



Universiteit
Antwerpen



Universiteit Antwerpen
Faculteit Letteren
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Public Awareness of Media Accessibility

A Study on Knowledge and Perception

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Academiejaar 2024–2025

Masterproef

Vertalen (Talencombinatie: Engels–Spaans)

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Ondergetekende Jara Van den Berge, talencombinatie Engels-Spaans in de opleiding Master in het Vertalen, verklaart dat deze masterproef volledig oorspronkelijk is en uitsluitend door ondergetekende is geschreven. Bij alle informatie en ideeën ontleend aan andere bronnen, heeft ondergetekende expliciet en in detail verwezen naar de vindplaatsen.

Antwerpen, 6 augustus 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jara Van den Berge' in a stylized, cursive script.

Totaal aantal woorden eigen tekst: 17990

Abstract

This thesis investigates public awareness of Media Accessibility (MA) in Belgium, aiming to evaluate the general public's understanding, perceptions, and attitude regarding accessibility services. Using survey data from up to 140 respondents, with varying response rates across sections due to skip logic and participant dropout, the study adopts four key dimensions of awareness adapted from Gafoor's (2012) theoretical framework and related models in cognitive and cultural awareness research (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Piggins & Phillips, 1998). These dimensions include general familiarity with MA as a concept; cognitive knowledge of relevant legal frameworks and service availability; perceptual recognition of personal engagement with accessibility services; and cultural attitudes regarding the societal significance of MA. Findings reveal that, although most respondents have encountered the term "media accessibility," comprehensive understanding remains limited, with widespread ambiguity surrounding its scope and intended beneficiaries. Knowledge of legal mandates and specific accessibility services is significantly low, highlighting a pronounced disconnect between existing policy and public awareness. Perceptual awareness is marked by widespread uncertainty about whether commonly used features, such as subtitles or dubbing, qualify as accessibility services, reflecting a conceptual disconnect between everyday media use and the recognition of these tools as part of inclusive design. Culturally, MA is predominantly linked to sensory disabilities, though a subset of participants expresses more inclusive, universalist perspectives. These results underscore significant challenges in effectively communicating the importance of MA and point to an urgent need for targeted educational strategies and reinforced policy implementation to promote an inclusive media landscape. This research contributes to the broader discourse on accessibility as a fundamental human right and emphasizes the critical necessity of bridging gaps between legislation, public understanding, and practical application.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Media Accessibility (MA) has gained increasing prominence across various domains, including education, policy-making, and the media industry, mirroring a broader societal shift toward inclusion, equity, and human rights. This growing attention reflects not only technological and regulatory advancements but also an evolving recognition of the diverse needs of individuals. Yet, despite this expanding discourse, one crucial dimension remains significantly underexplored: public awareness of Media Accessibility.

Greco (2019, p.18) defines MA as “access to media and non-media objects, services and environments through media solutions, for any person who cannot or would not be able to, either partially or completely, access them in their original form.” Rooted in Audiovisual Translation (AVT), MA has evolved into an interdisciplinary field, drawing on insights from disability studies, technology and communication. While academic research has predominantly focused on technical standards, quality, and end-user experiences, particularly in relation to individuals with sensory disabilities (Orero, 2004; Remael et al., 2016), far less is known about how the general public perceives, understands, or values MA.

Awareness is not merely a static state of knowledge, it functions as a catalyst for change by shaping how individuals engage with new ideas, policies, and practices. It operates at the intersection of cognition, perception, and social behaviour, influencing how people interpret and respond to the needs of others and the demands of an inclusive society (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Gafoor, 2012). As Morin et al. (2012) argue, inclusive practices are most effective and sustainable when supported by a broadly informed and engaged public. However, generally, awareness-raising efforts have largely targeted specific groups, most notably school-aged children, leaving adult populations underrepresented in both academic literature and practical initiatives (Scior, 2011). Furthermore, few studies adopt a robust theoretical framework when assessing public awareness, often overlooking conceptual models such as stigma theory or the social model of disability. Scior (2011) argues that incorporating such frameworks can offer deeper insight into public attitudes and potential resistance.

This thesis addresses this research gap by empirically investigating public awareness of Media Accessibility in Belgium through a quantitative survey-based study (see Appendix). The survey design incorporated conditional logic and allowed for partial completions, resulting in varying

response numbers across different sections. Drawing on a multidimensional theoretical framework of awareness adapted from key scholars such as Gafoor (2012), Brown and Ryan (2003), and Piggins and Phillips (1998) (detailed in Section 2.3), this study examines how MA is understood, noticed, and valued by the general public through four interconnected dimensions: general, cognitive, perceptual, and cultural awareness. Specifically, general awareness reflects basic familiarity with MA as a social and technological concept (adapted from Gafoor's "awareness about" category), cognitive awareness captures participants' factual knowledge of MA and its legal and practical frameworks, perceptual awareness assesses whether individuals actively recognize and experience accessibility features in media consumption, and cultural awareness explores how MA is positioned within broader societal and ethical values. These dimensions informed the development of a 17-item questionnaire designed not only to assess participants' knowledge but also to capture their lived experiences with MA services and their attitudes toward its social importance, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of public awareness.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How familiar are participants with the concept of MA, and how do they define it?
2. What knowledge do participants have about the availability of MA services and relevant legal frameworks?
3. How do participants recognize and experience MA services in their daily lives?
4. What attitudes and beliefs do participants hold regarding the societal importance and beneficiaries of MA?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence on a largely overlooked area of MA. In doing so, it contributes not only to academic discourse but also to the practical promotion of inclusive media environments through enhanced public understanding and engagement.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, beginning by tracing the evolution of Media Accessibility, from its AVT origins to its current interdisciplinary status. It then contrasts the particularist and universalist models of accessibility, explores how MA functions in practice, and examines the legal and policy frameworks in place, with a specific focus on the Flemish region in Belgium. This is followed by a conceptual discussion of awareness, including its various definitions, dimensions, and relevance to the field of MA. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, justifying the use of a questionnaire and detailing its design in alignment with

the four established awareness dimensions. The chapter also addresses the study's inclusion criteria, ethical considerations, and data analysis procedures. Chapters 4 and 5 present and critically discuss the results, offering insights into how the Belgian public understands, experiences, and values MA, while also addressing the study's limitations and identifying directions for further research. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive summary of the main findings and conclusions.

Through this structure, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive account of public awareness of MA in Belgium, highlighting how varying levels of knowledge and perception may influence the realization of a more accessible and inclusive media landscape.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical background for the study, structured around two main themes: Media Accessibility and awareness. To build a solid foundation for designing the research study and interpreting the collected data, an interdisciplinary literature review was conducted. The review focuses on key concepts, theoretical models, and previous findings relevant to how media accessibility is understood, perceived, and framed in the public sphere. By drawing on literature from fields such as disability studies, social sciences, health sciences, and translation studies, the chapter establishes the conceptual and empirical grounding necessary to explore the public's knowledge, attitude and perception of media accessibility.

2.1. Approach to Literature Review

To develop the theoretical framework and literature review for this research, a broad selection of academic sources, including peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and scholarly papers in both English and Dutch, was systematically collected and analysed. These materials were selected for their relevance to central themes such as public awareness, the conceptualization of awareness within social and disability studies, the evolution and scope of Media Accessibility (MA), and the theoretical and practical distinctions that inform its implementation. Inclusion criteria were applied throughout the entire literature selection process: Publications from the past 25 years (2000–2025) were considered to ensure relevance to contemporary debates and practices. Sources were limited to works published in English or Dutch, given the linguistic competencies of the researcher and the relevance of these languages within the Belgian academic and social landscape.

The literature on awareness was gathered through comprehensive keyword-based searches across multiple academic databases. On platforms such as ScienceDirect, combinations such as “physical disability/public awareness AND beliefs/attitude/knowledge” were used, while JSTOR and BASE were queried using phrases such as “disability studies AND awareness AND beliefs AND attitude.” Supplementary searches were also conducted via Google Scholar and EBSCO using similar terminology to ensure broader coverage. To further enrich the literature base and avoid limitations associated with keyword searches alone, reference mining was employed. The bibliographies of initially selected studies were examined to uncover foundational and influential cited works that may not have appeared in standard database results. The

investigation into the concept of Media Accessibility, including its evolution, recent developments, and disciplinary foundations, were carried out through focused searches using keywords such as “Media Accessibility,” “Translation Studies,” “Accessibility Studies,” “audiovisual translation,” “accessibility services,” and “models of disability.” This interdisciplinary approach allowed for the integration of perspectives from both translation and disability studies, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of MA’s theoretical underpinnings and practical applications.

Despite the comprehensive approach adopted, certain limitations within the existing literature became apparent: there is a notable lack of research addressing public awareness of Media Accessibility. Most scholarly attention has been directed toward the technical dimensions of MA, such as service quality, implementation standards, and end-user experience, while broader public understanding and awareness are rarely examined. The present study narrows its scope to the Belgian population, aiming to generate context-specific insights to contribute to filling the wider empirical research gap. By exploring how the general public in Belgium understands and values MA, this thesis adds a much-needed societal dimensions to the predominantly technical discourse in the field.

2.2. Media Accessibility

This chapter establishes the theoretical and practical foundations of MA, which underpin the empirical study presented later in this thesis. It begins by tracing the conceptual evolution of MA in both academic literature and professional practice, highlighting its shift from a set of reactive accommodations to a proactive and inclusive framework. The chapter then outlines the main accessibility services that fall under the umbrella of MA, while also addressing persistent barriers to their widespread implementation. Special attention is given to the theoretical distinction between particularist and universalist models of MA, one framing accessibility as a service for individuals with disabilities, the other promoting it as a design principle for all users. This theoretical contrast is particularly significant to the present study, which examines how the Belgian public understand and perceive the purpose, scope, and beneficiaries of MA. While the empirical dimensions of the study, the survey design and methodology, are discussed in Chapter 3, the present chapter establishes the conceptual groundwork by offering an overview of key models, accessibility service typologies, and legal frameworks that inform MA discourse and practice, with particular emphasis on the Flemish context.

2.2.1. The Evolution of Media Accessibility

Media Accessibility (MA) is the research field concerned with “access to media and non-media objects, services and environments through media solutions, for any person who cannot or would not be able to, either partially or completely, access them in their original form” (Greco, 2019, p.18). It encompasses a wide range of services, including subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH), audio description (AD), sign language interpretation (SLI), and easy-to-read formats, that will be further discussed in the subsequent section. These services aim to mitigate the barriers that prevent full access to audiovisual content, particularly in a rapidly evolving society, where communication, education, and cultural participation increasingly depend on equitable access (Greco & Jankowska, 2020; Remael et al., 2016). As such, MA is no longer viewed merely as a technical or linguistic challenge but as a foundational condition for social participation and cultural inclusion.

MA initially developed within the discipline of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), a subfield of Translation Studies, where its early focus was rooted in a particularist focus on the needs of individuals with sensory impairments. Early research and practice in MA were primarily concerned with compensating for visual and hearing impairments, giving rise to services such as SDH, AD, and SLI (Orero, 2004; Remael et al., 2016). These services were designed to reduce access barriers for individuals with disabilities and were firmly grounded in the methodological and conceptual frameworks of AVT. Pioneering scholars such as Díaz Cintas (2005), Gambier (2003), and Orero (2004) helped formalize MA as a subfield, framing it primarily around SDH and AD services designed to compensate for hearing and visual disabilities. While some early definitions expanded the scope to include modalities such as audio subtitling and SLI, MA was still largely conceptualized as a reactive solution for a specific group of users (Orero, 2004, 2012; Romero-Fresco, 2018).

However, this narrowly defined, impairment-based understanding of MA has since been challenged by scholars advocating for a broader, more inclusive framework. Over time, the notion of MA evolved to encompass not only sensory but also linguistic and cognitive barriers (Díaz Cintas, 2005; Orero & Matamala, 2007). A major turning point came with the work of Greco (2016, 2018, 2019), who proposed a universalist, user-centred model of accessibility grounded in the interdisciplinary field of Accessibility Studies. This paradigm shift reframed accessibility not as a reactive measure limited to disability, but as a proactive, systemic obligation embedded in the principles of inclusive and human-centred design.

Within this expanded framework, MA came to include services such as interlingual subtitling, same-language subtitling (SLS), and easy-to-read formats. These forms of linguistic accessibility, benefit not only individuals with disabilities but also other groups, including language learners, children, elderly users, and individuals with cognitive or literacy challenges (Romero-Fresco, 2018). This redefinition reflects the growing recognition that accessibility solutions are relevant across a wide range of user needs and contexts.

