.5%                        |
| Support              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Viewed as people in need of care</li> <li>- Viewed as people in need of support</li> </ul>                                                                    | 41.3%                   | 23%                         |
| Burden               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referred as people who need constant help, in a negative way</li> <li>- Referred as people with financial burden as a society</li> </ul>                      | 8%                      | 5%                          |
| Empathy              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Described as people who need sympathy towards them</li> <li>- Warmth and welcoming towards them</li> <li>- Humanity</li> </ul>                                | 19%                     | 13%                         |
| Empowerment          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Described as inspiration</li> <li>- Described as people who have full rights</li> <li>- Described as brave people</li> <li>- Described as powerful</li> </ul> | 18.4%                   | 12%                         |

The illness frame was present in the coverage of both Gulf News and Khaleej Times 7.5%. As for the support frame, Gulf News had a much higher percentage than the Khaleej Times. In the Gulf News report: "Sedra foundation establishes support group for families of teens with special needs," it was stated that, "the purpose of the meeting was to establish a family support group and empower parents." People with special needs were rarely represented as a burden by both news outlets. On the other hand, both outlets expressed empathy towards people with special needs. An example is the "Emirati with special needs hopes to join FNC to promote integration" news report published by Gulf News, which states that "her goal is to integrate people with special needs into society." Moreover, it reflected humanity by mentioning, "Ebtisam hopes to take advantage of her experience with working with people with special needs as well as her own disabilities to serve this segment of people better." Lastly, the frame empowerment was used in the coverage of both outlets: Gulf News had a more significant percentage, 18.4%, and Khaleej Times had 12%. For instance, Gulf news in

the “Unsung heroes of Dubai” news report interviewed people with special needs and described them as inspiration when one of the interviewees said, “I always inspired my workers to work hard and never shirk any cleaning duties.” In addition, they described them as influential people by having many abilities and skills. One of the people with special needs mentioned to Gulf News, “I want to thank Dubai Municipality and their central laboratory for giving me a chance to work and prove myself.” Overall, Gulf News resulted in a higher percentage than the Khaleej Times in all the frames mentioned.

According to the findings table, people with special needs in the UAE are framed positively. The media representation might reflect what the country offers as support for people with special needs. As stated by the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates Cultural Division's website, the country's government perceives the need to help people with special needs. In November 2006, the UAE marked the protocol to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Federal Law 29/2006 ensures rights for individuals with needs. The law specifies that “special needs themselves are not a barrier to joining or getting accepted into any educational institutions, regardless of whether it is public or private.” This law shows the empathy that the UAE's honorable leaders have for others' necessities and their conviction that equivalent admittance to quality schooling will assist people with unique requirements to evolve to their full potential. The UAE Federal Government passed the UAE Disability Act to secure individuals' privileges with incapacities and special needs.

When comparing the findings with the literature review, there is an enormous difference in terms of how people with special needs are portrayed in other countries and how media plays a huge role in representing these people. According to Abwao (2019), people with disabilities face extreme difficulties as there are no set of rules addressed by the government in Kenya, while the government in the UAE plays a massive role in supporting people with special needs. Similarly, the study of framing disability in North Central and South Central western newspapers in Nigeria published by Ogundola (2013) showed how different indicators were used in a stereotypical way for people with special needs such as support, inequality, derogatory. However, the media framing of these people in the UAE was unbiased and had shown no difference in terms of race or gender. In Sudan (Nyerere, 2011), people with special needs, unfortunately, do not participate in any way in the society, while in the UAE, they do engage in various activities and competitions to overcome their challenges and engage in the society just like any other individual. Regarding the coronavirus pandemic and its relation to people with special needs, South America's government did not fully address these people as they had no special care (Sakellariou, Malfitano and Rotarou, 2020). On the other hand, in the UAE, people with special needs received equal or even more consideration during the Covid-19 pandemic as special care was offered with high quality. Furthermore, Chinese newspapers portrayed children with special needs negatively as if they

are a burden in their society. In contrast, the UAE viewed children with special needs as people who need constant help and care.

## CONCLUSIONS

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This study aimed to examine the media representation of people with special needs in the UAE. The study focused on two major newspapers, Gulf News and Khaleej Times. The time frame was from 2015 to 2020. The method used was qualitative content analysis. Findings showed that people with special needs in the UAE are framed positively by the media. The UAE recognized and tended to serve full rights to the needs of people of determination of all ages and nationalities. The country believes every child is an individual and has the right to live and reach their full potential.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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This current research has focused on the media representation of special needs in UAE newspapers; therefore, a possible area of research would be to explore the representation of disabled individuals in other media platforms, for example, magazines or radios. Another aspect can be examining the media portrayal of people with special needs in different years, using a different time frame. Lastly, a comparative study between two other countries can be carried out to understand how special needs are represented in different countries. It would be informative to compare countries where special needs are represented as a social problem and where special needs are represented as an inspiration.

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