

# Analyzing the Dynamics of Inclusive Practices through the Mass Media Coverage of Deafness, Multimodal Communication and Performance

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses deafness and the cultural shift in the public perceptions of this hearing impairment in a synchronic perspective. Using Buzzsumo's content analyzer, we identified the content published around "Rose Ayling-Ellis", "Sign Language" and "Deaf" as specific keywords. We examined the data in tandem with the social engagement, the concept, the purpose and the impact of inclusive practices through the mass media coverage of deafness, multimodal communication and performance. The findings revealed a significant increase in social engagements with Sign Language and Deaf; Rose Ayling-Ellis was an important driver of the content and related topics. Using the content analysis and Maslow's Hierarchy of needs as theoretical frameworks, this study confirms that multimodal communication strategies have allowed the disability dimensions to transcend the empathic assumptions and embrace significantly meritocratic achievements in a very competitive and yet inclusive contest. The paper concludes that ability/disability is an elusive dichotomy that is often related to societal and cultural interpretative deficiency. But for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion framework to lead to meaningful changes, it should be supported by equitable interventions designed to facilitate and warrant the level playing field.

**Keywords:** Mass media coverage; Deaf studies; Multimodal communication; Sign Language; Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC); Equity; Equality; Diversity; Inclusion

## INTRODUCTION

Voices for action on disability and inclusion have been heard around the world, asking to address urgently various forms of stigma that people with physical, communicative or cognitive impairments face in their daily lives. Many policies against discrimination and injustices have been put in place to remove barriers to work, travel or take part in various public events. Nevertheless, such policies on inclusion are often driven by the attitude of ensuring a better representation of people with impairment. These are informed by empathy with the aim to enhance mental wellbeing through tackling social and professional isolation. However, the old assumption that inclusion is about doing the right thing is no longer tenable. Disability does not need to be associated with a specific league in competitive performances and this study will show that an equitable design of access mechanisms and tools can better support inclusive and social justice agenda [1-6].

Beyond the activists' advocacy for equality, diversity and inclusion; public and private institutions have adhered to inclusive practices. The Equality Act 2010 in Britain overwrites previous anti-discrimination laws and combines them into a single Act. It facilitates the understanding of different ways in which individual treatments can be unlawful and clearly sets out institutional duties of creating an environment of equality, diversity and inclusion. This Act provides a legal protection to people against various forms of discriminations, including those associated with disability [7-15].

The implementation of the principles of equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities have made it possible to better understand the communication challenges that the deaf face on daily basis. This justifies the crucial role that Sign Languages have been given, alongside other communicative modalities. As the World Federation of the deaf celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary during the International Week of Deaf People

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(20 to 26 September 2021), this global organization's estimates suggest that there are over 70 million deaf people around the world. On 23 September 2021, as the International Day of Sign Languages, argued that "Sign Language is key to real inclusion". This statement is echoed by Jenny Nilsson, member of Human Rights Watch Disability Rights Advisory Committee and Ombudsman for children with disabilities in Sweden when she recommended that "Sign Language should be respected just as any other language. It's our fundamental right and it enables us to communicate and be equal members of our communities". On the same day, the United Nations Secretary General António Guterres joined the debates and confirmed that "Sign Language protects linguistic identity and cultural diversity of all users' early introduction and quality inclusive education in Sign Language are essential for their full and effective participation, as guided by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" [16-23].

Notwithstanding all actions taken to recognize and promote sign languages, especially through the mainstream media coverage, one would wonder whether the implementation of the disability policies has in fact enhanced socio-professional integration of deaf people. Certainly, the information and awareness in the public domain have put the sign languages and multimodal communication on the applied linguistic maps and this has been a good success. The awareness of different Sign Languages, the cued speech, speech reading or lip-reading, hearing aids, gestures and other Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) modes have triggered created curiosity and interests within the deaf studies research community [24-30]. Nevertheless, the big questions would be how effective are these interventions to support deaf people through the professional inclusion? How far has the society moved away from the simplistic perception of a deaf person as someone who cannot hear anything and therefore can only communicate orally and henceforth has inability to perform a range of activities that require auditory skills without an interpreter, including responding to the rhythmic stimulation? The aim of this study is to identify articles published around the British Strictly Come Dancing (SCD) 2021, analyse their social engagement through the specific keywords of "Rose Ayling-Ellis", "Sign Language" and "Deaf"; and establish a correlation between them and the public's perceptions of disability, multimodal communication, inclusion and performance [31].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Although available (Figures 1-14) provided by the World Federation of the Deaf, which has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA) indicate that Deaf people exceed 70 million worldwide, the exact number is actually difficult to know due the complexity of definition of "Deaf" since different hearing impairments can simplistically be referred to as deafness. Whilst some people might have lost hearing at birth, others might develop hearing impairment later in their life. "There are 11 million deaf or hard of hearing people in the UK. This figure includes those with mild to moderate or severe hearing impairments as well as those who are profoundly deaf. There is

diversity within deafness, and the needs and perspectives of Deaf people and those with hearing loss vary" (Equality and Inclusion Unit, 2021). This variety of deafness is recognized by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), which estimates that "In the UK, 1 in 5 adults are deaf or have hearing loss, and 1 in 8 has tinnitus".