Crucially, the evolution of MA also signifies a deeper reconceptualization of translation itself, not merely as interlingual transfer, but as an act of enabling access. Accessibility is thus increasingly viewed as a socio-technical and ethical practice that intersects with policy, human rights, and cultural inclusion (Greco, 2016b, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2018). Rather than addressing access gaps after they appear, the universalist approach aims to anticipate diversity by design, positioning accessibility as an inherent component of media production rather than an optional add-on.

This theoretical evolution forms the foundation for the present study, which seeks to explore whether public perceptions of MA align with this broadened conceptualization. By examining how the general population understands, engages with, and values MA, this research contributes to ongoing debates about the role of accessibility in an increasingly digital and diverse media landscape.

2.2.2. Theoretical Models: Particularist vs. Universalist

A core conceptual distinction in MA is the contrast between particularist and universalist models, which offer competing answers to a central question: *Who is accessibility for?* Over the years, this debate has played a crucial role in shaping both academic discourse and practical implementation within the field of MA. Scholar Gian Maria Greco (2016, 2018, 2019) has been instrumental in conceptualizing this evolution, describing a paradigm shift from a particularist to a universalist account of MA.

The particularist account of MA initially emerged as a response to the needs of specific user groups, primarily individuals with sensory disabilities. From the outset, the field of MA has been concerned with modalities such as SDH and AD, both of which are rooted in a rights-based framework that views accessibility as a compensatory measure for sensory impairments (Greco, 2016b; Romero-Fresco, 2018). This model has enabled deaf and blind user associations to play a leading role in advocating for increased provision and improved quality of access services

worldwide. It is also closely aligned with the medical model of disability and the recognition of accessibility as a fundamental human right, as established in international frameworks including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Article 9 of the UNCRPD mandates equal access to information and communication, including media content, for individuals with disabilities. However, while foundational for ensuring access, this particularist account often reinforces marginalization by framing accessibility as an exceptional, add-on feature, a dynamic Greco (2016a) calls the “ghetto effect.”

A second particularist model, grounded in the social model of disability, challenges the assumption that impairments alone create access barriers (Shakespeare & Watson, 2004). This. Instead, it recognizes the role of disabling environments and expands the target audience to include, for instance, foreign-language users and others who may benefit from accessibility services, while still regarding these groups as “special cases” (Greco, 2016b; Orero et al., 2018). This broader understanding is reflected in EU-funded initiatives such as *Digital Television for All* (DTV4ALL) and *Hybrid Broadcast Broadband for All* (HBB4ALL), which tested accessibility solutions with a wide range of users, including hearing, hard-of-hearing, and deaf participants (Romero-Fresco, 2018).

By contrast, the universalist account reframes accessibility as a proactive design principle that anticipates diverse user needs and benefits the population at large. Drawing on Universal Design and Accessibility Studies, this model advocates for inclusive practices not limited to persons with officially recognized impairments (Greco, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2019). Subtitling, for example, supports not only deaf users but also assists language learners, elderly viewers, and those in noisy environments (Romero-Fresco, 2018). Similarly, AD can enhance content consumption for sighted users engaged in multitasking, while easy-to-read formats benefit individuals with cognitive disabilities as well as users with low literacy or time constraints.

This theoretical distinction is not merely academic, it has direct implications for how MA is perceived by the general public. This thesis investigates whether the Belgian public conceptualize MA narrowly as a tool for persons with disabilities or more broadly as a universal benefit. Through a targeted questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate who they believe benefits from MA, offering insight into how the theoretical frameworks of particularism and universalism are reflected, or resisted, in public awareness and societal attitudes.

2.2.3. Media Accessibility in Practice

In practice, MA encompasses a wide array of services designed to facilitate equitable access for diverse audiences. These services are commonly grouped according to the types of barriers they address: sensory, linguistic, and cognitive. While functional classifications provide useful guidelines for implementation, they have often been shaped by particularist perspectives that align services with impairment-specific user groups. This framing can be problematic, as it risks reinforcing what Greco (2016a) refers to as the “ghetto-effect”: the unintended marginalization of accessibility as an isolated accommodation rather than an integrated design solution.

Moreover, grounding MA too narrowly, as has often been the case, has significant limitations. As Romero-Fresco (2018) argues, positioning MA within AVT risks reducing its scope to services that are strictly translation-based, thereby excluding other equally crucial modalities that do not necessarily involve translation, such as clean audio or audio introductions. This reductionist view sidelines the needs of user groups that fall outside traditional sensory disability parameters, such as children, elderly viewers, and those with cognitive impairments, thus betraying the universal essence of accessibility (Greco, 2016a, 2016b; Greco & Jankowska, 2020).

Following a functional classification of MA, services addressing sensory barriers are among the most established. They primarily target users with visual or hearing impairments but also benefit broader audiences in different contexts, for instance, language learners or viewers in noisy environments. These services typically include:

- Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (SDH): combine textual representation of dialogue with sound effects and speaker identification (Diaz-Cintas, 2005);
- Audio Description (AD): provides verbal narration of visual elements (Diaz-Cintas, 2005);
- Sign Language Interpretation (SLI): renders spoken language through visual-gestural translation (Bernabé Caro, 2020; Greco & Jankowska, 2020);
- Induction loops and clean audio tracks: enhance auditory clarity (Bernabé Caro, 2020);
- Touch tours and audio introductions: provide multisensory context for blind users (Bernabé Caro, 2020; Romero-Fresco, 2018).

Cognitive accessibility services address challenges with comprehension, attention, and memory. They are particularly relevant for users with intellectual disabilities, neurodivergent conditions (e.g., ADHD and autism), or cognitive overload. Elderly users and children also benefit from these services. Key practices in this category include:

- Easy-to-read and simplified language materials: which reduce linguistic and syntactic complexity;
- Consistent narrative structures and adjusted timing in subtitles: improving readability and coherence;
- Accessible user interfaces and platform navigation: which reduce cognitive load and enable content access (Bernabé Caro, 2020).

Linguistic accessibility services address barriers related to language and are vital in multilingual, immigrant, and culturally diverse contexts. They include:

- Interlingual subtitling, dubbing and voice-over: enabling access for speakers of different languages;
- Intralingual subtitling and same-language subtitling (SLS): beneficial for children, language learners, and users with reading or learning difficulties;
- Respeaking and real-time live subtitling: providing immediate access to live content (Romero-Fresco, 2011).

While these categories are functionally distinct and serve practical purposes, they often fail to reflect the full spectrum of lived user experiences. Many individuals face multiple, overlapping access needs, an elderly viewer, for instance, may simultaneously require SDH, slower subtitle speed, and easy-to-read formats. These overlapping user needs reinforce the importance of designing accessibility features that are scalable, adaptable, and inclusive by default, supporting the universalist account where a wide array of audiences is served, regardless of whether they identify as disabled (Greco, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2018).

To overcome the limitations of impairment-based classification, Greco and Jankowska (2020) propose distinguishing translation-based from non-translation-based services. This typology supports a more flexible, access-centered approach to MA. Rather than focusing on users' deficits, it focuses on how access is functionally achieved, offering a more inclusive, interdisciplinary framework.

Translation-based MA services involve transforming content across languages, modes, or semiotic systems. They include:

1. Audio Description (AD): Typically an intersemiotic translation of visual-verbal and visual-nonverbal signs into audio-verbal signs.

2. Audio Narration: Provides an integrated narration that doesn't necessarily follow the on-screen action, useful for both sensory and cognitive access.
3. Dubbing: Replaces original audio with target-language speech, maintaining synchronization with lip movements.
4. Enriched Subtitles / SDH: Contain both spoken dialogue and relevant non-verbal cues (e.g. music, emotions).
5. Extended Audio Description: Inserts pauses ("freeze frames") to add detailed descriptions, facilitating cognitive and sensory access.
6. Live Audio Description: Delivered in real time, often in performing arts contexts.
7. Live Subtitles (Real-time Subtitles): Created via respeaking, stenography, or ASR; support auditory and linguistic access in live events.
8. Sign Language Interpreting (SLI): Transfers speech or text into visual-manual language.
9. Subtitling: Written access to spoken content.
10. Transcripts: Provide full textual versions of audiovisual content, supporting linguistic and cognitive access.
11. Voice-over: An overlapping audio track in a target language over the original.

Non-translation-based MA services enhance accessibility without altering language or semiotic code:

1. Audio Introductions: Provide contextual information before the main content, useful for understanding characters, plot, and setting.
2. Audio Subtitles: Convert written subtitles into speech, often integrated with AD, serving blind and low-literacy users.
3. Clean Audio: Reduce background noise, enhancing speech clarity.
4. Speech Rate Conversion: Modifies the speed of speech playback without distorting sound.
5. Screen Readers: Transforms on-screen content into audio or braille, often via text-to-speech (TTS) or refreshable braille displays.
6. Tactile Reproductions/Touch tours: 3D models of characters or scenes to convey visual information through touch.

This reclassification allows for a clearer understanding of how MA addresses a broad range of access needs, regardless of whether translation is involved. By focusing on access rather than

disability or modality, it encourages the convergence of various disciplinary approaches and fosters the design of more inclusive media experiences.

Ultimately, MA should be understood not as a sub-field within AVT or Translation Studies, but as a multifaceted, interdisciplinary field that intersects with technology, policy, design, and social justice. A universalist model of accessibility promotes this broader vision, one that ensures that access services are not an exception for a few but a standard for all.

2.2.4. Legal and Policy Frameworks

Media Accessibility is no longer regarded merely as a technical or optional feature; it is increasingly understood as a fundamental human right (Greco, 2016b; Romero-Fresco, 2018). This perspective is promoted in international legal instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Article 9 of the UNCRPD mandates that states take appropriate measures to ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to information and communication technologies, including audiovisual media. This rights-based framing marks a decisive shift: accessibility is no longer an optional or charitable gesture but a legal and ethical obligation central to social justice and inclusion.

At the European level, two directives have significantly shaped the MA landscape. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), first adopted in 2010 and revised in 2018, encourages Member States to enhance the accessibility of audiovisual services. Although it does not impose mandatory quotas, the AVMSD establishes an expectation that broadcasters and on-demand platforms provide services such as SDH, AD, and SLI. Notably, the 2016 iteration of the Directive highlights that MA provision is essential not only for individuals with sensory impairments but also for older people, recognizing their right to participate in and be integrated into the social and cultural life of the EU.

Complementing this, the European Accessibility Act (EAA, Directive 2019/882) requires a broad range of digital services, including e-books, streaming platforms, and user interfaces, to be accessible by design. By harmonizing minimum standards across the EU, the EAA positions accessibility as both a regulatory obligation and a market-driven imperative.

In Belgium, media policy is devolved to the regional level, resulting in varied implementation across Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels-Capital Region. In Flanders, the legal framework for MA is codified in the Act on Radio and Television Broadcasting (2025), which mandates that public

broadcasters progressively make their content accessible. Accessibility services such as subtitling, AD, and SLI are required under proportionate, market-dependent conditions. The Act specifies detailed quotas, timeframes, and annual reporting obligations, with oversight provided by the Flemish Regulator for the Media (VRM). These provisions transpose the EU AVMSD Directive while adapting enforcement to local media dynamics.

In addition to these content obligations, *Annex 1* to the Act outlines technical and service-related accessibility requirements for terminal equipment and related services. For instance, television receivers must be designed to accommodate users with disabilities through accessible user interfaces, compatibility with assistive technologies, and multi-sensory information delivery. Specific requirements include volume control options, alternative colour settings, flexible magnification, and screen readability. Moreover, accessibility components (SDH, AD, and SLI) must be transmitted with adequate quality, synchronised precisely with video and audio, and controllable by users. Websites, electronic programme guides (EPGs), and support services must also comply with standards of perceivability, operability, and understandability. Collectively, these specifications ensure not only accessible content but also the usability of devices and interfaces throughout the media consumption process (VRM, 2025, Annex 1).

Despite significant advances in the legal and conceptual development of MA, notable implementation gaps persist. Ellis and Kent (2015) observe that services such as SDH and AD are often inconsistently provided, with availability depending heavily on local regulations, industry willingness, and consumer pressure. This variability is especially pronounced among private broadcasters, who frequently face less stringent regulatory obligations compared to their public counterparts, resulting in uneven uptake across the media landscape and undermining efforts toward universal access.

