



Evaluation of digital accessibility on public platforms for people with disabilities

Evaluación de la accesibilidad digital en plataformas públicas para personas con discapacidad

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to evaluate the digital accessibility of public platforms from the perception of people with disabilities in Bolivia and Ecuador. The research was developed under a quantitative approach, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design and descriptive-correlational scope. The sample consisted of 128 people with disabilities who had used public digital platforms to consult information, carry out procedures or access institutional services. A structured survey with a five-level Likert scale was applied for data collection, organized into dimensions of ease of navigation, clarity of information, compatibility with assistive technologies, access to online procedures, autonomy of use, and perceived digital inclusion. Previously, a pilot test was carried out and the reliability of the instrument was verified by Cronbach's alpha, obtaining a value of 0.82. The results showed low and medium levels of digital accessibility, with greater difficulties in autonomous navigation, accessible forms, clear institutional language and technological compatibility. In addition, Spearman's correlation confirmed a positive and significant relationship between perceived digital accessibility and digital inclusion. It is concluded that the digital transformation of the public sector in Bolivia and Ecuador should strengthen inclusive design, the permanent evaluation of platforms and the participation of users with disabilities in improvement processes.

Keywords: digital accessibility; public platforms; disability; digital inclusion; e-government.

RESUMEN

El estudio tuvo como objetivo evaluar la accesibilidad digital de plataformas públicas desde la percepción de personas con discapacidad de Bolivia y Ecuador. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cuantitativo, con diseño no experimental, transversal y alcance descriptivo-correlacional. La muestra estuvo conformada por 128 personas con discapacidad que habían utilizado plataformas digitales públicas para consultar información, realizar trámites o acceder a servicios institucionales. Para la recolección de datos se aplicó una encuesta estructurada con escala de Likert de cinco niveles, organizada en dimensiones de facilidad de navegación, claridad de la información, compatibilidad con tecnologías de apoyo, acceso a trámites en línea, autonomía de uso e inclusión digital percibida. Previamente, se realizó una prueba piloto y la confiabilidad del instrumento fue comprobada mediante Alfa de Cronbach, obteniéndose un valor de 0.82. Los resultados evidenciaron niveles bajos y medios de accesibilidad digital, con mayores dificultades en la navegación autónoma, formularios accesibles, lenguaje institucional claro y compatibilidad tecnológica. Además, la correlación de Spearman confirmó una relación positiva y significativa entre accesibilidad digital percibida e inclusión digital. Se concluye que la transformación digital del sector público en Bolivia y Ecuador debe fortalecer el diseño inclusivo, la evaluación permanente de plataformas y la participación de usuarios con discapacidad en los procesos de mejora.

Palabras clave: accesibilidad digital; plataformas públicas; discapacidad; inclusión digital; gobierno electrónico.

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of the public sector has changed the way citizens access information, procedures, and institutional services. This process has expanded service channels and reduced reliance on in-person attendance; however, it has not always ensured equal conditions for all users. For people with disabilities, access to digital environments can be limited by non-inclusive designs, content that is difficult to understand, forms incompatible with assistive technologies, or navigation processes that require external assistance. Therefore, digital accessibility is a necessary condition to ensure autonomy, citizen participation, and the effective exercise of the right to information.

Janowski (2015) argues that digital government is not limited to incorporating technology into public management, but rather involves transforming services according to the context and needs of the population. This perspective highlights that state digitalization must go beyond publishing information online, requiring services that are functional, understandable, and usable for different user profiles. Additionally, Malodia et al. (2021) emphasize that the development of electronic government depends on the integration of technological infrastructure, institutional trust, service quality, and citizen participation.

Web accessibility refers to the ability of any person to perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with digital content, regardless of their physical, sensory, cognitive, or technological conditions. Manzoor and Vimarlund (2018) indicate that digital technologies can promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities when they address their real needs. Similarly, the literature recognizes that digital accessibility represents both a technical challenge and an opportunity to build more equitable services (Kulkarni, 2019).

Various studies have shown that government websites continue to present problems related to usability, mobile compatibility, and compliance with accessibility standards. Agrawal et al. (2022) identified limitations in e-government portals in India, particularly in navigation, accessibility, and mobile readiness. These findings are consistent with research conducted in other countries, where similar difficulties have been observed in government portals, even in contexts with greater technological advancement (Al-Khalifa et al., 2017; Csontos & Heckl, 2021). This demonstrates that the mere existence of digital services does not guarantee an inclusive experience.

