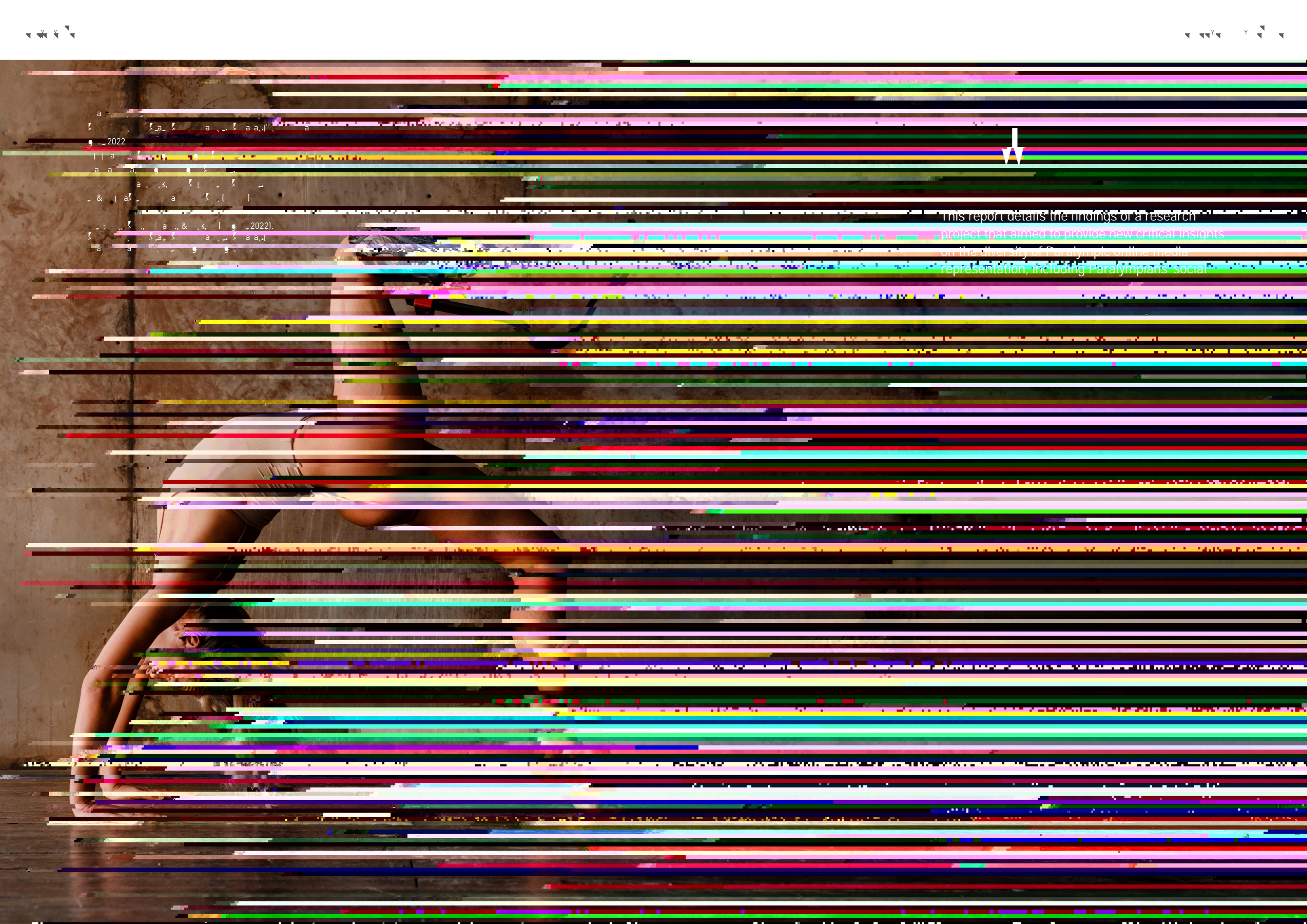
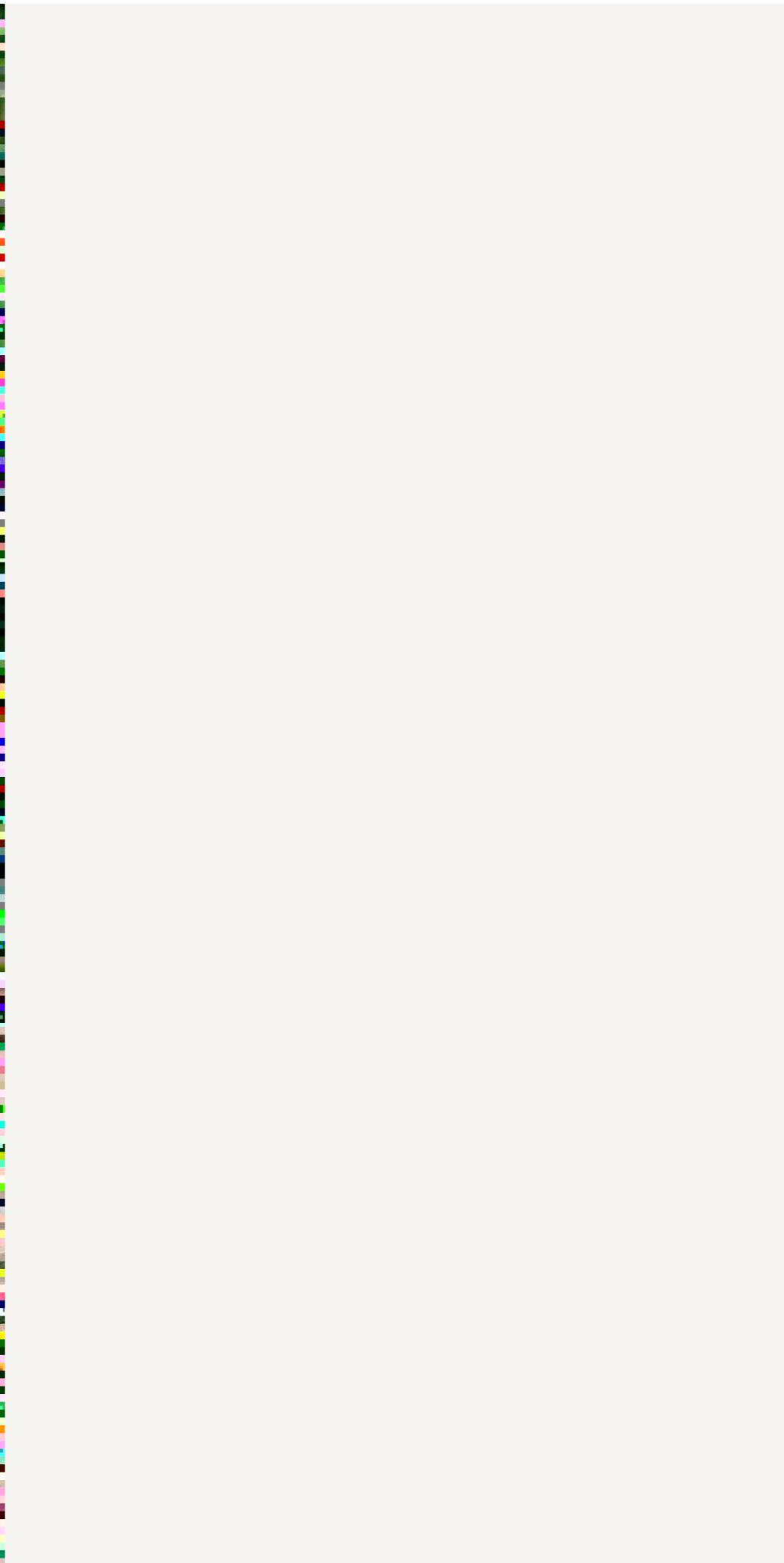