Even within public broadcasting, consistent provision of MA services remains challenged by fragmented enforcement, resource constraints, and technological limitations. Greco and Romero-Fresco (2023) argue that prevailing reactive and particularist approaches, where accessibility is treated as a technical add-on targeting specific disability groups, contribute to this inconsistency. These challenges are exacerbated in the digital field, where content created for online platforms often lacks accessibility features by design, reflecting a failure to embrace the proactive, universalist model advocated in recent scholarship. Consequently, users with disabilities continue to face marginalization, not only due to infrastructural shortcomings but also of widespread public unawareness regarding the purpose and significance of accessibility services. This disconnect between policy ambitions and practical realities underscores the

urgent need for a paradigm shift: accessibility must be framed as a shared societal responsibility, embedded from the outset in media production and reinforced through informed public engagement.

2.2.5. Relevance for the Present Study

This chapter outlined the conceptual, practical, and regulatory foundations of MA, offering a critical framework through which the empirical components of this thesis can be interpreted. Several key distinctions and models discussed here directly inform the design and objectives of the survey presented in Chapter 3.

Foremost among these is the theoretical tension between particularist and universalist models of MA, which serves as a central conceptual axis for this study. The particularist model frames MA as a compensatory service for individuals with disabilities, whereas the universalist approach positions accessibility as a proactive and inclusive design principle benefiting a wide range of users, regardless of disability status. This distinction is not merely theoretical; it significantly influences societal perceptions of who MA is for and whether services such as subtitles, AD, or SLI are considered fundamental rights, useful enhancements, or optional features.

To investigate how the Belgian public conceptualizes the purpose and beneficiaries of MA, the survey draws explicitly on this theoretical divide. Questions are designed to determine whether participants associate MA exclusively with disability-related services or acknowledge its broader societal value. For example, respondents are asked to identify all groups they believe benefit from MA services, a question grounded in the dichotomy between particularist and universalist perspectives.

Furthermore, the classification of MA services by type of barrier (sensory, linguistic, cognitive) and access modality (translation-based vs. non-translation-based) has informed the structure and content of the survey. These functional and access-based typologies guided the selection and formulation of items assessing public familiarity with and perception of services such as SDH, AD, or dubbing, as well as less conventional forms such as touch tours and clean audio. The aim is to explore whether respondents recognize these services as forms of accessibility and whether they associate them primarily with disability or with broader notions of usability and inclusion.

In addition, the legal and policy frameworks presented in Section 2.2.4 have highlighted both the progress and persistent limitations in the implementation of MA within Belgium and the broader

European context. The gap between regulatory mandates and real-world service provision, particularly in the private sector, underscores the importance of public awareness and demand in driving compliance. This study seeks to assess not only participants' knowledge of MA but also their attitudes toward its value and purpose, including whether they perceive it as a basic human right or as a specialized accommodation. These questions are grounded in the ethical and human rights-based perspectives outlined earlier, particularly those reflected in the UNCRPD and the EAA.

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced the theoretical models, service typologies, and regulatory structures that shape contemporary understandings of MA. These foundations have directly informed both the conceptual focus and the methodological design of the survey in Chapter 3. The objective is to evaluate how theoretical debates around universality and accessibility are reflected, or resisted, in public attitudes. By linking theory with empirical inquiry, this study aims to bridge the gap between academic discourse, policy ambition, and public perception in the field of Media Accessibility.

2.3. Awareness

To investigate public awareness of MA, it is first essential to establish a clear and theoretically grounded understanding of the concept of “awareness”. This chapter begins by reviewing how awareness has been defined and conceptualized in relevant literature, highlighting its interdisciplinary nature and conceptual complexity. It then outlines the key dimensions of awareness commonly examined in academic studies, providing a theoretical framework for the present research. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the relevance of awareness as an object of inquiry, both in general terms and within the specific context of MA, demonstrating why it is a meaningful and necessary area of investigation. Finally, the chapter considers how awareness has been addressed within the field of MA to date, identifying existing research gaps and establishing the need for further study. Accordingly, the objectives of this chapter are threefold: (1) to clarify an operational definition of awareness for this thesis, (2) to demonstrate the significance of studying awareness, particularly in relation to MA, and (3) to identify and address gaps in existing research on awareness in the field of MA.

2.3.1. Framing Awareness

Awareness is a complex and multidimensional construct that has been studied across various disciplines, including healthcare, neuroscience, education, and technology (Gebru et al., 2023; Khatri, 2021; Leite et al., 2021; Patil & Sawant 2023). Although widely used, its meaning varies considerably depending on disciplinary and contextual perspectives. At its broadest, awareness refers to an individual's conscious perception, understanding, or recognition of a phenomenon, issue, or environment (Baars, 1988). It may involve both passive detection and active knowledge, serving as a foundation for processes such as learning, decision-making, and social interaction.

Scholars frequently distinguish between different types or dimensions of awareness based on the context in which it is examined. Baars (1997), for instance, differentiates between self-awareness, topic-specific awareness (e.g., familiarity with a subject), and situational or cultural awareness. Endsley (2000) defines situational awareness as the perception of environmental elements and events, while Constantin et al. (2015) describe cultural awareness as the ability to recognize, understand, and respect the values and practices of other communities.

From a cognitive neuroscience perspective, Lamme (2004) distinguishes between awareness and attention, suggesting that awareness arises from recurrent neural processing and may occur independently of focused attention. He proposes three core dimensions of awareness:

1. Phenomenal awareness: the raw experience of a stimulus without conscious attention;
2. Access awareness: allows for focused attention, memory, and reportability;
3. Unconscious processing: neural responses to stimuli that do not result in conscious awareness, i.e., you do not feel or notice what your brain has processed.

Similarly, Piggins and Phillips (1998) approach awareness from both psychological and neurobiological perspectives. Drawing on Young's (1994 in Piggins & Philips, 1998) layered model, they outline three primary levels:

1. Sensory awareness: basic detection of stimuli such as light, colour, pitch, taste, motion, without memory or interpretation;
2. Perceptual awareness: recognition based on stored knowledge (e.g., identifying places, symbols, situations);
3. Cognitive awareness: complex processes such as reflection, evaluation, self-awareness and problem-solving, involving long-term memory and intentional thought.

In the field of psychology, Brown and Ryan (2003) define awareness as a continuous, non-judgmental monitoring of internal and external experiences. They emphasize that awareness is not a fixed trait but a dynamic state that fluctuates across individuals and situations.

Gafoor (2012, p.2) defines awareness broadly as “knowledgeable, being conscious; cognizant, informed, alert.” He characterizes it as “the state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects, or sensory patterns”, highlighting that while knowledge includes awareness, awareness does not necessarily imply understanding. Gafoor stresses the importance of contextualizing awareness in relation to its field, whether well-defined, ill-defined, or undefined, thereby underscoring the need for clear operationalization in empirical research. He further presents three core meanings of awareness:

1. Awareness as knowledge *about*: an informal, experience-based understanding of the issue (e.g., awareness of HIV or climate change), often cultivated through civic education or media exposure;
2. Awareness as self-perception: bodily, emotional, or subjective awareness of oneself (awareness *of*), which is not necessarily based on factual knowledge but on individual and subjective experience;
3. Awareness as capability: a form of competence or skill in responding to stimuli or situations (awareness *to deal with*).

The study of awareness also carries important epistemological implications. As Gafoor (2012) points out, awareness can range from well-defined constructs such as factual knowledge to less tangible domains such as emotional or intuitive perception. This conceptual flexibility allows it to be studied across a wide spectrum, from subconscious processes (e.g., gut feelings) to deliberate reflection, and from individual self-awareness to collective social consciousness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Lamme, 2004). As such, awareness is not merely a measurable construct but also an interpretive lens through which researchers can investigate how knowledge is acquired, perceived, and acted upon.

Across these diverse theoretical models, several commonly studied dimensions emerge, offering a useful foundation for the present study: phenomenal vs. access awareness, self-awareness, perceptual awareness, and cognitive awareness. For the purpose of this thesis on public awareness of Media Accessibility, the most relevant dimensions are:

- Cognitive awareness: knowledge of what MA is;
- Perceptual awareness: whether individuals notice MA features when consuming media;
- Cultural awareness: how individuals position MA within broader societal and ethical values.

These dimensions are further complemented by Gafoor's (2012) first category, awareness *about*; which captures public familiarity with MA as a social and technological issue. Taken together, these selected dimensions allow for a multifaceted understanding of public awareness: not only what people know, but also how they perceive, experience, and value media accessibility in their daily lives.

2.3.2. Research on Awareness

As mentioned above, awareness has been studied across a wide range of disciplines (Al-Azri et al., 2016; Khatri, 2021; Leite et al. 2021; Piggins & Phillips, 1998). This section examines the rationale for investigating awareness in these diverse fields, highlighting both its theoretical significance and practical applications. It begins by synthesizing key motivations underlying awareness research, particularly its relevance to behavior, decision-making, and knowledge dissemination. The discussion then expands to consider the broader societal implications of awareness, emphasizing how increased awareness can influence individual actions, institutional practices, and policy development. At the same time, this section acknowledges the inherent challenges and limitations involved in raising awareness, including issues of scope, sustainability, and measurable impact. Insights from Disability Studies are integrated to illustrate how public awareness is instrumental in shaping societal attitudes toward inclusion and in reducing stigma. This perspective is especially relevant in the context of Media Accessibility, where awareness not only facilitates equitable access but also challenges dominant assumptions about who MA is intended for. The discussion subsequently narrows its focus to awareness within the field of MA. Despite increasing academic attention to inclusive media practices, public awareness remains an underexplored yet critical dimension. Awareness of MA services can influence how these services are perceived, valued, and implemented, making it a key factor in driving systemic change. Together, the literature reviewed in this section demonstrates the interdisciplinary importance of awareness as a research focus and provides a conceptual foundation for this thesis's central objective: to investigate public awareness of MA and its potential impact on future developments in accessibility policy, media production, and inclusive design.

2.3.2.1. Importance and Implications of Studying Awareness

Awareness is a foundational construct across disciplines such as healthcare, education, psychology, and technology, due to its central role in shaping behaviour, cognition, and decision-making (Gafoor, 2012; Khatri, 2021; Leite et al., 2021). Rather than representing a passive state of knowing, awareness encompasses the capacity to perceive, interpret, and act upon both internal and external stimuli (Lamme, 2004; Piggins & Philips, 1998). It functions as a cognitive and emotional interface between individuals and their environments, making it essential for understanding processes such as learning, social interaction, and the adaptation of new practices or technologies (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

One of the primary motivations for studying awareness lies in its role as a catalyst for change. Behavioural models such as the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska et al., 1997; Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005) identify awareness as a critical first stage in initiating reflection, intention formation, and ultimately, action. This model has been extensively applied in public health contexts, where awareness-raising campaigns are employed as early interventions to inform individuals about risks factors, symptoms or preventive behaviors (Al-Azri et al., 2016; Balcilar & Gulcan 2022; Gebru et al., 2023; Patil & Sawant 2023). A similar dynamic appears in educational contexts: enhancing student's metacognitive awareness, their ability to recognize or regulate their own learning processes, has been associated with improved academic performance and self-regulation (Khatri, 2021).

Despite its transformative potential, awareness is not evenly distributed. Structural and sociodemographic factors such as education, socioeconomic status, and access to information significantly influence how awareness is acquired, internalized, and acted upon. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may be less likely to benefit from awareness campaigns, potentially reinforcing existing social and informational inequalities (Balcilar & Gulcan, 2022; Elgendy et al., 2020). In the field of Disability Studies, awareness is frequently identified as a key mechanism of promoting inclusion and reducing stigma. Research on intellectual disability (ID), for example, demonstrates that public attitudes are often shaped by misinformation, limited exposure, and cultural discomfort, contributing to social exclusion (Pelleboer-Gunnink et al., 2017; Scior, 2011; Wang et al., 2021). These attitudes are further influenced by the conceptual lens through which disability is interpreted, whether through the medical model, which frames disability as a problem located within the individual, or the social model, which perceives disability as a consequence of

societal and environmental barriers, thereby shifting responsibility to the collective (Scior et al., 2013).

In this sense, awareness research also functions diagnostically, allowing scholars and practitioners to identify systemic gaps and patterns of exclusion. Mapping levels of awareness across populations can reveal which groups are being excluded from critical knowledge systems and why (Chan & Mubarak, 2012; Elgendy et al., 2020). In applied fields such as digital literacy or accessibility, this insight is vital for developing targeted outreach and policy interventions aimed at underinformed groups (Leite et al., 2021). Nevertheless, awareness alone does not guarantee behavioural change. Studies in cybersecurity, for example, indicate that even when individuals are aware of risks, they may fail to act without the presence of motivating factors, institutional support, or structural incentives (Chan & Mubarak, 2012).