This paper does not intend to explore various forms of hearing impairment nor does it aim to discuss different needs of physically disabled people, deaf people and those with hearing loss. In fact, there is no shortage of literature on disability and inclusion in general and on deafness in particular. However, more recently, the British Strictly Come Dancing (SCD) 2021 has brought to light an aspect of inclusivity by bringing in the competition Rose Ayling-Ellis as its first ever deaf contestant. The assumption was that the public would appreciate the organizers' efforts to champion equality, diversity and inclusion; but at the same time keeping the low expectations in terms of the outcome. In an interview with Emine Saner of The Guardian after the competition, Rose Ayling-Ellis herself responded to the question whether she thought people were surprised seeing a deaf person on a dance show by agreeing and confirming that "for deaf people, the thing we have to live with is that people have such low expectations of us. A lot of people were probably thinking, 'How's she going to hear music, how is she going to dance?' I always felt like I have to give 120%, so that I can seem capable of doing it the same as everyone else." Nevertheless, the mainstream media covered the deaf person in a dancing competition as a socio-cultural revolution towards equal opportunity, even though through some headlines you could still sense people thinking that this was still a SCD's attempt to show how inclusive they are, can and should be [32].

There were some articles that were rightly stating that "Listening is not just with your ears", talking about "Stars urge Hollywood to take urgent action on disability inclusion" publishing some common misconceptions of deafness in "How will strictly first deaf contestant hear the music?" But still, many people were wondering whether "strictly come dancing inspires deaf signing course for teens" or whether Rose Ayling-Ellis was actually going to be a serious contestant. But as the competition became fierce and Rose Ayling-Ellis continued to shine steadily, the new headlines were: "Rose Ayling-Ellis praised for deaf tribute dance"; "Strictly Come Dancing: Deafness 'not a barrier' to the arts"; "Strictly Come Dancing 2021: Rose Ayling-Ellis becomes first deaf winner"; "Strictly exclusive! Winner Rose Ayling-Ellis on the glitter ball, Giovanni and the joy of being deaf" and "Rose Ayling-Ellis's Strictly Come Dancing win gives deaf children huge confidence boost". Winning the competition has contributed to the public perceptions' shift from disability to ability *vis-à-vis* the deafness. The question was whether the public interests in associating Rose Ayling-Ellis' performance with deafness, sign languages and excellence could have a cultural impact on the perceptions of deaf people. We decided to carry out this research to analyse the publication content, the search intent and their impact in the context of Rose Ayling-Ellis' presence on a national TV programme during the strictly come dancing competition [33].

Because our study aims to find correlations between and patterns in how keywords and related topics have driven social engagement, the content analysis was one of the theoretical frameworks used to collect and analyse quantitative data, allowing us to understand the search trends during a specific period of time. As the content analysis can also be used to analyse the meanings and relationships of concepts and themes, it was also referred to in the identification and analysis of qualitative data by examining the correlation between search keywords, themes and concepts within both primary and secondary data. In this regard, were used as a reference. Finally, Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs has been used to inform the discussion part, whilst analyzing the correlation between basic, psychological and self-fulfillment needs through the SCD competition and the winning stage by Rose Ayling-Ellis (Figure 1).

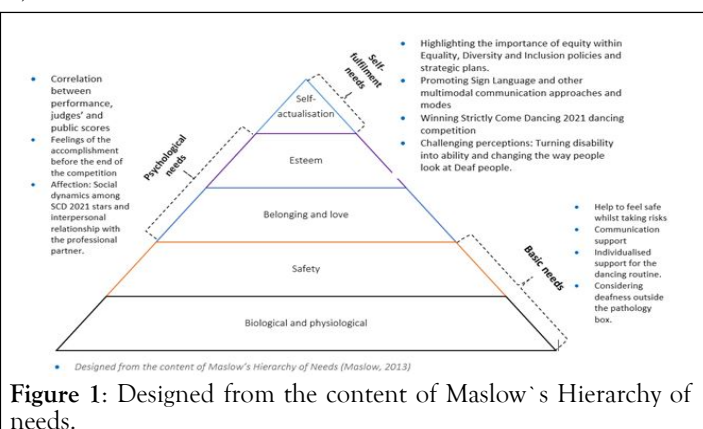


Figure 1: Designed from the content of Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs.

## METHODOLOGY

As a cloud-based platform Buzzsumo facilitates the identification of social and search engagement. It helped with the discovery of trending stories associated with keywords and allowed us to explore the public’s questions and intent while monitoring the social engagement. Using the content analyzer Buzzsumo we focused on the search intent and publication content around the SCD 2021 winner Rose Ayling-Ellis’ presence on a national TV programme. We examined the articles published by the press over the last 12 months, covering the period of January 2021-January 2022 [34-36].