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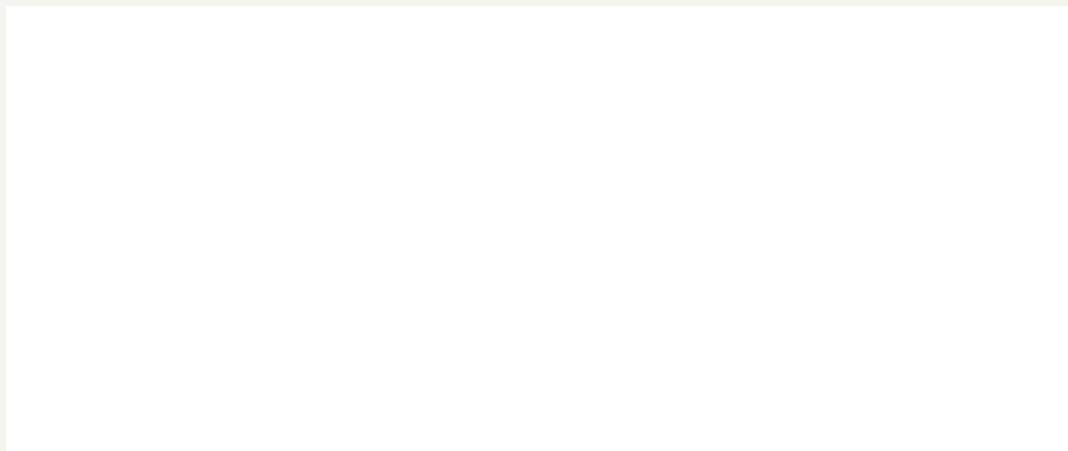
This report details the findings of a research project that aimed to provide new critical insights on the diversity of Paralympic online media representation, including Paralympians' social



