

The Current Status and Optimization Strategies for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Young Disabled Broadcasters in China from the Perspective of Digital Labor

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Abstract

A number of young disabled broadcasters in China have emerged in the internet live streaming industry, with increased online employment options, stronger platform support, and significant value transformation effects. However, they still face challenges such as the risk of "re-stigmatization," limited and loose social support, and a lack of occupational safety guarantees. This paper analyzes the current situation and proposes optimization strategies such as "multi-pronged" measures to prevent stigmatization, strengthen social support, and provide targeted occupational safety guarantees, aiming to effectively protect the rights and interests of young disabled broadcasters and promote their healthy development.

Keywords

Young disabled broadcasters, rights protection, digital labor, optimization strategies.

1. Introduction

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, as of the end of 2023, the number of disabled people in China was 85.914 million, accounting for 6.16% of the total population. In order to effectively protect the relevant rights and interests of disabled people, the 20th National People's Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly proposed in its report to improve the social security system and care service system for disabled people and promote the comprehensive development of the cause of disabled people. Respecting and protecting the rights and interests of disabled people is one of the main tasks of guaranteeing and improving people's livelihood. The Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee further proposed that guaranteeing and improving people's livelihood in development is a major task of Chinese-style modernization. In the composition of the entire disabled population, the young disabled population has become an important subset with great research value. According to data from the China Disabled Persons' Federation, as of the end of 2023, there were more than 100,000 disabled college students among the young disabled population in China. For young people with disabilities, they bear similar developmental expectations as ordinary young people, but also face special difficulties due to limitations in physical function. This makes it necessary to conduct in-depth research on issues related to young people with disabilities. According to the "Development Research Report" released by China Network Audiovisual, by the end of 2023, the number of live streamers reached 15.08 million. In 2024, the number of live streamers on Lizhi Interactive Entertainment increased by 40% year-on-year, and the number of high-quality and high-income live streamers increased by 58% year-on-year. In the current context of the rapid development of the Internet live streaming industry, young people with disabilities in China are also gradually entering social

media, seeking to realize their self-worth through the platform. Against this background, the academic community has launched research on the digital survival issues of young people with disabilities from the perspective of digital labor. There are currently four main research paths: First, focusing on the impact of media use on empowerment of young people with disabilities; second, focusing on the media survival dilemmas and development paths faced by young people with disabilities in the new media era; third, exploring media issues related to social integration of young people with disabilities in the social media environment; and fourth, focusing on analyzing the media image presentation of young people with disabilities. However, these research perspectives still lack in-depth analysis of the protection of the rights and interests of young people with disabilities in the digital labor process. Therefore, this paper focuses on the current status of rights protection for young disabled broadcasters in China and proposes optimization strategies to further improve the research system on related issues of young disabled broadcasters in China from the perspective of digital labor.

2. The Current Status of Rights Protection for Young Disabled Broadcasters in China

(1) Increasing Online Employment Options

In the past, people with disabilities were limited by their physical condition, facing many obstacles not only in traditional offline employment models, but also in the relatively limited types of jobs available online. In recent years, online employment opportunities for young disabled broadcasters in China have been increasing. Different types of online live-streaming jobs, whether knowledge sharing, talent showcasing, or product marketing, provide them with ample opportunities to showcase their unique talents. They can choose suitable paths based on their interests and expertise, gaining a sense of accomplishment and recognition, and continuously exploring and enhancing their self-worth, no longer limited to a single, restrictive development path. Whether it's Sa Ye, a disabled broadcaster born in the 2000s from Yunnan Province with congenital muscular dystrophy, successfully realizing her dream of e-sports; Ye Hongting, a visually impaired boy born in the 2000s from Jiangsu Province, becoming an audio broadcaster to "see the world" through his voice; or a girl with cerebral palsy born in the 1990s becoming an internet celebrity broadcaster, creating hundreds of videos to call for a reduction in discrimination against disabled youth... they are all realizing their value in different roles. As the online employment options for young disabled broadcasters become increasingly diverse and they frequently appear in the public eye, society is beginning to abandon its inherent prejudices and stereotypes about people with disabilities, gradually recognizing that they also possess remarkable abilities and unlimited potential.