The process of data collection and analysis took some steps, such as identifying data (volume of mainstream media coverage), defining data (search intent and social engagement), identifying the population (public or mass media consumers), explaining the context (British Strictly Come Dancing 2021), setting the boundaries (a period of 12 months) and clarifying the content to be measured (keywords as Rose Ayling-Ellis, Sign Language and Deaf). Through a thematic perspective, the Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs framework was also used to analyse different factors of perceptions within the entry behavior context, motivation, performance, outcome, cultural insights and positive impact [37].

## RESULTS

To analyse the publication content and search intent around Rose Ayling-Ellis’ presence on the national TV programme strictly come dancing 2021 using Buzzsumo’s content analyzer, the use of keywords has generated the following data:

Keyword: “Rose Ayling-Ellis”

- Number of articles analysed/written: 1,517
- Number of articles written in October/their social engagement: 176/122,918
- Number of articles written in November/their social engagement: 357/257,834
- Number of articles written in December/their social engagement: 815/527,452
- Total engagement on social media: 1,016,257

During October -November 2021, there was a 103% percentage increase in articles published, a 110% increase in social engagement. The period of November–December saw a 128% percentage increase in articles published, with a 105% increase in social engagement (Figures 2-14).

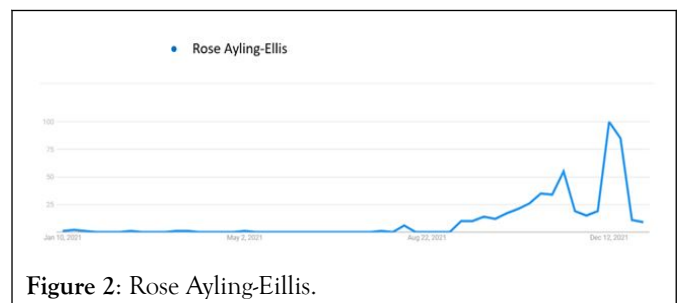


Figure 2: Rose Ayling-Ellis.

- Search trend for 7-13 November 2021: 35
- Search trend for 14-20 November 2021: 60
- Percentage change between the two dates: +71%

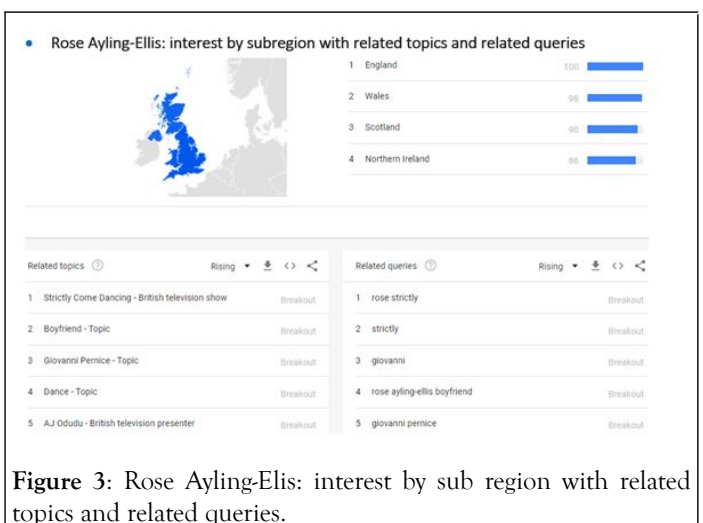


Figure 3: Rose Ayling-Elis: interest by sub region with related topics and related queries.

- “Sign Language”
- Number of articles analysed/written: 19,821
- Number of articles analysed/written in Oct/their social engagement: 1,793/157,465
- Number of articles analysed/written in Nov/their social engagement: 1,531/156,315
- Number of articles analysed/written in Dec/their social engagement: 1,795/63,905
- Total engagement on social media: 3,293,026
- Interestingly, the data show that during October - November, we actually saw articles focusing on Sign Language decrease by 15% but an increase by 17% during November-December

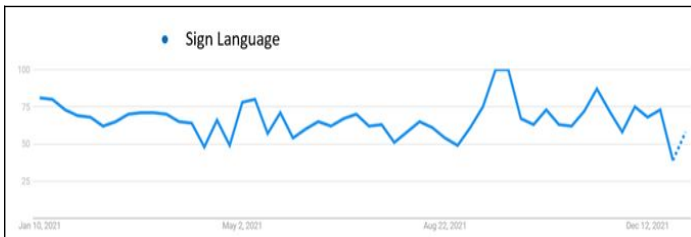


Figure 4: Sign Language.

- Search trend for 7-13 November 2021: 64
- Search trend for 14-20 November 2021: 100
- Percentage change between the two dates: +56%

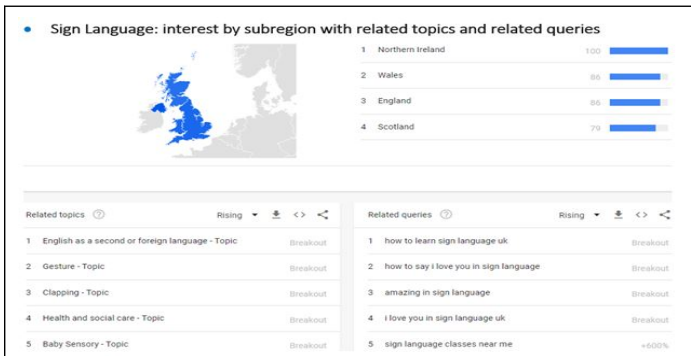


Figure 5: Sign Language: interest by subregion with related topics and related queries.