The findings in this report are based on three integrated datasets consisting of:

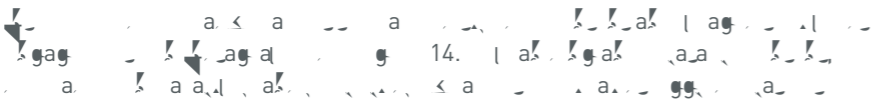
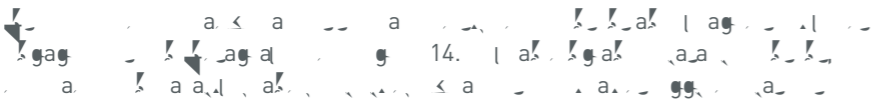
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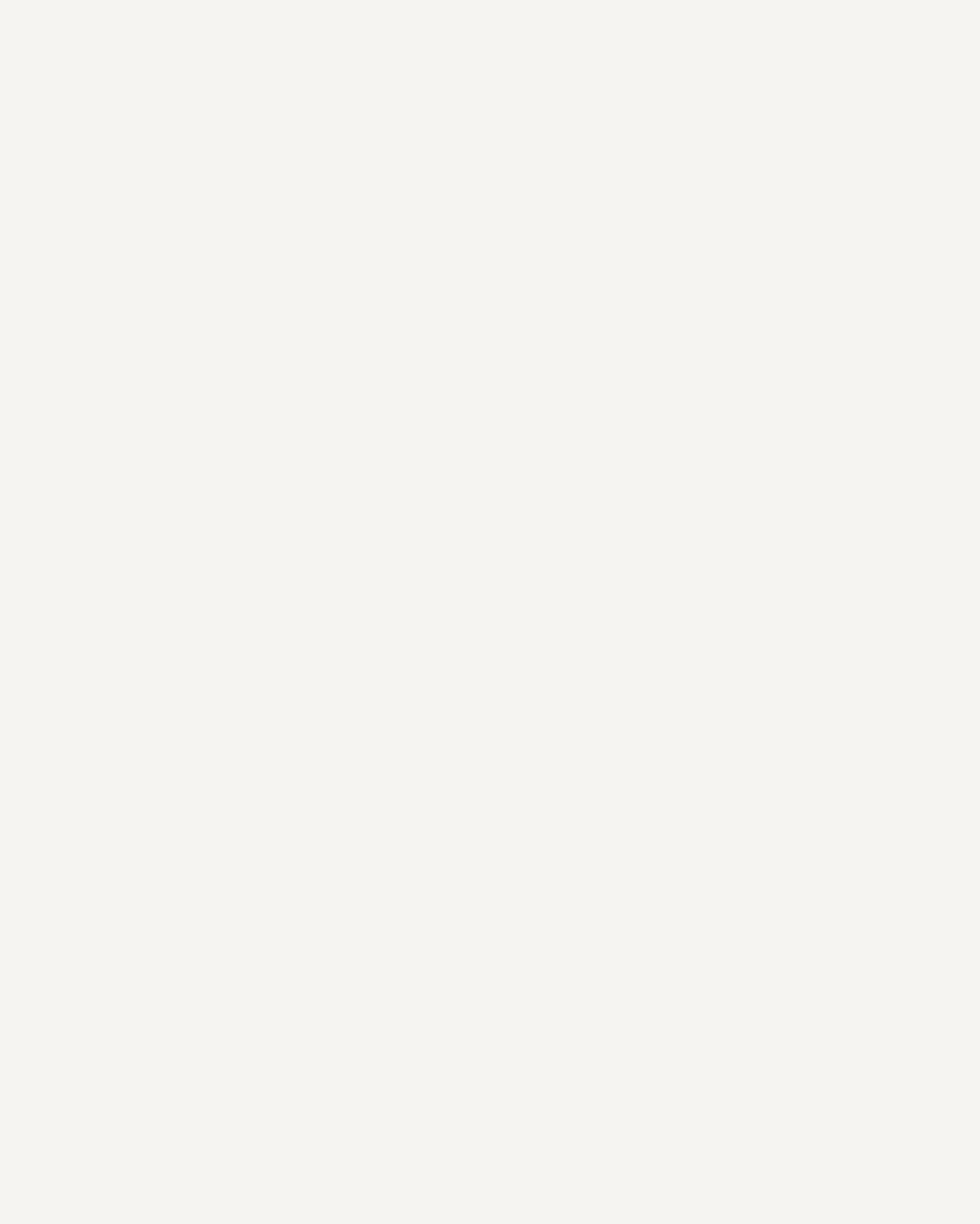