Beyond its cognitive and behavioural dimensions, awareness also plays a crucial role in connecting personal experience to collective values. Cultural and social awareness, for instance, are essential for meaningful intercultural interaction and for countering prejudice and stereotyping (Constantin et al., 2015). Similarly, awareness of structural issues such as inequality, climate change, or systemic injustice can drive civic engagement and support for policy change. In this regard, awareness only informs what individuals know, but also contributes to moral reasoning, identity formation, and public participation.

In conclusion, awareness is a multidimensional construct that bridges individual understanding with larger societal frameworks. Its study provides valuable insights for the design of interventions, the shaping of public discourse, the advancement of educational strategies, and the development of equitable policies. For the present thesis, establishing a nuanced understanding of awareness, its definitions, dimensions, and relevance, provides the conceptual grounding needed to investigate how the general public in Belgium engages with the concept and practice of MA.

2.3.2.2. Awareness of Media Accessibility

As discussed in the previous section, awareness plays a central role in shaping knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and decision-making across various domains. In fields such as health, education, and technology, assessing public awareness is often the initial step toward implementing effective change. The same principle holds for the field of Media Accessibility: when the public remains unaware of access services, what they are, who they serve, and why they matter, efforts toward inclusion risk being superficial or ineffective.

Despite the significant growth of MA over the past two decades, public awareness has received limited academic attention. While the concept occasionally surfaces in scholarly literature, it is rarely the main focus. More often, awareness is mentioned in passing within theoretical discussions, referenced indirectly in user studies, or explored through small-scale qualitative research. As a result, systematic, large-scale research that assess what the general public knows or believes about MA remain virtually absent.

A review of empirical research reveals that the majority of MA research has centered on the development, implementation, and reception of specific access services, such as subtitling (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Robert & Remael, 2018), audio description (Di Giovanni, 2018; Fryer, 2018), and sign language interpretation (De Meulder & Haualand, 2019; Marschark et al., 2004). These studies often prioritize technical aspects, user experience, and quality evaluation, offering valuable insights into how services operate for specific user groups. When awareness is addressed, it is typically within the context of these specific groups, for instance, blind or visually impaired audiences (Tomlinson, 2016; Xie et al., 2023) and deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals (Szarkowska et al., 2016). In these cases, awareness is often inferred through users' familiarity with the services they actively use, such as AD or SDH. However, the focus remains on access and usability rather than awareness per se, and the findings, grounded in qualitative methodologies, lack generalizability to the wider population.

At a conceptual level, scholars such as Greco (2016b, 2018) and Di Giovanni (2018) have pointed out that MA continues to be perceived as a marginal concern, largely absent from mainstream media production and public consciousness. These contributions have called for the integration of accessibility into broader media and cultural practices. However, despite their theoretical significance, such works do not provide empirical data to substantiate claims regarding the public's level of awareness. This gap underscores a broader issue within the academic discourse:

while there is a growing emphasis on inclusivity and systemic integration, there is limited understanding of how these ideas are received, or even recognized, by the general public.

Nonetheless, some empirical efforts are beginning to emerge. Jankowska et al. (2025), for instance, examined how targeted training influences participants' awareness of accessibility in audiovisual contexts. Their findings suggest that awareness can be significantly boosted through educational interventions. However, their participants were already involved in media or translation-related fields and therefore do not represent the general public. Although narrow in scope, their research highlights the value of direct inquiry into awareness and supports the need for similar efforts targeting broader population samples.

Parallel insights from adjacent fields reinforce this argument. In the domain of web accessibility, Leite et al. (2021) found that even when developers were aware of accessibility guidelines, systemic barriers such as lack of training, time constraints, and insufficient support, often hindered their implementation. These results emphasize that awareness, while essential, is not sufficient on its own; it must be accompanied by structural support mechanisms such as policy development, education, and infrastructural investments. This observation is equally relevant for MA, where limited public awareness can reduce demand for accessible content, thereby discouraging producers and platforms from prioritizing or investing in accessibility.

Together, the current body of literature reveals a clear and pressing gap. While interest in MA is growing within professional, academic, and user-specific circles, public awareness remains significantly underexplored, both conceptually and empirically. References to awareness are often implicit, scattered, or anecdotal, offering little insight into what the broader public actually knows or believes about MA.

2.4. Synthesis

This thesis positions public awareness as a crucial yet underexplored factor in the normalization of Media Accessibility. While the field of MA has evolved considerably, both professionally and academically, scholars such as Greco (2016b, 2018, 2019) and Matamala and Orero (2007) have highlighted its ethical, cultural, and communicative dimensions. However, despite this progress, much of the existing research has concentrated on service development, technical

implementation, and user reception, leaving limited insight into how MA is perceived by the general public.

Empirical studies that do explore awareness in the context of MA tend to focus on specific user groups or professional contexts. For example, research has examined the experiences of users of particular services such as audio description or subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (Szarkowska et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2016; Xie et al., 2023), as well as awareness within training and education for media professionals (Jankowska et al., 2025). While these contributions offer valuable insights, they do not adequately address broader public engagement. Without a clearer understanding of public perceptions, it remains difficult to determine whether accessibility is regarded as a collective societal value or as a nice concern limited to specific audiences. This lack of insight is especially significant in light of international and European legislative frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the European Accessibility Act (EAA), and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), all of which frame accessibility as a fundamental right and a shared responsibility. While such policies establish important legal obligations, their societal impact ultimately depends on the public's awareness, understanding, and support.

Public awareness, therefore, encompasses more than factual knowledge of what MA entails; it reflects broader cultural values surrounding inclusion, equity, and participation. As evidenced in other domains, such as disability, health and education, awareness-raising has the potential to shift attitudes, reduce stigma, and drive systematic change (Scior, 2011). For MA to become embedded as a normative feature, it must be supported by an informed and engaged public.

By investigating public awareness of MA in Belgium, this thesis seeks to address both conceptual and empirical gaps. It aims to explore what people know about MA, how they perceive its relevance and who they believe MA is for. In this way, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to advance inclusive media practices and supports the development of accessibility policies that are socially resonant and publicly endorsed.

3. Methodology

Understanding how awareness has been assessed across various disciplines is essential for informing the methodological design of this thesis. While qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, offer rich, nuanced insights into individuals' experiences and perspectives, quantitative approaches are particularly well-suited for measuring awareness at scale. Among these, structured questionnaires have emerged as a widely adopted tool for capturing patterns of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours across large and diverse populations (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014). The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the research methods commonly employed in awareness studies, with a particular focus on the use of questionnaires in fields such as healthcare, education, and technology. This section outlines the rationale behind their prevalence, highlighting their capacity for standardized data collection and comparative analysis. It also reviews common formats, including Likert scales, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions, and discusses how these are typically structured to reflect multiple dimensions of awareness, such as factual knowledge, affective responses, and behavioural intentions. Drawing on these insights, the second part of the chapter introduces and justifies the design of the survey instrument used in the present study. It explains how the questionnaire aligns with the theoretical framework of awareness previously outlined and incorporates established best practices from the literature. Particular attention is given to how the survey captures the multidimensional character of awareness, encompassing general, cognitive, perceptual, and cultural dimensions, as operationalized for this thesis.

Finally, a brief overview is provided of the data analysis techniques employed. These include descriptive statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic grouping for the open-ended responses, allowing for both numerical representation and interpretive depth. Together, the methodological approach outlined in this chapter ensures that the study is grounded in both theoretical rigor and empirical reliability, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of public awareness of MA in Belgium.

3.1. Methodological Approaches in Awareness Research

To inform the development of the survey component of this research, additional literature was reviewed with a specific focus on existing awareness questionnaires. This stage prioritized open-access sources and utilized keywords such as “public awareness,” “awareness studies,” “knowledge,” “perceptions,” and “awareness research.” The majority of relevant studies were found within the fields of social sciences and health studies, accessed through academic databases including SpringerLink, ResearchGate, and Taylor & Francis.

As previously discussed in Section 2.3, awareness has been investigated across a wide range of disciplines using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and contact-based interventions, are particularly valuable in capturing the complexity, nuance, and emotional depth of individuals’ experiences. These methods are especially effective in exploring socially sensitive or stigmatized topics, including disability.

Within the field of intellectual disability, for instance, qualitative studies have played a pivotal role in advancing awareness and challenging societal perceptions. Finkelstein and Orr (2021) emphasize how such research fosters deeper understanding by centering lived experiences. Similarly, Scior (2011) conducted in-depth interviews to explore public knowledge, perception, and stigma associated with intellectual disability, revealing how personal narratives can elicit empathy and promote more inclusive attitudes. Contact-based interventions, where participants directly engage with individuals with disabilities, have also shown a positive impact on awareness and attitudinal change (Walker & Scior, 2013). Both studies underscore the potential of qualitative methods to generate rich, context-sensitive insights with both academic and social value.

By contrast, quantitative approaches, particularly structured questionnaires, are widely used in awareness research that seeks to reach larger and more diverse populations. These tools offer scalability, replicability, and the ability to collect standardized data across multiple awareness dimensions. In public health, for instance, Al-Azri et al. (2016) employed a standardized questionnaire to measure cancer symptom awareness among patients in Oman, while Gebru et al. (2023) used a 28-item survey to assess awareness of prostate cancer among men in Ethiopia. In the educational and technological domains, Khatri (2021) utilized the Metacognitive

Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSII) to quantitatively measure student reading awareness, while Chan and Mubarak (2012) conducted a structured online questionnaire to evaluate cybersecurity awareness in higher education settings.

3.2. The Use of Questionnaires in Awareness Research

Among quantitative research tools, structured questionnaires have emerged as one of the most effective and widely employed instruments for measuring awareness. Their standardized format allows for the systematic collection of comparable data regarding individuals' familiarity with, understanding of, or attitudes toward a specific topic. Due to their scalability and capacity to reach a broad and diverse public, questionnaires are particularly well-suited for awareness studies. Moreover, their ability to capture both factual knowledge and subjective perceptions make them an ideal tool for investigating multidimensional constructs such as public awareness of MA.

A review of previous studies across various domains, including healthcare, education, and technology, demonstrates the versatility and methodological strengths of questionnaire-based research. In these fields, questionnaires are frequently chosen for their capacity to explore sub-dimensions of awareness through a combination of question types (e.g., Likert scales, multiple choice, yes/no) and thematic structuring. This methodological flexibility enables researchers to adapt instruments to suit both the content and the conceptual framework of a given study.

In healthcare, for example, several studies have implemented structured questionnaires to assess public awareness of health-related issues. Gebru et al. (2023) developed a 28-item questionnaire to evaluate awareness of prostate cancer among male patients in Ethiopia, addressing areas such as symptoms, risk factors, and early detection practices. Similarly, Al-Azri et al. (2016) employed a survey based on the standardized Cancer Awareness Measure (CAM) to assess symptom recognition and help-seeking behaviour. These instruments typically consist of closed-ended items and are thematically segmented to target specific dimensions, including symptom knowledge, risk perception, and attitudes toward screening.

In educational context, Khatri (2021) utilized the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSII), a 28-item Likert-scale questionnaire organized into three subcategories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and support strategies. This structure illustrates how awareness surveys can be designed to explore multiple facets of a single cognitive process.

Each subcategory captures a distinct component of reading awareness, reinforcing the value of thematically segmented instruments.

Similarly, in the field of technology and cybersecurity, structured online questionnaires are frequently employed. Chan and Mubarak (2012) implemented a 17-item questionnaire segmented into five dimensions to measure university staff's awareness of phishing, institutional policies, and online safety practices. In a related context, Leite et al. (2021) developed a multi-dimensional survey to examine awareness of mobile accessibility, addressing four core dimensions: awareness, knowledge, motivations, and barriers. This comprehensive approach enabled the researches to capture both practical understanding and attitudinal perspectives on accessibility, an approach that aligns closely with the present study's aims.

These examples underscore several common methodological features. Awareness questionnaires are often organized around clearly defined sub-dimensions, incorporate diverse question formats, and typically range from 15 to 30 items in length. Thematic structuring allows for a more nuanced understanding of awareness, facilitating both cross-sectional analyses and targeted insights into public misconceptions, knowledge gaps, and attitudinal trends.

In conclusion, questionnaire-based research provides a robust and adaptable methodology for assessing public awareness across diverse domains. Its strengths lie in its ability to operationalize complex constructs into measurable components while maintaining scalability and reliability. As demonstrated in prior studies, well-designed questionnaires yield both quantifiable indicators of awareness and deeper insights into the public's attitudes and knowledge. This methodology thus serves as a strong foundation for this thesis, which seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the underexplored field of MA and support the development of more inclusive policies and public engagement strategies.