Keyword: “Rose Ayling-Ellis” AND “Sign Language”

- Sign Language: interest by subregion with related topics and related queries.
- “Rose Ayling-Ellis” AND “Sign Language”
- Number of articles analysed/written: 51
- Number of articles analysed/written in October/their social engagement: 9/28,645
- Number of articles analysed/written in November/their social engagement: 20/28,676
- Number of articles analysed/written in December/their social engagement: 14/19,092
- Total engagement on social media: 82,171
- The data show that articles mentioning both keywords saw an increase of 122% in October-November and a decrease in December.
- Keyword: “Rose Ayling-Ellis” AND “Deaf”
- Number of articles analysed/written: 209
- Number of articles analysed/written in October/their social engagement: 16/3,320
- Number of articles analysed/written in November/their social engagement: 30/66,613
- Number of articles analysed/written in December/their social engagement: 98/123,268
- Total engagement on social media: 228,179
- Data show that the period of October- November saw a 88% percentage increase in articles written about “Rose Ayling-Ellis” AND “Deaf”, with November-December seeing a 227% percentage increase. That means Rose/Deaf saw 158 more articles than Rose/Sign Language as well as 178% more engagement.
- Keyword: “Deaf”
- Search trend for 7 - 13 November 2021: 79
- Search trend for 14-20 November 2021: 88
- Percentage change between the two dates: +11

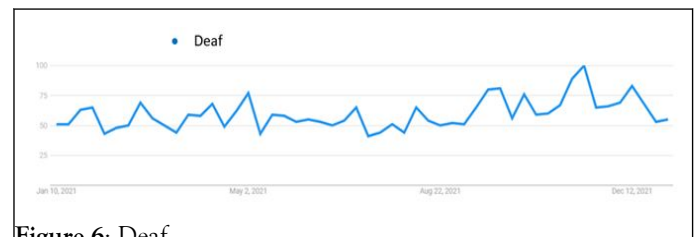


Figure 6: Deaf.

Interestingly, although we saw articles for Sign Language decline in November 2021, people searching for Sign Language saw a 56% increase. During the same period, search for Rose Ayling-Ellis peaked and saw a 71% increase in search trends. This means, although mass media coverage for Sign Language declined-but maintaining a relatively high number regardless, British public intent around Sign Language has increased.

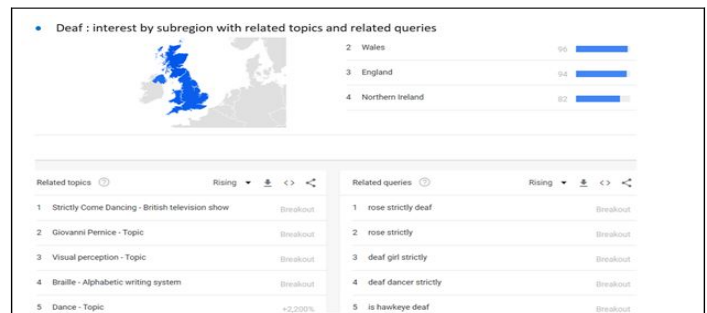


Figure 7: Deaf: interest by subregion with the related topics and related queries.

Looking at related topics, which are defined as “Users searching for your term also searched for these topics” below we can see that Rose Ayling-Ellis was a significant driver in engagement.

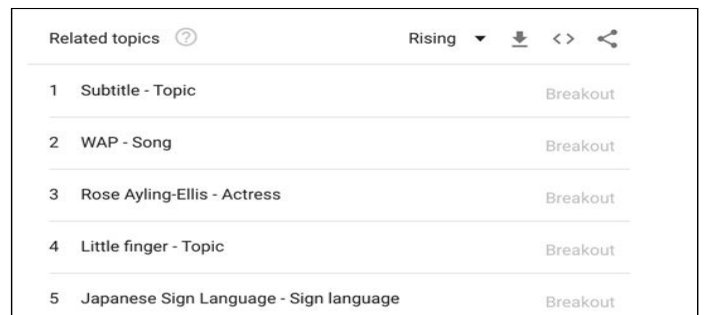


Figure 8: Users searching for your term also searched for these topics.

Focusing on related queries which are defined as “Users searching for your term also searched for these queries”, we can see that intent focused around British public wanting to learn Sign Language as a whole, “how to learn Sign Language UK” seeing an 800% increase alone [38].



Figure 9: Users searching for your term also searched for these queries.

When looking at “Deaf” as search trend, we see in the following that Strictly Come Dancing is the number one related topic - along with films such as Eternals and Hawkeye that feature Deaf main characters [39,40].