“[I like content that shows] the human side: you’re not a superhuman—yes, you’ve achieved good things, inspirational things, but that doesn’t mean that you’re not human and don’t have challenges.”

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1 The sample of online Paralympic news and glossy coverage around the Tokyo 2020 Games (2021) indicate a progressive shift toward narratives that include discussions centred on disability rights issues and diversity within the Paralympic movement. It is important to continue to track these narrative frames in the reporting on the Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games to establish the extent to which these frames are an aberration resulting from the launch of campaigns such as #WeThe15 or part of wider trends in Paralympic media reporting.

2 The findings in the report demonstrate that, despite a shift towards more progressive narratives in online Paralympic media reporting, articles and images predominantly centred on female Paralympians from white racial backgrounds. Although articles were not explicitly gendered, there was a lack of sexual and ethnic diversity across the news sample. This poses a challenge for a range of stakeholders in terms of addressing and improving diversity through reporting practices and media cultures alongside access to grassroots Para sport and refinement of athlete recruitment campaigns (expanded on in point 3).

3 The analysis of the 32 most popular GB Paralympians' social media practices demonstrated Instagram as a preferred platform for content generation, particularly amongst female Paralympians. Although the findings indicate that very few Paralympians engage with global disability campaign messages such as #WeThe15 through their social media, their content did do important cultural work in challenging disability stereotypes at the intersection of gender/sexuality through stylised images that promote a renewed and empowered disability body culture. Although formalised disability campaign messages are important for progressive social change, it is important for researchers and stakeholders to pay further attention to 'quiet' forms of disability advocacy that take place on social media where athletes utilised their positionality to steer discussions.

4 The dataset demonstrates that there was a significant lack of racial and ethnic diversity within the sample of the most popular Paralympian social media influencers on Instagram, which resulted in content generation that predominantly challenged disability gender/sexual stereotypes at the intersection of white racial privilege. Previous research has highlighted the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the GB Paralympics team compared to the GB Olympics team and national figures.⁹ Key stakeholders need to prioritise ongoing efforts that nourish a more diverse and inclusive sports culture and enhance initiatives that offer sporting opportunities to a diverse range of underrepresented

CONCLUSION

The findings in this report build on previous research that demonstrates the importance of Paralympic media (broadcasting, TV marketing and campaigns) for driving progressive representations of disability and challenging societal attitudes toward disability. Extending this work with a specific focus on the online Paralympic media ecology – including online news, ‘glossy’ online lifestyle magazines (e.g., British Vogue, GQ, Harpers Bazaar etc.) and Paralympians’ social media content—the findings in this report document the intersectional complexities of gender, sexuality and race and the diversity of disability representation. The findings highlight the need to improve the ethnic and racial diversity in Paralympic online media content to be more representative of wider society and thus pedagogically affective as a vehicle for progressive and inclusive representations.

The findings documented here aim to provide stakeholders with key insights, challenges and potential opportunities for future research, interventions and initiatives with respect to broadening the diversity of online media Paralympic representation and harnessing the power of social media content to engage with a diverse audience through inclusive representations and messaging.