3.3. Strengths and Limitations: Justifying the Use of a Questionnaire

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies offer valuable contributions to research, each suited to different objectives and contexts. Qualitative methods are particularly effective in exploratory studies and theory development, as they facilitate in-depth, nuanced understandings of complex phenomena. Through open-ended inquiry, researchers can uncover subtle aspects of awareness, such as emotional responses, personal narratives, and experiential influences, that may be overlooked in more structured formats. However, qualitative approaches tend to be time-consuming, resource-intensive, and limited in scalability. Their findings, while rich and contextually grounded, often lack generalizability due to small sample sizes and situational specificity.

In contrast, quantitative methods are well-suited for large-scale assessments aimed at identifying trends, measuring prevalence, and examining variation across demographic subgroups. Structured questionnaires allow for the systematic collection of standardized data, enabling researchers to quantitatively assess both cognitive (knowledge-based) and perceptual (experience-based) dimensions of awareness. This approach is particularly useful for detecting widespread misconceptions, comparing awareness levels across populations, and generating statistically robust insights.

Given the objective of the present study, to assess public awareness of MA across a broad and diverse sample of the Belgian population, a quantitative, survey-based methodology was deemed most appropriate. This approach allows for the efficient collection of comparable data at scale, supports the analysis of demographic correlations, and facilitates the integration of theoretical constructs such as the particularist and universalist perspectives on accessibility. By enabling both measurement and comparison, the chosen method aligns well with the study's overarching goal of mapping the scope and variation of awareness in a general population context.

3.4. Research Design

To empirically investigate the multidimensional concept of awareness on a large scale, this study adopts a quantitative, survey-based methodology targeting the general population in Belgium. A survey was selected as the primary research method due to its effectiveness in reaching a broad and demographically diverse audience, its capacity to capture both factual knowledge and subjective perceptions, and its utility in identifying patterns across different population groups. Although survey research may lack the depth of qualitative approaches and is susceptible to response biases, it remains a robust method for detecting general trends and facilitating comparative quantitative analysis.

The conceptualization of awareness in this thesis draws on a range of theoretical frameworks (as discussed in Section 2.3), from which several key dimensions were derived to guide questionnaire design. The study focuses on three main dimensions of awareness:

- Cognitive awareness: knowledge about MA and familiarity with accessibility services;
- Perceptual awareness: the extent to which individuals consciously notice accessibility features while consuming media;
- Cultural awareness: how participants position MA within broader societal discourses, particularly concerning inclusion and equal access.

These dimensions are complemented by Gafoor's (2012) concept of "awareness about", referring to a more general conceptual familiarity with a given topic. Together, these dimensions offer a layered and comprehensive framework for understanding public awareness, not only what individuals know about MA, but also how they perceive, experience, and value it in everyday life. These distinctions were operationalized in the structure and content of the survey.

To assess public awareness of MA in Belgium, a structured online questionnaire was developed and administered using Qualtrics, a cloud-based survey platform provided by the University of Antwerp. The final survey comprised 17 items, with 12 of them structured around four key sections reflecting the core dimensions of awareness identified in the study:

- General awareness ("awareness about"): Three multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question capturing the participants' familiarity with and self-defined understanding of the term "media accessibility."

- Cognitive awareness: Two multiple-choice items to assess the respondents' knowledge about the availability of accessibility services and legal frameworks.
- Perceptual awareness: This section focuses on participants' lived experiences and personal recognition of MA features, using one open-ended question and two multiple-choice items.
- Cultural awareness: Participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs about the societal relevance of MA were explored through one open-ended question and two Likert-scale items.

In addition to these thematic sections, the survey also included a demographic section consisting out of five items collecting data on age, educational background, disability status, and whether the participant personally knows someone with a disability. **These variables enabled further exploration of correlations between background characteristics and levels of awareness.** The final component of the questionnaire was an optional comment box, inviting participants to share further thoughts, reflections, or remarks. These qualitative responses offered valuable contextual insights to complement the structured data.

This multidimensional survey design reflects the conceptual framework of awareness developed in the Chapter 2 of this thesis and ensures that the empirical analysis can meaningfully capture how different forms of awareness manifest across a representative sample of the Belgian population. In the subsequent results and discussion chapters, each awareness dimension will be examined separately to facilitate a clear and focused interpretation of the findings.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study applied broad inclusion criteria: participants had to be proficient in Dutch to understand the questionnaire and have internet access, as the survey was conducted online. The survey incorporated skip logic, meaning that not all participants received the same questions; certain items were only shown based on prior responses. Unlike studies that discard incomplete data, this research retained partially completed responses. Each survey item was analyzed based on the number of valid responses it received, allowing partial data to contribute meaningfully to the investigation of public awareness. This decision aligns with the exploratory nature of the research, recognizing that even incomplete responses may yield valuable insights.

Ethical Considerations

The survey was conducted online and completed independently by participants. Before beginning the survey, all respondents were informed about the research objectives and provided with detailed information regarding informed consent, in line with the ethical guidelines of the University of Antwerp. Participation was entirely voluntary, and only those who explicitly consented were able to proceed. All data were collected anonymously, ensuring participant confidentiality and adherence to ethical research standards.

3.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected via Qualtrics were analysed using the platform's integrated statistical tools, primarily the Stats iQ module. Descriptive statistics were employed to assess levels of awareness across the different dimensions of media accessibility, general, cognitive, perceptual, and cultural, and to examine how responses varied according to demographic variables such as age, education level, disability status, and familiarity with disability.

Stats iQ's Describe function was used to generate visual summaries and detailed breakdowns for individual variables. This allowed for a clear understanding of the distribution, frequency, and structure of the response data, and facilitated the identification of outliers, inconsistencies, or irregular patterns, which informed the interpretation of the results.

In addition to the quantitative measures, open-ended responses were reviewed to provide illustrative examples and additional context. These responses helped capture participants' personal experiences, reflections, and attitudes, adding depth to the statistical results and highlighting nuances that may not be fully conveyed through closed-ended items alone.

This approach enabled a systematic examination of participants' knowledge and perceptions, providing a solid foundation for interpreting the prevalence of particularist and universalist attitudes. By focusing on descriptive statistics, the analysis offers a clear and transparent overview of the measurable dimensions of public awareness of MA in Belgium.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the survey on public awareness of Media Accessibility in Belgium, based on responses from up to 140 participants. Due to the use of conditional survey logic and partial completions, the number of respondents varies across different questions and sections. The results are organized according to the four key awareness dimensions outlined in the research design (Section 3.4): general, cognitive, perceptual, and cultural awareness. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics, followed by a detailed analysis of each awareness dimension. Quantitative results are supplemented with tables and figures for clarity, alongside interpretive commentary and notable observations to contextualize the findings.

4.1. Participant Demographics

To contextualize the findings on public awareness of MA in Belgium, demographic data were collected from all survey participants. The questionnaire included five questions addressing age, educational background, disability status, and whether respondents personally know someone with a disability.

Table 1 presents the age distribution of the 85 respondents who completed the demographic section of the survey. The majority of these participants (64.7%) were between 20 and 25 years old, indicating a predominantly young adult sample. Smaller proportions included 5.9% under the age of 20, 23.5% between 26 and 35 years old, and five respondents (5.9%) aged 36 or older. Age was included in the survey to explore potential differences in MA awareness across life stages. It is important to note that while the total number of survey submissions was higher, only 85 participants completed the demographic questions. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, partial responses were retained and analysed on a question-by-question basis, with the number of valid responses varying throughout. This approach allowed for a broader range of insights but also requires transparency regarding the differing sample sizes reported across various analyses.

Wat is je leeftijd?	Count	Percent of Data
24	18	21,2%
23	11	12,9%
25	11	12,9%
27	8	9,4%
20	6	7,1%
22	6	7,1%
26	5	5,9%
28	4	4,7%
19	3	3,5%
21	3	3,5%
32	2	2,4%
17	1	1,2%
18	1	1,2%
29	1	1,2%
40	1	1,2%
41	1	1,2%
48	1	1,2%
55	1	1,2%
56	1	1,2%

Table 1: Participants' age

As shown in Table 2, participants' highest level of completed education varied, though the sample leaned toward higher educational attainment. Nearly half of the respondents (44.7%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by 28.2% who had completed secondary education, and 21.2% who had obtained a master's degree. One respondent indicated having obtained a PhD. This educational profile reflects a relatively well-educated sample, which may be a relevant factor when interpreting subsequent awareness levels.

Wat is het hoogste opleidingsniveau dat je hebt voltooid?	Count	Percent of Data
Secundair onderwijs	24	28,2%
Beroepsopleiding	1	1,2%
Bachelor	38	44,7%
Master	18	21,2%
Doctoraat	1	1,2%
Anders (specificeer):	3	3,5%

Table 2: Participants' educational level

Participants were asked whether they had a disability or health condition that affects their daily life (Table 3). This question was included to contextualize respondents' perspectives on MA and to examine whether personal experience with disability might influence awareness, perceptions, or use of accessibility services, in line with the theoretical framework distinguishing between particularist and universalist accounts of MA. The vast majority of respondents (89.4%) reported that they did not have a disability or health condition, while 10% indicated that they did. One respondent selected "prefer not to say."

Heb je een beperking of gezondheidsprobleem dat invloed heeft op je dagelijks leven?	Count	Percent of Data
Ja	8	9,4%
Nee	76	89,4%
Ik antwoord liever niet	1	1,2%

Table 3: Participants' disability status

Within the small subgroup of participants who reported having a disability or health condition affecting their daily life (Table 4, n=8), psychosocial disabilities were the most frequently mentioned, appearing three times. Other categories cited included visual impairments, cognitive disabilities, and "other" conditions, each reported twice. Notably, no respondents indicated having a hearing impairment, which may impact the interpretation of responses related to services such as SLI or SDH. This absence is likely influenced by the relatively young age profile of the sample, as hearing impairments tend to be more prevalent among older populations.

Zo ja, selecteer wat van toepassing is.	Checked Percent	Checked Count	Sample Size
Psychosociale beperking (bijv. mentale gezondheidsproblemen)	37,5%	3	8
Visuele beperking (bijv. blindheid, slechthoortendheid)	25,0%	2	8
Cognitieve beperking (bijv. leerstoornissen, geheugenproblemen)	25,0%	2	8
Anders (specificeer):	25,0%	2	8
Lichamelijke beperking (bijv. mobiliteitsproblemen)	12,5%	1	8
Ik antwoord liever niet	12,5%	1	8
Gehoorbeperving (bijv. doofheid, slechthoortendheid)	0,0%	0	8

Table 4: If yes, select all that apply.

As shown in Table 5 (n=81), a slight majority of respondents (55.6%) indicated that they personally knew someone with a disability or health condition affecting their daily life, while 43.2% reported no such connection. This variable was included to examine whether indirect exposure to disability correlates with increased awareness of MA, a relationship further explored in the subsequent analysis of the four awareness dimensions.

Ken je iemand met een beperking of gezondheidsprobleem dat invloed heeft op hun dagelijks leven?	Count	Percent of Data
Ja	45	55,6%
Nee	35	43,2%
Ik antwoord liever niet	1	1,2%

Table 5: Participants' familiarity with someone with a disability

4.2. General Awareness

This section presents the results related to general awareness, or “awareness about” MA, a dimension referring to participants’ basic familiarity with the concept. This includes whether they had previously heard the term, where they encountered it, and how they define it themselves. As Gafoor (2012) highlights, this foundational level of awareness is essential for meaningful engagement with any topic, as individuals cannot reflect on, evaluate, or act upon concepts they do not recognize. The following questions were designed to assess the extent and nature of this initial familiarity.

As shown in Table 6, among the 139 respondents, 84.9% reported having encountered the term “media accessibility” before. However, only 28.1% felt confident that they understood what the term actually means, while a larger portion, 56.8%, had heard the term but were unsure of its precise meaning. Notably, 15.1% of respondents had never come across the term at all. These results indicate that while general awareness of media accessibility is relatively widespread, deeper, more accurate understanding remains limited.

Heb je ooit gehoord van de term “mediatoegankelijkheid”?	Count	Percent of Data
Ja, en ik weet wat het betekent	39	28,1%
Ja, maar ik ben niet zeker wat het betekent	79	56,8%
Nee, ik heb er nog nooit van gehoord	21	15,1%

Table 6: Participants' familiarity with the term “media accessibility”

Table 7 presents an overview of where respondents first encountered the concept of media accessibility (n=48). Participants were allowed to select multiple answers, so the percentages exceed 100%, reflecting the diverse and overlapping pathways through which individuals are exposed to media accessibility. Educational settings emerged as the most frequently cited source (64.6%), including university lectures, coursework, and research projects. This was followed by social media (31.3%), traditional media such as TV and newspapers (29.2%), and entertainment platforms including streaming platforms or cinemas (14.6%). Less common sources included personal experiences and accessibility organizations, each accounted for 10.4% of responses, while very few respondents mentioned workplaces (6.3%), government or legal sources (4.2%), and professional events including conferences or workshops (2.1%).