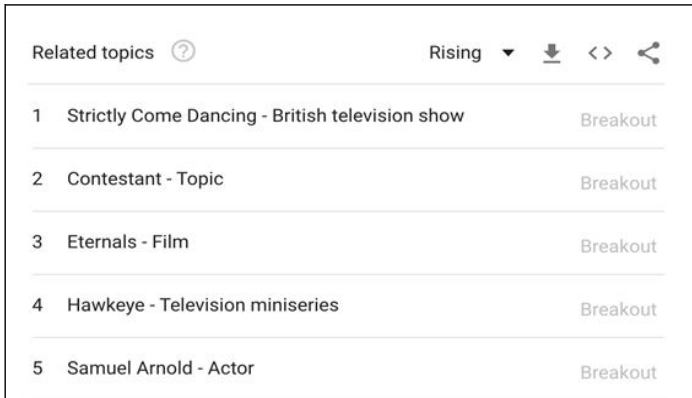


Figure 10: Eternals and Hawkeye that feature Deaf main characters.

Looking at related queries we can also see the main driver was Rose and Strictly Come Dancing:

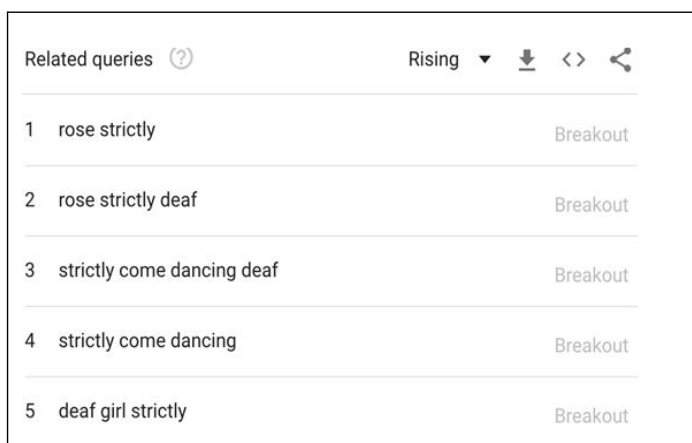


Figure 11: Looking at related queries we can also see the main driver was Rose and Strictly Come Dancing.

The graph below shows the search trends for Rose, Sign Language and Deaf from September 2021.

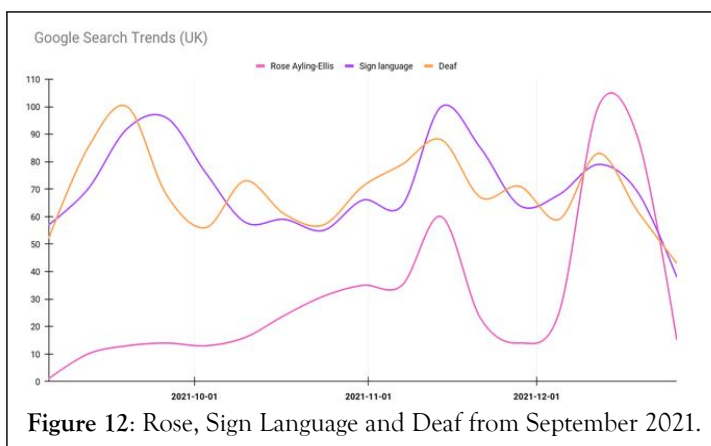


Figure 12: Rose, Sign Language and Deaf from September 2021.

The graph below shows Buzzsumo articles written about the keywords shown:

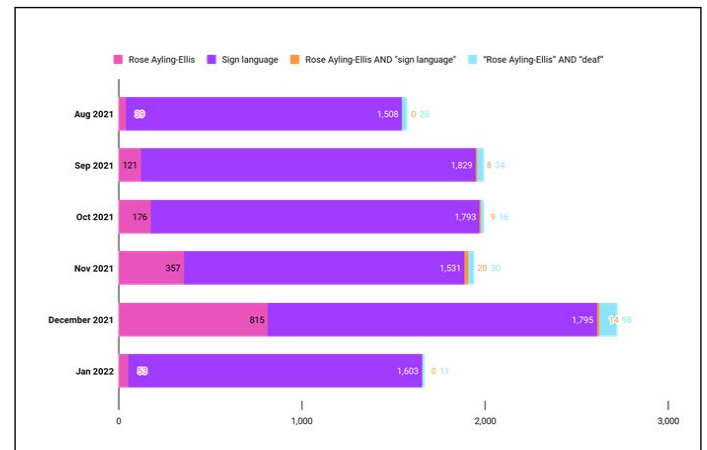


Figure 13: Buzzsumo articles written about the keywords shown.

The graph below shows trending searches for “deafness”, highlighting that in the last 30 days, including post strictly come dancing 2021 period, we have seen a 22% increase in searches for this concept; with the related topics being Sign Language [41-45].