This issue is not limited to a specific region or level of development. Ismailova (2017) found deficiencies in accessibility, usability, and security in government websites in Kyrgyzstan, while Kesswani and Kumar (2022) identified significant differences in compliance with accessibility criteria between G7 and BRICS countries. This background indicates that the quality of digital services must be analyzed not only in terms of their availability, but also in terms of the real possibility of use by people with different conditions.

Compliance with international standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, is fundamental for assessing the inclusive quality of institutional environments. Paul (2022) demonstrated, through an analysis based on WCAG 2.1, that several e-government platforms maintain barriers that affect navigation and comprehension of content. Similarly, Al-Sakran and Alsudairi (2021) emphasize that accessibility must also be considered in mobile interfaces, given the growing use of smartphones to access public services.

Technical evaluation is necessary but not sufficient to understand the actual user experience. AlSaeed et al. (2020) analyzed e-government systems from the perspective of people with visual impairments and demonstrated that their perceptions allow for the identification of problems that are often not detected by automated diagnostics. In the field of public health, Alajarmeh (2022) also highlights the importance of ensuring accessible websites so that institutional information can be consulted by the entire population. Therefore, the user's perspective is key to assessing the effectiveness of inclusive digital services.

In Latin America, this issue is particularly relevant due to persistent social, technological, and territorial inequalities. Campoverde-Molina and Valverde (2019) identified accessibility limitations in institutional portals in Ecuador, highlighting the need to strengthen inclusive design in digital spaces for public use. Although their research focused on educational institutions, their results reveal problems applicable to other state services, especially in countries where digitalization progresses alongside gaps in connectivity and digital literacy.

The digital divide affects people with disabilities in a differentiated manner, not only in terms of access to devices or the internet, but also in the way online services are designed. Kolotouchkina et al. (2022) warn that smart cities and digital services can increase inequality when they do not consider the needs of these groups. Consequently, accessibility is directly linked to social justice, citizen participation, and the right to public information.

Another relevant aspect is the technical and institutional capacity of those who develop and manage digital environments. Alghamdi et al. (2024) point out that developers face challenges related to knowledge of standards, the application of best practices, and resolving web accessibility issues. This indicates that limitations originate not only in the final design of a page, but also in planning, training, and technological maintenance processes.

Despite the increasing number of studies on e-government and web accessibility, there remains limited empirical evidence focusing on the direct perceptions of people with disabilities in Latin American countries. Most research has concentrated on technical evaluations or website comparisons, while studies analyzing how users assess navigation, information clarity, compatibility with assistive technologies, and autonomy in completing digital procedures are less common. This gap highlights the need for research that incorporates the experiences of those who encounter these challenges in their daily use.

In this context, the present study aims to evaluate the digital accessibility of public platforms from the perspective of people with disabilities in Bolivia and Ecuador. To achieve this, a structured survey using a Likert scale will be administered to a sample of 128 participants, considering dimensions related to ease of navigation, comprehension of information, compatibility with assistive technologies, access to online procedures, autonomy of use, and perceived digital inclusion. The reliability of the instrument will be verified using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value of 0.82, supported by a prior pilot test to assess the clarity and relevance of the items. Thus, the study seeks to provide evidence to improve the design of more inclusive public digital services that address the real needs of people with disabilities.

METHODS

The research employed a quantitative approach, as numerical data were collected and analyzed through a structured survey. The design was non-experimental, since the study variables were not manipulated; instead, participants' perceptions were observed in their real context of use. Additionally, the study was cross-sectional, as information was collected at a single point in time, and had a descriptive-correlational scope, aiming to characterize perceived digital accessibility and analyze the relationships among its main dimensions.

The target population consisted of people with disabilities from Bolivia and Ecuador who had used public digital platforms to access information, complete procedures, use institutional services, or interact with state entities. The sample comprised 128 participants, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria were being a person with a disability, residing in Bolivia or Ecuador, having prior experience using public digital platforms, and voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study.

For data collection, a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was designed, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree." The instrument measured perceptions of digital accessibility based on dimensions related to ease of navigation, clarity of information, compatibility with assistive technologies, access to online procedures, autonomy of use, and perceived digital inclusion. The items were written in clear language to ensure they were understandable to participants and aligned with the research objective.