(2) Platform Support Continues to Strengthen

In 2023, Kuaishou launched the "Happiness Lecture Hall" project, among which the "Happiness Self-Improvement Academy" provides vocational skills training in new media such as internet operation and live-streaming e-commerce for people with disabilities. By the end of 2023, the "Happiness Lecture Hall" had reached 34 counties and cities across the country, covering more than 1 million people. In 2023, the Zhejiang Provincial Disabled Persons' Federation and the Alibaba Foundation jointly launched the "Zhejiang Libo" project, aiming to provide live-streaming skills training to 1,000 people with disabilities and help 100 people increase their income through live-streaming. On October 31, 2024, the unveiling ceremony of the Kuaishou Digital Human Live-streaming Assistance Base for People with Disabilities was held in the Disabled Persons' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Park in Xingtang County, Hebei Province. This project, initiated by the Hebei Provincial Disabled Persons' Federation in collaboration with Kuaishou Charity and the Kuaishou Digital Human Team, aims to explore new models for employment assistance for people with disabilities in the digital age. On December 2, 2024,

Alibaba Digital Media & Entertainment launched the "Entertaining You, Chasing the Light" public welfare program to support disabled bloggers in creating high-quality content and broaden employment channels for people with disabilities...

(3) Significant Value Transformation Results

As of November 2022, the Douyin platform in China had over 14.1 million videos about the lives of people with disabilities, accumulating over 1.7 billion likes. According to data provided by Douyin, in the past year, 360 blind massage parlors launched group-buying services on the Douyin Life Services platform, selling 330,000 orders. 1,106 people with disabilities earned income through live-streaming their talents on Douyin, and 17 people with disabilities promoted over 300,000 orders for their hometowns through Douyin e-commerce. In addition, a search on the Douyin platform using the keywords "disability," "disability," and "disabled broadcaster" yielded 112 disabled broadcasters, of whom approximately 95% were young people. Many of these broadcasters had over 100,000 followers, with some even reaching millions.

3. Challenges to the Protection of the Rights of Young Disabled Broadcasters in China Remain

(1) Facing the Risk of "Re-stigmatization"

In traditional views, "disability" is often stigmatized, containing various negative preconceived notions. Under this conventional thinking, the disabled community is often labeled as "outcasts." Currently, young disabled broadcasters in the live streaming industry may face the risk of being "re-stigmatized." The development and operation of live streaming platforms cannot be separated from the manipulation of "capital." After young disabled broadcasters complete their identity construction through specific symbols, they will inevitably be gradually commercialized. In short, if young disabled broadcasters want to obtain continuous traffic and exposure and achieve sustained "digital survival," they are very likely to have to engage in "commercial performances." In order to ensure the quality of content creation and attract more precise fans, signing with a network of influencers (MCN) is the choice and final destination for most young disabled broadcasters. After joining an MCN, the development direction of young disabled broadcasters will be further extended, such as realizing traffic monetization through live streaming sales and live streaming PK, thereby better solving their life difficulties. Under this business logic, the performance of young disabled broadcasters on live streaming platforms is no longer a simple self-presentation, but a "performance" dressed in the guise of "commerce". In order to cater to commercial needs, attract traffic and obtain revenue, their live streaming content is often carefully designed and even over-packaged. For example, some young disabled broadcasters may be guided to highlight their disability characteristics, distorting their originally normal life experiences into eye-catching plots, so as to stimulate the curiosity and sympathy of the audience and obtain more rewards or advertising cooperation. In the long run, this impure "performance" will bring serious "re-stigmatization" problems. The audience no longer sees the real and positive disabled group, but a stereotypical image. This reinforces the public's one-sided perception of young people with disabilities, thus ignoring their abilities and efforts. When the public is exposed to this distorted "performance" for a long time, it will further deepen misunderstandings about people with disabilities, degrading their image in social perception and putting them at risk of being "re-stigmatized."

(2) Relatively Loose and Limited Social Support

Currently, the digital employment forms of young people with disabilities are mainly divided into four categories: regular digital jobs, digital platform gigs, digital technology jobs, and digital skill-based flexible jobs. Young disabled broadcasters tend to fall into the "digital platform gig" category, characterized by autonomy. They do not rely on their own digital skills to make a

living on the internet, but rather use the internet as a medium, combined with their disability markers—that is, "digital media + special markers"—to survive on the internet, belonging to the "vulnerable group" on the internet. Therefore, this group needs more social support to continue cultivating their careers in the live streaming industry. However, currently, although there is some social support for young disabled broadcasters, it is relatively loose and limited. From a policy support perspective, although there are policies related to employment for people with disabilities, there is a lack of precise and detailed policies specifically for the emerging profession of young disabled broadcasters. For example, tax breaks and venue subsidies do not fully consider the characteristics of their live-streaming work, making it difficult for policies to be implemented and providing insufficient support. Furthermore, educational and training resources are extremely scarce. Professional live-streaming skills training courses are rare, and most are not designed specifically for young people with disabilities. For instance, there is a lack of sign language teaching courses and training materials suitable for visually impaired individuals, making it difficult for them to improve their professional skills and further exacerbating their competitive disadvantage.