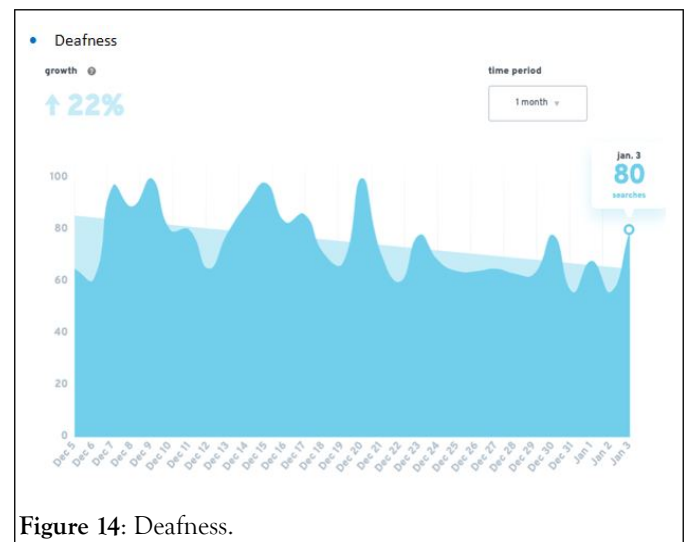


Figure 14: Deafness.

## DISCUSSION

Many scholars have written on the power of expectations in driving or hindering motivation and achievement. Normally, the level of performance is measured against expectations. Therefore, defining expectations is a fundamental step in guaranteeing performance. Hence, in a competitive event, clarifying expectations forms the basis on which contestants will be assessed at the end of the event or task. However, in the management of cultural and social practices, it often happens that expectations are implicit, or even tacit, especially when it comes to the implementation of inclusive policies and social justice agenda. In this case, such expectations can relate to different assessment factors and criteria, such as the quality and quantity of tasks to be performed, the behavior to be displayed, the stakeholders’ perceptions and the level of their satisfaction, and many more. In the case of expectations being based on

perceptions, the performance is subject to greater interpretative variations [46-48].

On an individual level, low expectations lead to very modest or rather limited achievements, because setting goals should normally be based on expectations. But when individual expectations exceed social expectations, the performance often challenges socially imposed goals and leads to excellence. Consequently, achieving performance requires a series of impulses and synergies that contribute to motivational behavior on the individual level. To display an excellent performance in a competitive environment, it is therefore necessary to optimize individual efforts and energies. This discussion section aims to present the main actors, factors and issues associated with the expectations and performance in the context of Rose Ailing-Ellis's participation in *Strictly Come Dancing 2021*, to better analyse the process of the competition and the positive impact of her achievement on the stakeholders.

### Public's low expectations

Rose Ailing-Ellis is no stranger to British TV screens. Her first character role was in *The End* in 2011, a short film of 25 minutes directed by a deaf filmmaker Ted Evans. In 2017, Rose Ailing-Ellis secured a role in the BBC's *Casualty* where she played the character Bianca Sinclair. In May 2020, Rose Ailing-Ellis joined *East Enders*, a very popular BBC soap opera where she is playing Frankie Lewis. Interestingly, even though she is not new to the British TV screens, the data collected through the content analyzer indicate that before the announcement of the *Strictly Come Dancing 2021* competitors, Rose Ailing-Ellis was almost unknown to the mass media environment and hence to the social engagement. Surprisingly, this was not the first time having a deaf person in the dancing competition, because the American version of the show, *dancing with the Stars*, had already had a deaf activist Nyle DiMarco as a contestant and winner of the 2016 series together with his professional dance partner Peta Murgatroyd. But still, Nyle DiMarco's achievement did not put Rose Ailing-Ellis in the spotlight before halfway of the competition. The mainstream media did not even make references to the US 2016 series. One can only suggest that her roles as a character were confining her into the world of art where the genre allows the manipulation of events or features to beautify the end-result. When Rose Ailing-Ellis was announced as a dancing contestant, many people who had seen her on TV screens previously as a character discovered for the first time that she was in fact deaf.

What seemed like the mainstream media's lack of interest in this regard justifies the low expectations people were holding against Rose Ailing-Ellis. Perceived in the public eyes as an inhibiting disability, deafness took precedence over any consideration of performance in terms of the competitive capacity that involves responding physically to the musical beats. For many people, talking "about deaf people is to focus on the fact of their condition that they do not hear and to interpret all other aspects of their lives as consequences of this fact".

In an open letter signed against prejudice and discrimination towards disabled talents in Hollywood, more than 80 actors and entertainment industry professionals argued that there is an

"urgent need to act on disability inclusion. Due to years of misrepresentation in the media, social barriers, and chronic ableism, the deaf, hard of hearing, neurodiverse and disabled communities continue to be underrepresented and disrespected in the entertainment industry." In an interview with BBC, Ella who lost her hearing at 11 stated that "It's the first time I've seen a deaf person in that kind of reality show. She's not playing a character; she is showing herself as a deaf person and it's beautiful."

In order to move away from that character status and challenge the perceptions that she might have been chosen to represent a certain category of people for the sake of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Rose Ailing-Ellis had to rely to and use her high aspirations to test the public's low expectations. In her own words, she confirms that "My ambition is to amplify deaf voices and to stop people assuming deaf people can't achieve. The challenges of dealing with people's lack of understanding made me more determined and want to work harder". In a separate interview with McIntosh (September 2021), Rose Ailing-Ellis reiterated this determination by saying, "I feel like I have a purpose, because I'm deaf, and to be the first deaf person on *Strictly*, I feel like it's a good chance to break the stereotype of what deaf people can and can't do."