Prior to the final administration, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of individuals with characteristics similar to those of the final sample. This phase allowed for verification of the clarity of the questions, the relevance of the dimensions, the time required to complete the questionnaire, and potential comprehension difficulties. Based on the pilot test results, minor adjustments were made to the wording of some items to improve the instrument's precision and avoid ambiguities in responses.

The validity of the questionnaire was reviewed by expert judgment, who evaluated the coherence between the items, the proposed dimensions, and the study objective. This process ensured that the questions were relevant for assessing digital accessibility on public platforms from the perspective of people with disabilities. The internal reliability of the instrument was verified using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding a value of 0.82, which demonstrated adequate internal consistency for administering the questionnaire to the selected sample.

The data collection procedure involved administering the survey to the 128 participants from Bolivia and Ecuador. Prior to participation, the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of the collected information were explained. The responses were organized in a database for subsequent statistical analysis, ensuring that the information remained anonymous and was used solely for academic purposes.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to identify perception levels in each evaluated dimension. Additionally, due to the ordinal nature of the Likert scale, Spearman's correlation was applied to analyze the relationships among perceived digital accessibility, autonomy of use, and digital inclusion. This analysis determined whether the evaluated dimensions were significantly associated and provided evidence to address the research objective.

From an ethical perspective, the study adhered to the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and responsible use of information. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and could freely decide whether to complete the questionnaire. No sensitive personal data that could directly identify participants were collected, thereby ensuring anonymity and protection of the information obtained.

RESULTS

The results were organized according to the dimensions evaluated in the survey administered to 128 persons with disabilities from Bolivia and Ecuador. The Likert scale used enabled the identification of participants' levels of agreement regarding the digital accessibility of public platforms, considering aspects related to navigation, clarity of information, compatibility with assistive technologies, online procedures, autonomy of use, and perceived digital inclusion.

Table 1. Instrument reliability assessed using Cronbach's Alpha

Evaluated dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Ease of navigation	4	0.80
Clarity of information	4	0.79
Compatibility with assistive technologies	4	0.83
Access to online procedures	4	0.81
Autonomy of use	4	0.84
Perceived digital inclusion	4	0.82
General instrument	24	0.82

Note. The overall value of 0.82 demonstrates adequate internal consistency of the instrument used.

The reliability analysis of the questionnaire yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.82, indicating adequate internal consistency. The evaluated dimensions obtained values between 0.79 and 0.84, demonstrating stability in the responses and coherence among the items. This result supports the suitability of the instrument for measuring perceptions of digital accessibility on public platforms from the perspective of persons with disabilities.

The results indicate that the ease of navigation received an overall average of 3.01, corresponding to a medium level. Although some participants reported being able to find basic information on the platforms, difficulties in navigating without external support were also evident. The item with the lowest rating was the possibility of autonomous navigation, with a mean of 2.89, indicating that a portion of users still depends on assistance to complete digital actions in public services.

Table 2. Perception of ease of navigation on public platforms

Evaluated item	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretative level
The platform allows information to be found easily	3.12	1.08	Medium
Menus and links are understandable	3.05	1.11	Medium
Navigation can be performed without assistance from another person	2.89	1.16	Low
The site structure facilitates completing actions	2.96	1.13	Low
Dimension average	3.01	1.12	Medium

Note. The dimension reflects an intermediate perception, with greater difficulties in autonomous navigation.

Table 3. Clarity of information and compatibility with assistive technologies

Evaluated item	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretative level
Information is presented in clear language	3.18	1.04	Medium
Texts are understandable to the user	3.09	1.07	Medium
The platform works correctly with assistive technologies	2.76	1.18	Low
Forms are accessible for persons with disabilities	2.71	1.20	Low
Dimension average	2.94	1.12	Low

Note. The results indicate greater limitations in technological compatibility and form accessibility.

The dimension related to clarity of information and compatibility with assistive technologies had an average of 2.94, representing a low level. Although the clarity of language received medium values, the items associated with functioning with assistive technologies and form accessibility had the lowest averages. This indicates that public platforms do not always adequately address the needs of people who use screen readers, magnifiers, voice commands, or other digital assistive resources.

The most frequently reported barriers were forms that are difficult to complete, cited by 28.9% of participants, followed by unclear or overly technical information at 22.7%. The lack of compatibility with assistive technologies was also identified as a relevant issue, indicated by 20.3%. These results suggest that the limitations are not confined solely to the visual structure of the sites, but also to the organization of digital processes and the presentation of institutional information.