Waar heb je voor het eerst gehoord over mediatoegankelijkheid? (Selecteer alle opties die van toepassing zijn)	Checked Percent	Checked Count	Sample Size
Op school of universiteit (bijv. tijdens een cursus, lezing of onderzoeksproject)	64,6%	31	48
Op sociale media (bijv. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube of TikTok)	31,3%	15	48
Via de media (bijv. tv, radio, kranten, online artikelen of blogs)	29,2%	14	48
Via streamingplatforms of entertainmetaanbieders (bijv. Netflix, YouTube of toegankelijkheidsdiensten in de bioscoop)	14,6%	7	48
Door persoonlijke ervaring (bijv. zelf een beperking hebben of iemand kennen die dat heeft)	10,4%	5	48
Via belangenorganisaties of toegankelijkheidsorganisaties	10,4%	5	48
Anders (gelieve te specificeren):	10,4%	5	48
Op het werk (bijv. via jobtraining, collega's of sectorvereisten)	6,3%	3	48
Via de overheid of juridische bronnen (bijv. wetten, regelgeving of openbaar beleid)	4,2%	2	48
Op een evenement (bijv. conferentie, workshop of openbare lezing)	2,1%	1	48

Table 7: Sources through which participants first encountered media accessibility

To explore how participants interpret the concept of MA, an open-ended question invited them to provide a definition in their own terms. Among 108 responses, the data were analysed thematically to identify patterns, variation, and misconceptions. 45 participants defined MA in broad functional terms, emphasizing that everyone should be able to access media, though often without specifying concrete implementations or target groups; for example: “*Dat iedereen toegang heeft tot media in brede vorm. Artikels, nieuws, sociale media, video's, muziek, etc.*”

(“That everyone has access to media in a broad sense: articles, news, social media, videos, music, etc.”) and *“Dat iedereen, ook mensen met een beperking, makkelijk toegang moet kunnen krijgen tot media, zoals websites, video’s of apps”* (“That everyone, including people with a disability, should be able to easily access media, such as websites, videos, or apps”). 32 participants specifically linked MA to persons with disabilities, mentioning tools such as subtitling, sign language interpretation, and audio description; for instance: *“Audiovisuele producten toegankelijk maken voor iedereen (audiodescriptie, ondertiteling, ...)”* (“Making audiovisual products accessible for everyone [audio description, subtitles, ...]”) and *“De mate waarin media toegankelijk is voor alle personen: bv. Blinden (geluid), doven (ondertiteling), etc.”* (“The degree to which media is accessible to all individuals, e.g., blind people [audio], deaf people [subtitles], etc.”). 15 participants showed misconceptions, equating MA with general usability, platform availability, or even censorship, such as: *“Dat je gemakkelijk nieuws/beelden/trends ziet. Zonder dat het gecensureerd is, dus alles komt op je af en je kan er makkelijk op geraken?”* (“That you can easily see news/images/trends. Without censorship, so everything comes at you and you can easily access it?”) and *“Hoe moeilijk of makkelijk je tot media komt, het kan raadplegen of gebruiken”* (“How easy or difficult it is to access media, to consult or use it”). Variation was also evident in the types of media referenced, including TV, newspapers, social media, streaming platforms, and cultural media such as theatre or literature, reflecting both the wide scope of interpretations and the potential for misunderstanding the concept among the general public.

The final item within this dimension of general awareness asked participants how long they had been familiar with the concept of “media accessibility” (Table 8). Among the 50 respondents who answered, exactly half (n=25) indicated that they were unsure, suggesting that their awareness is either recent or superficial. A further 13 respondents (26%) reported familiarity of more than two years, six respondents (12%) indicated 6–12 months, three respondents (6%) less than 6 months, and three respondents (6%) between one and two years. Overall, these results indicate that while the term “media accessibility” may be encountered in certain educational or professional contexts, sustained and in-depth understanding among the wider public remains limited.

Hoe lang weet je al over mediatoegankelijkheid?	Count	Percent of Data
Minder dan 6 maanden	3	6,0%
6 maanden tot 1 jaar	6	12,0%
1 tot 2 jaar	3	6,0%
Langer dan 2 jaar	13	26,0%
Ik weet het niet	25	50,0%

Table 8: Duration of participants' awareness of media accessibility

4.3. Cognitive Awareness

This dimension of cognitive awareness concerns participants' factual understanding of MA, including knowledge of relevant legislation and recognition of where accessibility services are available. This dimension differs from general awareness in that it probes concrete, verifiable information rather than perceived familiarity.

Participants were first asked whether accessibility services are legally required in Belgium, and their responses revealed a substantial knowledge gap (Table 9, n=86). Nearly half of the respondents (43%) indicated that they did not know, while a further 41.9% reported being uncertain. Only 3.5% correctly responded "yes," and 11.6% incorrectly selected "no." These results point to widespread uncertainty regarding national MA policies and suggest that the legal frameworks currently in place remain largely invisible to the general public. Although accessibility requirements exist at both the federal and regional levels, such as the AVMSD, these provisions appear to be insufficiently communicated or promoted beyond institutional circles.

Zijn toegankelijkheidsdiensten wettelijk verplicht in België?	Count	Percent of Data
Ja	3	3,5%
Nee	10	11,6%
Ik ben niet zeker	36	41,9%
Ik weet het niet	37	43,0%

Table 9: Participants' knowledge of legal requirements for accessibility services in Belgium

Participants were also asked to indicate where they know accessibility services are available (Table 10). As this was a multiple-choice item, percentages exceed 100%, a point explicitly communicated to participants to avoid confusion. The question was intentionally framed to assess verified knowledge rather than subjective impressions or personal experience. The most frequently selected settings were television (89.4%) and streaming platforms (69.4%), followed by cinemas (62.4%) and cultural venues such as museums (61.2%). These high-response categories suggest that respondents most strongly associate MA with audiovisual and entertainment contexts, domains where services such as subtitling, closed captions, and audio description are more commonly implemented and publicly visible. In contrast, significantly lower response rates were observed for other environments: 38.8% identified live events, 37.6% chose social media, 31.8% chose work or school settings, and only 24.7% mentioned public spaces. Only 3.5% reported not knowing of any setting where accessibility services are available.

The distribution of responses underscores the uneven visibility of accessibility services across different settings. While entertainment-based environments appear to be relatively well-recognized, more functional or civic spaces, such as workplaces, school, and public areas, remain underrepresented in public awareness. This pattern may reflect not only a real-world implementation gap but also a perceptual gap, in which participants may be unaware of existing services or may not identify certain tools (e.g., live captioning, screen readers) as falling under the umbrella of MA.

Waar weet je dat toegankelijkheidsdiensten beschikbaar zijn? (Selecteer alles wat van toepassing is)	Checked Percent	Checked Count	Sample Size
Op televisie	89,4%	76	85
Op streamingplatforms (bijv. Netflix, YouTube, Disney+)	69,4%	59	85
In bioscopen	62,4%	53	85
In musea of culturele locaties	61,2%	52	85
Bij live evenementen	38,8%	33	85
Op sociale media	37,6%	32	85
Op werk of school	31,8%	27	85
In openbare ruimtes	24,7%	21	85
Ik heb geen toegankelijkheidsdiensten gezien of ervaren	3,5%	3	85
Anders (specificeer):	2,4%	2	85

Table 10: Contexts in which participants are aware that accessibility services are available

4.4. Perceptual Awareness

This section explores participants' perceptual awareness, defined as the capacity to recognize and relate to MA services in everyday contexts. This dimension focuses less on formal knowledge and more on intuitive understanding and recognition. Do people realize their own use of MA services? Can they identify which services qualify as a MA service? And how do they interpret or misinterpret these services in practice? As such, this dimension serves as a conceptual bridge between familiarity and cognitive knowledge: it examines whether accessibility is visible and meaningful in their daily lives. Importantly, this dimension also reflects the ongoing tension between particularist and universalist accounts of MA: while a particularist perspective limits recognition primarily to disability-specific services (SDH or SLI), a universalist view encourages broader awareness of accessibility as an inclusive design benefiting diverse user groups. Understanding how participants perceive MA services in real-world settings can therefore reveal whether public recognition aligns more closely with traditional, narrow conceptions or with evolving, inclusive frameworks.

Participants were asked whether they currently make use of any accessibility services. As shown in Table 11 (n=112), nearly half of respondents (48.2%) indicated that they were unsure. Meanwhile, 26.8% reported not using such services, 15.2% acknowledged occasional use, and only 9.8% identified as regular users. This striking level of uncertainty reveals a significant conceptual disconnect: while many likely engage with services such as subtitles or dubbing, they may not categorize these as accessibility tools.

Gebruik je momenteel toegankelijkheidsdiensten?	Count	Percent of Data
Ja, regelmatig	11	9,8%
Ja, soms	17	15,2%
Nee	30	26,8%
Ik weet het niet	54	48,2%

Table 11: Participants' self-reported use of accessibility services

To gain deeper insight into participants' perceptual awareness, an open-ended follow-up question was presented only to those who had previously indicated in the survey that they themselves used accessibility services (n=28). This survey logic ensured that the item targeted self-identified users, although responses still varied in relevance. Of these 28 participants, nine provided a written answer. Among them, three reported having a disability or health condition and six did not. Interestingly, only one of the three participants with a disability or health condition responded to the open-ended item, stating: *"ondertitels voor doven en slechthorenden in zowel het Spaans, Engels, als Nederlands. Ik vind het veel gemakkelijker om dan de film/serie te kunnen volgen"* ("subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing in Spanish, English, and Dutch. I find it much easier to follow the film/series that way"). Five respondents explicitly referred to accessibility services such as subtitles, closed captions, subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, and intralingual subtitles. While the survey did not ask them to distinguish between these categories, their examples suggest a general, and at times overlapping, understanding of the terms. For instance, SDH and closed captions were mentioned in the context of enhancing comprehension rather than accommodating a hearing impairment (none of the five respondents reported having one), implying a functional use of these services for improved clarity in noisy environments or when content was challenging to follow. This suggests that at least some participants apply MA in a universalist way, recognising its value beyond disability-specific contexts. In contrast, four participants' answers indicated possible misinterpretations: instead of identifying MA services, they mentioned platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, or VRT. While these may offer MA features, they are not accessibility services in themselves. Overall, these responses illustrate both the varied ways in which accessibility services are understood and the occasional confusion about what constitutes media accessibility in practice.

A multiple-choice question asked participants to indicate which features they considered to be accessibility services (see Table 12, n=92). Because respondents could select more than one option, the total percentages exceed 100%, a detail made explicit in the survey instructions. The question was designed to explore whether participants lean more towards a particularist or a universalist understanding of MA, as defined in the theoretical framework (Section 2.2.2.).

The most frequently selected modalities were those typically associated with sensory accessibility and a particularist approach, including subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (85.9%), sign language interpreting (84.8%), audio description (77.2%), subtitling/captions (76.1%), and braille text (73.9%). This pattern suggests that many participants conceptualise

accessibility primarily in terms of removing sensory barriers for specific groups, rather than as a broader set of solutions that could also benefit the general public.

In contrast, services aligned with a universalist approach, those addressing cognitive or linguistic barriers and aiming to make media accessible to all, were less frequently recognised. These included easy-to-read formats (47.8%), plain language (45.7%), surtitling (26.1%), dubbing (20.7%), and hearing loops (15.2%). Notably, despite their relevance to linguistic accessibility within the universalist framework, dubbing and standard subtitling were not consistently interpreted by participants as accessibility measures.

Some modalities, such as easy language, hearing loops, or touch tours (25.0%), may simply be less familiar to the general public, which could account for their lower selection rates. The very low proportion of respondents selecting “none of the above” (1.1%) indicates that most participants associate at least some features with accessibility, but their understanding remains partial and often narrower than the definitions adopted in professional and academic contexts.