### Challenging perceptions: synergies and strategies

On a personal level, it should be noted that in any form of performance, the major difference between expectations and perception is related to individual aspirations and the state of mind the person himself. Apart from the considerations relating to a possible involvement of external factors which could impose the social objectives, the individual expectations remain hypothetical. They take their shape and form through the actions that are triggered by the impulses connecting the aspirations to the desire to perform with excellence. The gap between expectations and excellent performance as two motivational variables determines the level of individual satisfaction or disappointment. Hence, the direction of shift in societal perceptions is determined by the quality of performance and the positive outcome. When individual goals and performance exceed by far societal perceptions and expectations, the individual reaches a very high level of satisfaction.

Reaching this level of high satisfaction that Maslow (2013) would refer to as self-actualization requires strategies to challenge the low expectations and associated inhibiting societal perceptions. In *The Inner Game of Work*, argues that we all have a Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA) and a Negative Emotional Attractor (NEA). Both PEA and NEA are the fundamental factors in driving the inner game to either enhance or hinder motivation to perform. However, for the PEA to operate, our psycho-physiological state of being needs to be open to new ideas, changes and challenges. This is the case with Rose Ailing-Ellis, whose competition goals have been associated with motivational strategies based on both internal and external factors.

Since deafness has been perceived as a negative factor linked to her possible inability for communicative interaction, Rose Ailing-Ellis relied on her Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA)

and used communication strategies to disable the concept of disability. Even though she recognizes that "not all deaf people are the same, every deaf person will have their own unique experience with music", she nevertheless points out that she "will be focusing on reading my partner's body language plus counting in my head, which will help me with timing. So, for me it's a combination of everything" (ibid.). In an interview with the National Deaf Children's Society, Rose Ayling-Ellis explains how "she often has to perform using Sign Supported English (SSE) to reflect her own communication style and make it clear for audiences". She also said: "When I use SSE (Sign Supported English), it's like thinking of two languages at the same time while performing, so a BSL (British Sign Language) monitor checks my BSL is clear on-screen".

As said, "subscribing to the disability construction of culturally Deaf people, undermines the deaf agenda" (p. xii). In this study, the data have shown that at a time when disability has been one of the key factors that produced the main elements of the interpretation of public expectations *vis-à-vis* the process and the outcome of strictly come dancing 2021 competition, Rose Ayling-Ellis's performance has shown that only socio-cultural perceptions can constitute an inhibiting factor for engagement and achievement. Such an inhibition undermines individual aspirations, especially for people that the society considers disabled. The process and outcome of a deaf contestant competing through strictly come dancing 2021 gives hope for a positive change, pointing to the right direction *vis-à-vis* the shift in socio-cultural perceptions of disability, engagement and performance.

### Potential impact of the competition process and outcome

Many researchers have published on the power of the role model in inspiring, influencing, raising aspirations and changing behavior in a positive way. Outside the research domain, it is well-known that in all institutions, both social and professional, there have been many initiatives to create and support mechanisms for role modeling. Actions to promote the role modeling generally aim to encourage inspiration raise aspirations and enhance motivation and performance.

However, even though the conceptualization of the role model seems to have been institutionalized, the importance of the role is determined by the aspirations, which are triggered by the performance and achievements of others. That said, the role model can be played unconsciously or can depend on individual goals and performance that challenge expectations. It is from this perspective that we analyse Rose Ailing-Ellis's performance in tandem with the potential impact on behavioral social changes.

### Inspiration to the deaf community

In an article published by Venter (2021) in The Guardian, one can read that "It is hoped that the East Enders actor's victory in the dance contest will give the public a better understanding of deafness". Quoting a 15 year old deaf person Scarlet Davies, Vinter (ibid.) wrote that "Rose has had such a massive impact on

young people. She reinforces the message that we shouldn't let other people dictate to us because of our deafness. [I] feel that I don't need to worry about my deafness getting in the way of my future. She also makes me believe that I can do anything in life and my deafness will never stop me." Apart from the data we have collected around Rose Ayling-Ellis' impact on the popularity of Sign Language and on the social engagement with deaf as associated, not to disability but rather to communicating through signs, there have been other surveys that point to the same direction.

A New research carried out after the SCD 2021 competition by the BBC One show in December 2021 indicates that "more than three-quarters of deaf children think the programme has given the public a better understanding of deafness" (ibid.). Furthermore, a survey involving Deaf children and their families by the National Deaf Children's Society also reveals that "Ailing-Ellis's visibility led to two-thirds of deaf children feeling more confident about wearing their hearing aids, with seven in 10 saying they felt happier talking about their own deafness" (ibid.).