Table 4. Digital barriers perceived by persons with disabilities

Identified barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Forms are difficult to complete	37	28.9%
Information is unclear or overly technical	29	22.7%
Lack of compatibility with assistive technologies	26	20.3%
Menus or links are confusing	19	14.8%
Difficulty locating procedures or services	17	13.3%
Total	128	100%

Note. The main barriers are related to forms, institutional language, and technological compatibility.

Table 5. Perception of autonomy of use and digital inclusion

Evaluated item	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretive level
I am able to complete digital procedures without assistance	2.82	1.15	Low
Public platforms enable me to save time	3.21	1.06	Medium
I feel included in the State's digital services	2.88	1.17	Low
The platforms meet my needs as a person with a disability	2.74	1.19	Low
Dimension average	2.91	1.14	Low

Note. Autonomy and perceived digital inclusion show low values, especially regarding adaptation to specific needs.

Autonomy of use and perceived digital inclusion reached an average of 2.91, which is considered low. The most critical result was observed in the item regarding whether the platforms meet the needs of persons with disabilities, with a mean of 2.74. This suggests that, although digital services may offer a useful alternative to reduce time and travel, they still do not guarantee a fully inclusive or autonomous experience for all users.

The correlational analysis using Spearman's method showed positive and significant relationships between the evaluated dimensions. The strongest relationship was found between general digital accessibility and perceived digital inclusion, with a coefficient of 0.64 and a significance of 0.000. This indicates that a higher perception of accessibility on public platforms is associated with a greater perception of digital inclusion among persons with disabilities. A relevant relationship was also observed between technological compatibility and perceived digital inclusion, with a coefficient of 0.61, confirming the importance of adapting digital services to assistive technologies.

Overall, the results indicate that the evaluated public platforms present a level of digital accessibility ranging from low to medium from the perspective of persons with disabilities in Bolivia and Ecuador. The main difficulties are related to autonomous navigation, form accessibility, compatibility with assistive technologies, and clarity of institutional information. In addition, the correlations obtained support the research hypothesis, as a significant relationship between perceived digital accessibility and digital inclusion was confirmed.

Table 6. Spearman correlation between dimensions of digital accessibility

Analyzed relationship	Spearman's rho	Sig. (two-tailed)	Interpretation
Ease of navigation – Autonomy of use	0.58	0.000	Moderate positive relationship
Technological compatibility – Perceived digital inclusion	0.61	0.000	Moderate positive relationship
Clarity of information – Autonomy of use	0.49	0.001	Moderate positive relationship
Access to online procedures – Perceived digital inclusion	0.55	0.000	Moderate positive relationship
General digital accessibility – Perceived digital inclusion	0.64	0.000	Significant positive relationship

Note. The correlation was significant at the 0.01 level.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the digital accessibility of public platforms, from the perspective of people with disabilities in Bolivia and Ecuador, ranges from low to medium levels. This finding demonstrates that the digitalization of state services does not, by itself, ensure an inclusive experience, particularly when digital environments present navigation difficulties, inaccessible forms, complex institutional language, and low compatibility with assistive technologies. In this context, accessibility should be understood as a necessary condition for people with disabilities to autonomously exercise their rights to information, participation, and the use of digital public services.

The navigation ease dimension showed a medium level, although with significant weaknesses in the ability to perform actions without third-party assistance. This result is consistent with Janusz et al. (2023), who note that the accessibility of public institutions depends not only on the availability of services, but also on the actual capacity of people with specific needs to use them under appropriate conditions. Thus, when a platform requires constant assistance, user autonomy is reduced and the inclusive nature of the digital service is limited.

The results also revealed difficulties in the clarity of information and the organization of content. This finding aligns with Sánchez Vanderkast (2013), who emphasizes that access to governmental information should not be analyzed solely in terms of the availability of documents or data, but also in terms of the conditions that enable citizens to understand and use them. Therefore, online public information should be presented with clear language, logical structure, and accessible formats, especially when targeting users with diverse sensory, cognitive, or technological needs.

