

Digital Storytelling for Inclusion: Post-Event Narratives of Live Music Attendance Among People with Disabilities

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Abstract

Live music events offer significant cultural, social, and emotional value (Getz & Page, 2019); however, for many people with disabilities (PWDs), attendance is shaped by persistent access barriers, uncertainty, and anxiety surrounding venue accessibility (Darcy, 2012; Dickson et al., 2016). While prior research has explored physical and organisational barriers to access and industry approaches to improving accessibility (Bossey, 2020; 2022), far less attention has been paid to how people with disabilities narrate, interpret, and share their lived experiences of live music attendance through digital platforms. Recent scholarship also calls for more lived-experience-led research in event accessibility (Darcy & Dickson, 2025; Davis, Brown, & Hayes, 2025).

The aim of this study is to explore the role of digital storytelling in shaping experiences of live music attendance for people with disabilities, with particular attention to how digital narratives influence decision-making, community formation, and perceptions of accessibility.

The objectives to meet this aim are to:

- Examine how people with disabilities use digital platforms to narrate and reflect on their live music attendance experiences.
- Explore the perceived functions and benefits of digital storytelling, and how they are used in relation to accessibility-related content and information for live music events.
- Identify how platform choice shapes the content of digital narratives.

The study adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on online semi-structured interviews with live music attendees who identify as disabled, d/Deaf, and/or neurodivergent. This method enabled flexible and accessible participation while facilitating in-depth exploration of attendees' lived experiences (Salmons, 2022). Conducting interviews online reduced physical, sensory, mobility, and logistical barriers that may arise in face-to-face settings (Miller, 2025). Participants reflected on their use of digital platforms, including social media, messaging applications, online groups, and review spaces, to document and communicate their experiences before, during, and after live music events. Data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Early findings suggest that digital storytelling operates across multiple, overlapping functions. First, participants use digital platforms as personal archives, capturing photos, videos, and reflections to preserve memories and construct an ongoing narrative of participation in live music culture. These narratives often emphasise enjoyment, identity, and belonging. Second, digital storytelling functions as a community-building practice, with participants sharing experiences within informal networks and wider online communities where stories foster solidarity and peer support.

Third, digital narratives serve a practical role in navigating accessibility. Participants frequently documented and evaluated access features such as wheelchair platforms, sightlines, toilets, and transport routes. These narratives function as informal accessibility intelligence for other PWDs when deciding whether to attend events, particularly where official venue information is limited or unclear (Bossey, 2020). Positive stories encouraged attendance and reduced anxiety, while negative reports acted as warnings or prompts for advocacy.

Participants also demonstrated platform-specific storytelling strategies shaped by perceived audience, emotional safety, and the need to balance honesty with self-protection from online hostility. Finally, findings highlight the advocacy potential of digital storytelling. Some participants positioned their narratives to challenge negative discourses around accessibility, promote best practice, and engage directly with venues and industry stakeholders, aligning with calls for more inclusive, user-informed approaches to event accessibility (Darcy et al., 2025).

This study contributes to disability studies, music event research, and digital storytelling literature by foregrounding PWDs' voices and positioning digital narratives as a critical extension of accessibility practice. Ongoing analysis will refine these themes and explore implications for inclusive event design, venue communication strategies, and digital platforms as access infrastructures in their own right.

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