### Sign language promotion

Globally, the legal recognition of Sign Languages has been achieved and this constitutes an important achievement for equality, diversity and inclusion activists; as well as for Deaf people themselves. While Sign Language is recognized as a language of communication alongside national and official languages, its recognition has however not been accompanied with promotional and outreach initiatives that other main languages enjoy. Since the popularity of a language in a globalized world is often underpinned by utilitarianism perspectives, which are facilitated by language policies and education, it is understandable that the absence of Sign Language programmes in education and training hinders its promotion. This might provide the reason why on daily basis deaf people face multiple interactional difficulties because their main communication tool suffers either from the lack or the shortage of interpreters. It is therefore normal that the use of Sign Language to facilitate communication during a mega event like Strictly Come Dancing 2021, which attracted 11 million TV viewers, is a good means of promoting this language. According, since November 2021, "interest in learning BSL has now exploded, thanks to strictly, with some teaching centers reporting waiting lists for BSL courses". This was expected, and the impact seems to confirm expectations.

If the mere recognition of Sign Language does not coincide with its popularity in terms of its use, its promotion should be facilitated by educational policies. Senior policy advisor at the National Deaf Children's Society, argues that after Rose Ayling-Ellis's performance and winning "What's important now is keeping this going because increased awareness and understanding of deafness can only be a good thing." Finally, the Department for Education has already "confirmed it would be holding a public consultation at the start of next year on the possibility of launching a new GCSE in sign language, despite a moratorium on new subjects." That is the kind of action that can make a significant positive impact on the promotion of Sign Language.

## Challenging misconceptions about deaf people and inclusion strategies

As it is the case with most physical or cognitive disabilities, societal perceptions have often associated deafness with a pathological condition, which is closely related to complete hearing loss. From this perspective, deafness has been seen as a reflection of a communicative deficiency leading to inability. This perception seems to suggest that the pathologic dimension should not allow a deaf person to engage in certain activities that require communicative interaction without an interpreter present. As a result, attitudes of empathy have dominated relations between the public and deaf people. This might actually justify the reasons why many initiatives, actions and investments to support deaf people have focused their attention on medical interventions for therapy or treatment of deafness. It is therefore not surprising to realize that equality policies for the integration of deaf people, as it is in fact the case with all other forms of diversity, have encouraged representation rather than participation.

It is hardly surprising then to notice that research data in this study have revealed low expectations of Rose Ayling-Ellis' performance among the public. However, she clearly demonstrated that what was perceived as a disability was rather a socio-cultural issue of misconception. If this case shows that the pathological dimension of deafness relates to the societal and cultural deficiency in perceptions, Rose Ayling-Ellis' performance is a good call for a redefinition, not only of deafness as a pathology, but also and above all of social constructs and inclusion policies which are based on empathy. Otherwise, the society runs the risk of continuing to support inclusion efforts which, in fact, continue to lead to exclusion.

For inclusion policies on diversity to be effective, they must be based on the principle of equity. According to Milken Institute School of Public Health (MISPH), "While the terms equity and equality may sound similar, the implementation of one versus the other can lead to dramatically different outcomes for marginalized people. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome". Paula Dressed also argues that "The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally. It will be achieved by treating everyone equitably, or justly according to their circumstances." It is very true that diversity inclusion should be underpinned by an appropriate design; and "Human beings are the real experts in adapting to diversity. Inclusive design puts people at the center from the very start of the process, and those fresh, diverse perspectives are the key to true insight".

It is clear that the adjustments made to support Rose Ayling-Ellis by providing communication tools, including interpreting facilities, hearing aids and other forms of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) modes have allowed her to succeed with excellence. "Equity is a solution for addressing imbalanced social systems. Justice can take equity one step further by fixing the systems in a way that leads to long-term,

sustainable, equitable access for generations to come" (ibid.). Rose Ayling-Ellis' case indicates that as long as all social justice policies in place continue to follow the triadic dimension of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion without Equity, they will always be condemned to fail since they rely on the perspectives that ignore an important aspect of fairness, which is underpinned by the level playing field. Her case is a call for a critical reflection on inclusion policies in general and in particular equitable support to people with disability.

## CONCLUSION

We should give the concluding remark of this study to Rose Ayling-Ellis to share with us her positive note of hope for an expected meaningful impact of her performance. In her interview with McIntosh (September 2021), she says: "I just hope a lot of good will come out of it, that will improve deaf people's experience. They [the deaf community] will hope that a lot of people's attitudes will change and that deaf people get better experience, get more jobs, get more involved in the industry, and it becomes more inclusive."

In the face of negative societal attitudes toward deaf people, Rose Ayling-Ellis hopes her performance will help steer clear of the pathological logic of inability that excludes people with hearing impairments. Notwithstanding the very low expectations that the public had of her at the beginning of Strictly Come Dancing 2021 competition, Rose Ayling-Ellis' performance has influenced not only the mass media through the volume of publications and related social engagements, but also the public in relation to the rise in popularity of Sign Language, as well as the inspirational testimonials collected through surveying Deaf people and their families. Finally, Rose Ayling-Ellis' influence has also reached policymakers and public institutions and bodies, including the British Department for Education, which has expressed its commitment to the promotion of Sign Language through education. For Rose Ayling-Ellis, deafness is just a hearing loss that should not trigger negative attitudes *vis-à-vis* the disability. The society should rather contribute to the normalization of deafness as one of the elements of difference in diversity.

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