One of the most significant limitations identified was the low compatibility with assistive technologies, such as screen readers, magnifiers, voice commands, or other digital assistance resources. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that many institutional platforms retain design errors that hinder the interaction of people with disabilities, even when content is formally available online (Mañez Carvajal, 2020; Casasola Balsells et al., 2019). Consequently, accessibility cannot be limited to publishing information on digital media, but must ensure real conditions for interaction with the systems.

The most frequent barriers reported by participants were forms that are difficult to complete, unclear technical information, and lack of technological compatibility. These results indicate that the main difficulties are not only concentrated in initial access to platforms, but also in the completion of procedures and processes. Chemnad and Othman (2024) argue that digital accessibility has become more complex in the era of artificial intelligence and advanced technological environments, as systems must adapt to different user profiles and not only meet minimum technical criteria. From this perspective, digital public services require ongoing evaluation and improvement processes.

The low rating of perceived autonomy of use and digital inclusion demonstrates that people with disabilities still do not fully experience the benefits of the digital transformation of the public sector. Although online services can reduce travel, costs, and waiting times, these benefits are diminished when platforms do not address specific needs. This interpretation aligns with Vidal-Alaball et al. (2023), who argue that digital transformation should aim to reduce the digital divide rather than deepen existing inequalities. Therefore, digital inclusion requires technical accessibility, communicational clarity, and institutional support.

From a social perspective, the results indicate that digital accessibility must be linked to broader inclusion processes. Cubillos-Bravo and Avello-Sáez (2022) emphasize that assistive technologies can enhance rehabilitation, autonomy, and social participation when they are adequately integrated into everyday environments. In the case of public platforms, this implies that systems must be compatible with such technologies and allow people with disabilities to carry out procedures or inquiries without permanent dependence on another person. Digital autonomy, therefore, is not only a technical indicator but also an expression of social inclusion.

The correlational analysis confirmed a positive and significant relationship between overall digital accessibility and perceived digital inclusion. This result indicates that when users perceive greater ease of navigation, better information clarity, and greater technological compatibility, their sense of inclusion in the State's digital services also increases. This relationship is consistent with Park et al. (2023), who show that access to and use of information technologies can be associated with better welfare conditions in vulnerable populations, provided that adequate conditions of access and use exist. In this study, accessibility emerges as a key factor for public digitalization to have a truly inclusive effect.

The findings are also consistent with Alajarmeh (2022), who warns that public sites linked to essential services, such as health, must guarantee accessibility to prevent certain groups from being excluded from relevant information. Although the present research focuses on public platforms in general, the principle is similar: when digital environments are not accessible, the possibility of exercising rights, completing procedures, or accessing institutional services is limited. Therefore, accessibility should be considered a cross-cutting criterion in the design, evaluation, and updating of state digital services.

Overall, the discussion supports the assertion that the analyzed public platforms continue to face significant challenges in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities in Bolivia and Ecuador. The results reveal not only technical difficulties but also issues related to communication, institutional design, and user experience. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the implementation of accessibility standards, incorporate testing with real users, improve compatibility with assistive technologies, and simplify digital processes. In this way, the digital transformation of the public sector can progress toward a more inclusive model, focused on autonomy and the right of all individuals to fully participate in digital life.

CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrated that the digital accessibility of public platforms, from the perspective of persons with disabilities in Bolivia and Ecuador, is at low to medium levels. Although digital services represent an important alternative for accessing information and government procedures, there are still difficulties that limit an autonomous, clear, and inclusive experience for this group of users.

The results indicate that the main barriers are related to forms that are difficult to complete, unclear institutional information, confusing menus, and low compatibility with assistive technologies. These limitations directly affect the autonomy of persons with disabilities, as they often require external assistance to complete processes that should be possible to carry out independently.

The reliability of the instrument, verified by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, supports the consistency of the applied survey and indicates that the evaluated dimensions were appropriate for measuring the perception of digital accessibility. The pilot test also contributed to improving the clarity of the items and strengthening the methodological rigor of the study.

The correlational analysis confirmed a positive and significant relationship between perceived digital accessibility and digital inclusion. This demonstrates that when public platforms are easier to use, understandable, and compatible with assistive technologies, persons with disabilities perceive greater conditions of inclusion, autonomy, and participation in the State's digital services.

In practical terms, it is concluded that Bolivia and Ecuador must strengthen the ongoing evaluation of their public platforms by incorporating international accessibility standards and testing with real users. The digital transformation of the public sector should not be limited to transferring procedures online, but must ensure that these services can be used by all people on equal terms.

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