The research project marks the first scholarly intervention on this topic and therefore the findings presented here can be considered as a preliminary evidence base. Although the findings pose critical questions, challenges and opportunities for a range of stakeholders, it would be remiss not to recognise the limitations of the initial evidence base with respect to the relatively small sample size and specific analytic focus, and thus a pressing need to expand on this area of inquiry in the near future.

By way of temporary closure, the project team would like to thank all those involved in the project: interviewees, partners and project advisors—including a number of Paralympians. We welcome further discussion, collaboration and continued research on this topic.

ENDNOTES

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2 www.paralympic.org/news/record-number-female-competitors-tokyo-2020-paralympic-games

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FIGURES

Bar chart displaying the number of news articles about the Paralympics, per newspaper: Metro 2, Express 5, Times 7, Daily Mail 8, Telegraph 9, Guardian 9, Independent 29, BBC 33.

Bar chart displaying the disability frames newspapers use, including frequency: heavily gendered 5, nationalistic 6, supercrip/overcoming 17, equality and diversity 30, neutral 44.

Doughnut chart displaying the disability frames glossy magazines use, including frequency: heavily gendered 1, entrepreneurial 1, disability activism 3, overcoming 4, nationalistic 3.

Bar chart showing the top 10 of Paralympians mentioned in newspaper headlines, including amount. Women: Sarah Storey 13, Kadeena Cox 4, Ellie Simmonds 4, Sammi Kinghorn 3, Hannah Cockroft 2, Maisie Summers-Newton 2, Stef Reid 2. Men: David Weir 6, Jonnie Peacock 5, Will Bayley 2.

Doughnut chart showing that the 55 Paralympians highlighted in newspaper articles consist of 32 women and 23 men.

Three doughnut charts showing that the top 32 Paralympian bloggers on Instagram consist of 22 women and 10 men. Of these, 18 are White and 4 have another ethnicity. 13 of them present themselves as heterosexual, 3 as LGBTQI+ and 13 bloggers' sexuality is unknown.

Doughnut chart listing the themes of Paralympians' Instagram posts in order of frequency: nation, achievement, emotion, promotion, exposure, kinship, motivation, activism, struggle.

Bar chart showing the mentions of the hashtag We The 15: Natasha Baker 20, Stef Reid 6, David Smith 1, Lucy Robinson 1.

Bar chart showing the mentions of the hashtag Impossible to Ignore: George Peasgood 5, Charlotte Moore 4, David Smith 4, Natasha Baker 3, Robyn Love 3, Stef Reid 3, Libby Clegg 2, Ali Jawad 2, Ellie Robinson 2, Jessica-Jane Applegate 1, Amy Conroy 1, Aled Davies 1.

Doughnut chart displaying interviewees' favourite social media platform to show Paralympians on, in order of size: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok.

Doughnut chart displaying the reasons for interviewees to prefer Twitter, in order of size: Twitter's activism/charity content, Instagram's glamour is uninteresting or unrealistic, Twitter shows professional side, Twitter shows personal side, Twitter is better for visual impairments.

Doughnut chart displaying interviewees' favourite Paralympians in order of frequency: Ellie Simmonds, Sarah Storey, Kadeena Cox, Tanni Grey-Thompson, Ade Adepitan, Jonnie Peacock, Will Bayley, Lauren Steadman, David Weir, David Smith, Ali Jawad, Libby Clegg, Ellie Robinson, Maisie Summers-Newton, Hannah Cockroft, Aled Sion Davies, No favourite/just teamGB.

Doughnut chart displaying interviewees' reasons for liking certain Paralympians, in order of frequency: sports achievements, having same disability, motivation/comfort, doing Para sport/same sport, met them in real life, relatable disability struggles, for their activism, good personality, lives in same area, first encounter with Paralympics, seen on TV shows.

Doughnut chart showing interviewees' favourite Paralympic content, namely humanising/personal content and activism/charity content, and favourite images, namely where disability is visible (not hidden) and images that are body-positive and authentic.

Doughnut chart explaining how Paralympians' content makes interviewees feel, namely: understood (in terms of disability struggles), inspired and proud (nationalistic), motivated to do sports, and empowered (due to disability advocacy).

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