Welke van deze beschouw je als een toegankelijkheidsdienst?	Checked Percent	Checked Count	Sample Size
Ondertiteling voor doven en slechthorenden (SDH)	85,9%	79	92
Gebarentaalvertolking	84,8%	78	92
Audiodescriptie (AD)	77,2%	71	92
Ondertiteling/captions	76,1%	70	92
Braille tekst	73,9%	68	92
Braille transcriptie	56,5%	52	92
Voice-over	54,3%	50	92
Eenvoudig te lezen (ETL)	47,8%	44	92
Eenvoudige taal	45,7%	42	92
Clean audio	37,0%	34	92
Audio-introductie (AI)	33,7%	31	92
Tactiele tentoonstellingen / Tactiele dialogen	33,7%	31	92
Surtitling	26,1%	24	92
Touch tour	25,0%	23	92
Nasynchronisatie	20,7%	19	92
Inductielus	15,2%	14	92
Geen van bovenstaande	1,1%	1	92

Table 12: Accessibility services as perceived by participants

4.5. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness concerns how individuals perceive the broader societal significance of MA, specifically whether accessibility services are viewed as benefitting all members of society or primarily as support mechanisms for specific groups (Greco, 2016b, 2018).

Participants answered an open-ended question asking who they believe benefits from accessibility services. A total of 78 responses were collected, exhibiting a wide range in both scope and depth. Some responses reflected a narrow, group-specific (e.g., focusing solely on persons with disabilities), while others expressed a more inclusive or universalist understanding of accessibility's role. To systematically analyse the data, all distinct beneficiary groups mentioned in participants' responses were coded. As many respondents referenced more than one group in a single answer, a total of 121 unique references were identified across the 78 responses. These references were then categorized into thematic groups, including: individuals with sensory disabilities, individuals with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, older adults, language minorities, and the general population (e.g., references to "everyone" or "all people").

As shown in Table 13, the most frequently mentioned beneficiary group was individuals with sensory disabilities, followed by general or universal statements such as "*iedereen*" ("everyone") or "*iedereen kan er voordeel uit halen*" ("everyone can benefit from it"). Notably, 53 participants mentioned only one group, while 25 referred to two or more, indicating a moderate degree of layered awareness.

Category	Count	Percent of Data
Persons with sensory disabilities	47	38.8%
General public / Everyone	28	23.1%
Older adults	13	10.7%
Persons with cognitive or learning disabilities	12	10.0%
Language minorities / Non-native speakers	11	9.1%
Others (e.g., political institutions, companies)	10	8.3%
Total	121	100%

Table 13: Groups participants believe benefit from accessibility services

These findings indicate that 38.8% of respondents primarily associate accessibility services with disability, particularly sensory impairments, while other responses reflect a more inclusive or universalist understanding. Several respondents explicitly broadened the scope by naming additional groups such as older adults, people with dyslexia, and even the general public. Illustrative responses include: *“Iedereen kan er voordeel uit halen maar deze diensten kunnen vooral gericht zijn op slechthorenden of slechtzienden”* (“Everyone can benefit from them, but these services can be primarily aimed at people with visual or hearing impairments”), *“mensen met een beperking”* (“people with a disability”), *“oudere mensen”* (“older adults”), *“mensen met een leerachterstand”* (“people with a learning difficulty”), and *“mensen die een vreemde taal leren”* (“people learning a foreign language”).

These responses suggest that respondents recognize MA as supporting a diverse array of needs, extending beyond permanent disabilities to situational or contextual challenges, such as learning a new language or navigating noisy environments. Nevertheless, some respondents expressed unfamiliarity with the concept of MA, providing answers such as *“geen idee”* (“no idea”) or *“ik weet niet wat toegankelijkheidsdiensten zijn”* (“I don’t know what accessibility services are”), highlighting ongoing gaps in public exposure to MA discourse.

In line with this, participants (n=88) were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale regarding the presence of sensory, cognitive, and language barriers in making media accessible. Their responses provide quantitative insight into the prevalence of these specific barriers, complementing the qualitative observations about which groups are considered beneficiaries of MA.

Participants’ ratings of barriers to MA indicate that sensory, cognitive, and language barriers are generally recognized. Sensory barriers were identified by 71.6% of respondents, with 39.8% agreeing and 31.8% fully agreeing that these barriers are present, while 17.1% disagreed (14.8%) or fully disagreed (2.3%) and 11.4% remained neutral (Figure 1). Cognitive barriers received somewhat lower recognition, with 60.9% agreeing (36.8%) or fully agreeing (24.1%), 13.7% disagreeing (12.6%) or fully disagreeing (1.1%), and 25.3% selecting neutral, indicating uncertainty or limited familiarity with this barrier type (Figure 2). Language barriers were perceived similarly to sensory barriers, with 73.2% agreeing (39.5%) or fully agreeing (33.7%), 15.2% disagreeing (10.5%) or fully disagreeing (4.7%), and 11.6% neutral (Figure 3). Across all three domains, responses suggest a moderate recognition of MA barriers. The low rates of full disagreement indicate that most respondents acknowledge their existence, even if the degree of recognition varies, and the relatively high neutral responses for cognitive barriers highlight areas

where public understanding may be less certain, suggesting that the public may be less familiar with cognitive barriers.

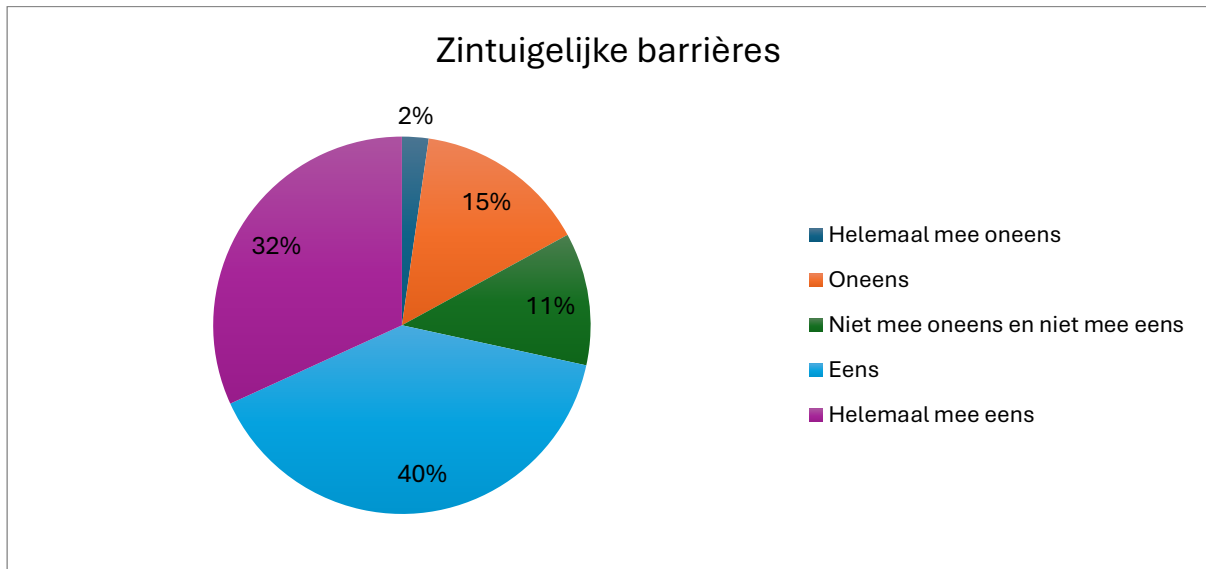


Figure 1: Participants' level of agreement that sensory barriers hinder the accessibility of media

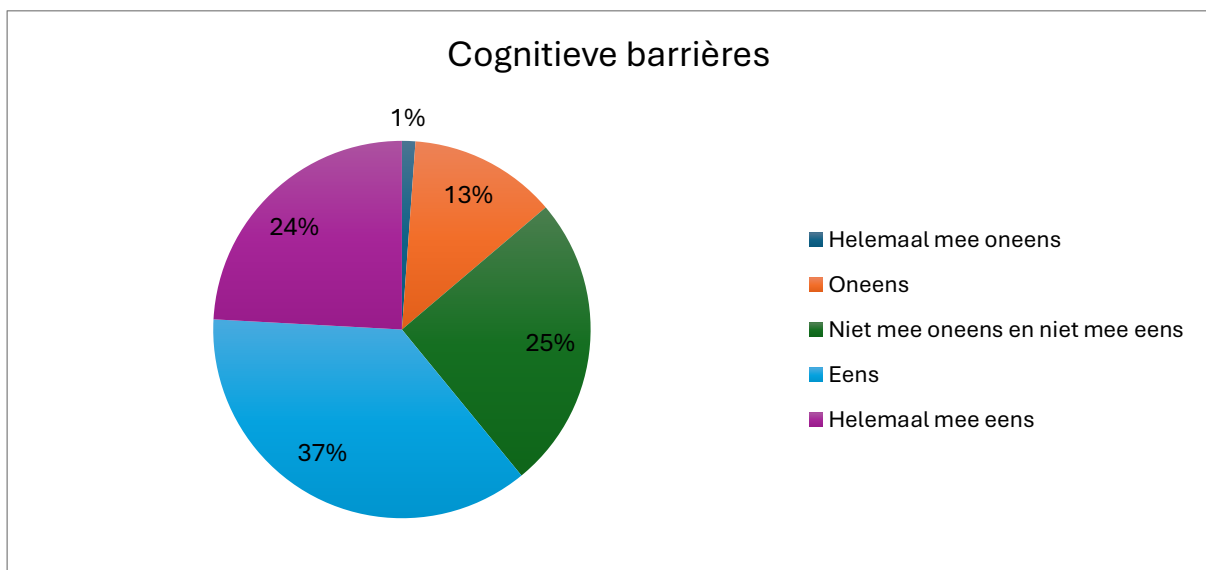


Figure 2: Participants' level of agreement that cognitive barriers hinder the accessibility of media

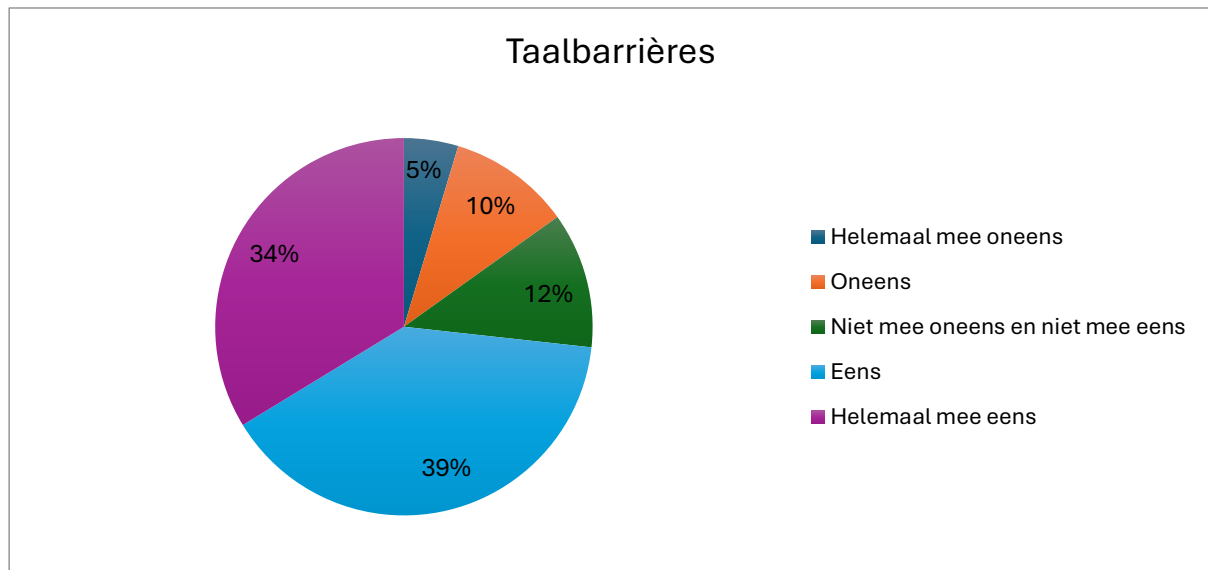


Figure 3: Participants' level of agreement that language barriers hinder the accessibility of media

A subsequent set of 5-point Likert-scale statements (n=86) explored respondents' attitudes toward the societal relevance and perceived value of MA. The results highlight three clear aspects of public perception:

- 1) Support for legal and universal provision: A majority of participants agreed that accessibility services should be legally required, with 57.6% agreeing and 23.5% fully agreeing (Figure 4), resulting in a combined 81.1% endorsement, which indicates very strong support for legally mandating MA. Similarly, agreement that accessibility services benefit everyone, not only individuals with disabilities, was expressed by 52.3% of respondents, with an additional 32.6% fully agreeing (Figure 5). The combined 84.9% suggests a very strong recognition of the universal value of accessibility services. This trend is further reinforced by responses to the statement that accessibility services are exclusively for people with disabilities: 54.7% disagreed and 3.5% fully disagreed (Figure 6), demonstrating a broad rejection of a particularist perspective. Neutral responses for these items were relatively low (7.0–16.5%), indicating that most participants had a clear opinion.