(3) Lack of Targeted Occupational Safety Protection

Live-streaming work is often misunderstood as simple and easy, but driven by commercial interests, broadcasters often need to work long hours under high pressure. However, current measures to protect the occupational safety of young disabled broadcasters are severely lacking. In terms of the work environment, live-streaming venues rarely consider their special needs and lack accessibility features such as convenient wheelchair access and equipment suitable for visually impaired individuals, which greatly increases the inconvenience and risks they face in their work. Health monitoring and intervention mechanisms are completely lacking. There are no regular health checkups, making it impossible to detect potential health problems in a timely manner. When health issues arise, the lack of professional medical guidance and support leaves disabled young broadcasters to bear the consequences of health damage alone. Due to the unique physical characteristics of disabled young broadcasters, prolonged broadcasting puts them at risk of secondary trauma. For example, young disabled broadcasters in wheelchairs, due to their limited mobility, experience continuous pressure on specific areas of their bodies due to prolonged sitting, leading to poor blood circulation and making them highly susceptible to bedsores and other health problems. Visually impaired young broadcasters need to concentrate intensely on processing information with their limited vision during broadcasts, which greatly increases the likelihood of further vision impairment... These health risks not only affect the current broadcasting performance of young disabled individuals, but also, in the long run, can lead to a deterioration of physical functions. This will not only cause them more physical suffering in the future but also inflict a heavy psychological blow, creating more serious hidden dangers for their long lives. This lack of targeted occupational safety protection severely restricts the long-term career development of disabled young broadcasters and urgently requires attention and solutions from all sectors of society.

4. Optimization Path for Protecting the Rights and Interests of Young Disabled Broadcasters in China

(I) Preventing the Risk of "Re-stigmatization" Through a Multi-pronged Approach

To mitigate the risk of "re-stigmatization" faced by young disabled broadcasters on the internet, multi-party collaboration is necessary. Platforms should strengthen content supervision, eliminate live streams that excessively package or distort the image of disabled individuals, and severely punish violations. Simultaneously, they should optimize algorithms, recommending content based on multiple dimensions to avoid focusing solely on the "disability" label. MCN agencies should abandon short-sighted commercial operations, respect the wishes of disabled

broadcasters, formulate positive development strategies, and help them showcase their true talents. Young disabled broadcasters themselves should uphold authenticity, presenting themselves with positive and professional content to enhance public understanding of the disabled community. Furthermore, society should strengthen education and publicity on disability equality, create an inclusive atmosphere, break down stereotypes and prejudices, and allow young disabled broadcasters to develop in a healthy online environment.

(2) Strengthening Social Support

The government and relevant organizations should increase training efforts for young disabled broadcasters to help them improve their live streaming skills and content creation abilities, enhancing their competitiveness in online live streaming. Live streaming platforms need to shoulder more social responsibility, providing a more user-friendly live streaming environment for disabled broadcasters through technological optimization and resource allocation, such as lowering technical barriers and providing accessibility tools. Furthermore, the participation of social forces, such as public welfare organizations and volunteer teams, should be encouraged to provide emotional support and resource connections for disabled broadcasters, helping them build a broader social support network.

(3) Providing Targeted Occupational Safety Protection

Establishing a health monitoring and intervention mechanism and regularly organizing physical examinations for disabled broadcasters is of great significance. Broadcasters with different types of disabilities face different health risks; for example, wheelchair-bound broadcasters are prone to bedsores, and visually impaired broadcasters are prone to vision impairment. Platforms should provide personalized rest and rehabilitation suggestions based on the examination results. For wheelchair-bound broadcasters, it is recommended to get up and move around regularly and use pressure-relieving cushions; for visually impaired broadcasters, vision care programs should be provided, such as controlling live streaming time and increasing eye relaxation time. These measures can effectively reduce the health risks of disabled broadcasters, protect their physical functions, and help them achieve long-term stable development in the live streaming industry.

5. Conclusion

Within the context of digital labor, young disabled broadcasters in China, as an emerging force, are gradually breaking free from traditional constraints and realizing their self-worth. Facing challenges requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society to comprehensively optimize their rights protection system, from preventing stigmatization and strengthening social support to providing occupational safety guarantees. This is not only a respect for the individual dignity of young disabled individuals but also an important measure for building an inclusive society and promoting social progress. In the future, we look forward to the implementation of more policies and measures to create a more equitable and friendly development environment for young disabled broadcasters.

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