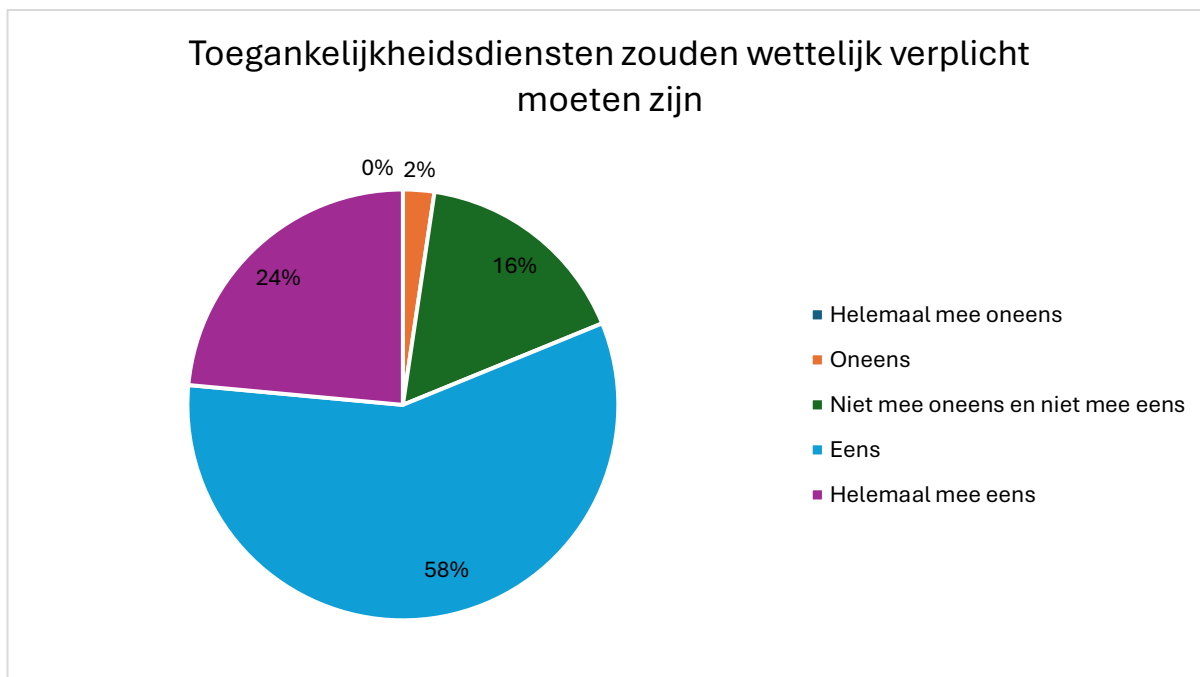


Figure 4: Participants' level of agreement with the statement that accessibility services should be legally mandated

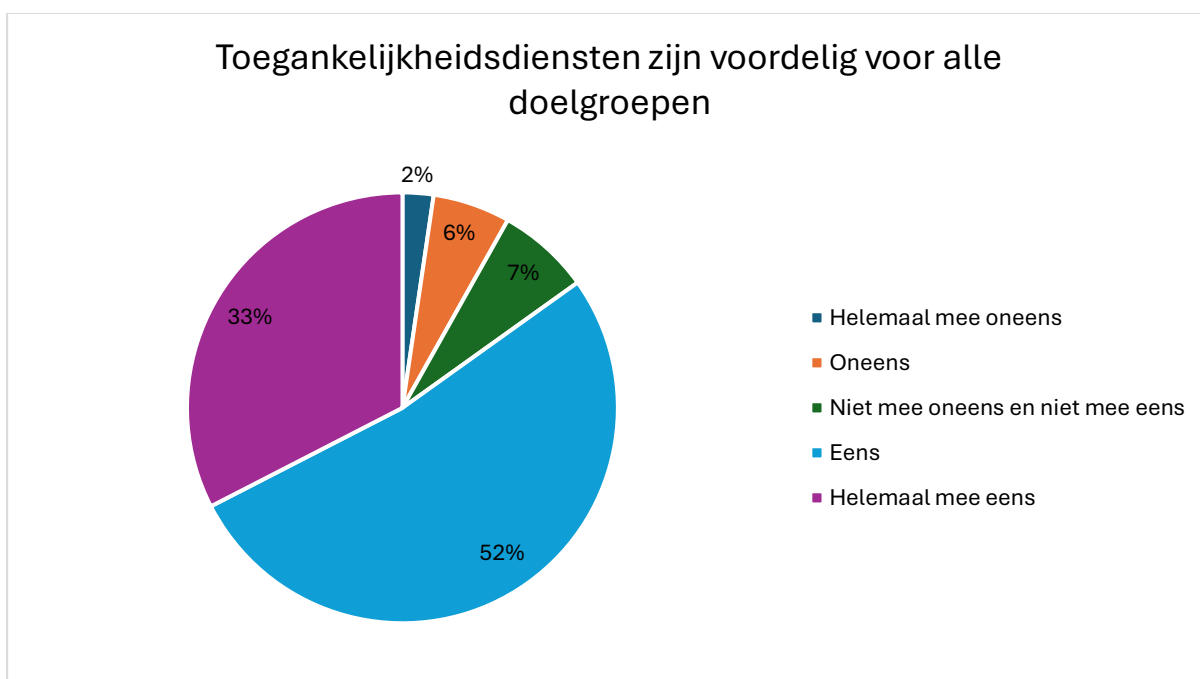


Figure 5: Participants' level of agreement with the statement that accessibility services benefit everyone

Toegankelijkheidsdiensten zijn alleen voordelig voor mensen met een beperking

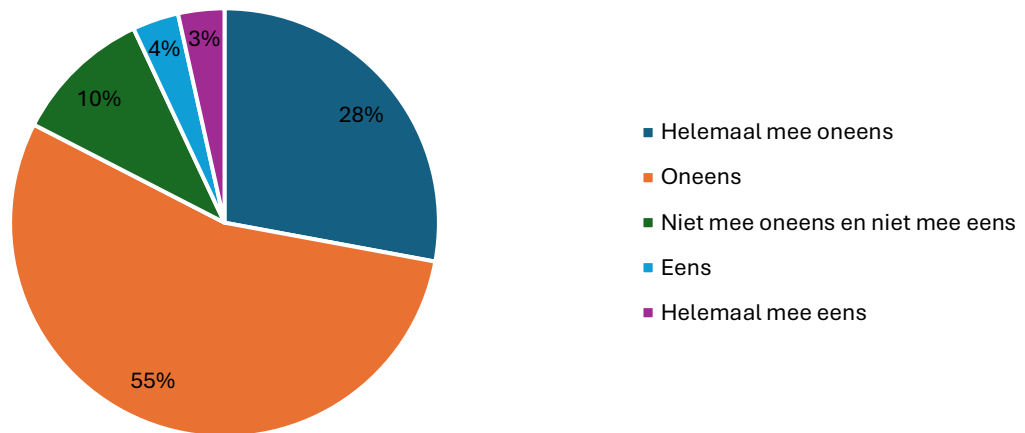


Figure 6: Participants' level of agreement with the statement that accessibility services benefit only people with disabilities

- 2) Personal identification as users: A slight majority of respondents (52.3%) identified themselves as users of accessibility services (Figure 7). This points to a moderate trend rather than a strong consensus, as a substantial proportion of respondents either selected neutral (23.3%) or disagreed/fully disagreed (24.4%). This variation reflects both differences in personal experience and uncertainty about what qualifies as an MA service.

Ik ben een gebruiker van mediatoegankelijkheid

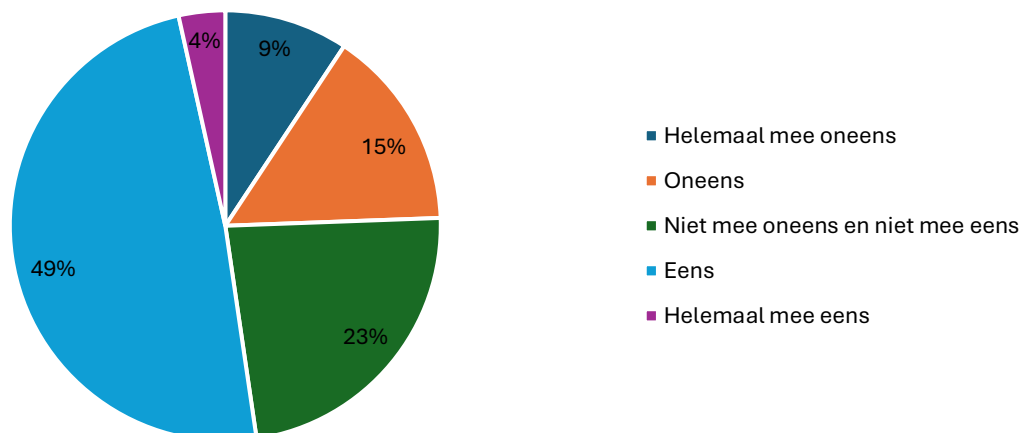


Figure 7: Participants' level of agreement with the statement that they personally identify as MA users

- 3) Perceptions of societal awareness and service sufficiency: Participants expressed more cautious views regarding societal awareness and service provision. For the statement that the Belgian population is generally aware of the importance of MA, 22.1% agreed and 1.2% fully agreed, while 40.7% disagreed and 9.3% fully disagreed, and 26.7% remained neutral (Figure 8). Perceptions of service sufficiency were even more uncertain: 52.3% selected neutral, 22.1% disagreed, and no participants fully agreed that Belgium currently provides sufficient accessibility services (Figure 9).

These findings suggest a moderate but incomplete recognition of the universal value of MA, relatively low confidence in current societal awareness and service sufficiency, and significant neutrality in responses where knowledge or personal experience may be limited.

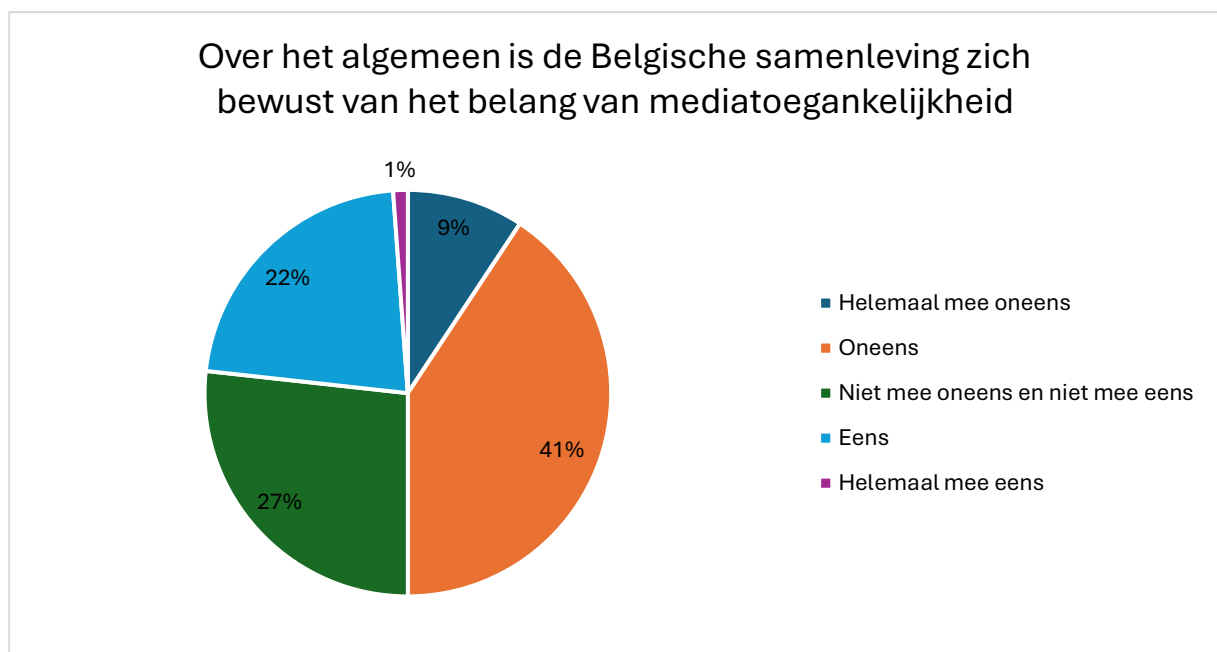


Figure 8: Participants' level of agreement with the statement that Belgian society is aware of the importance of MA

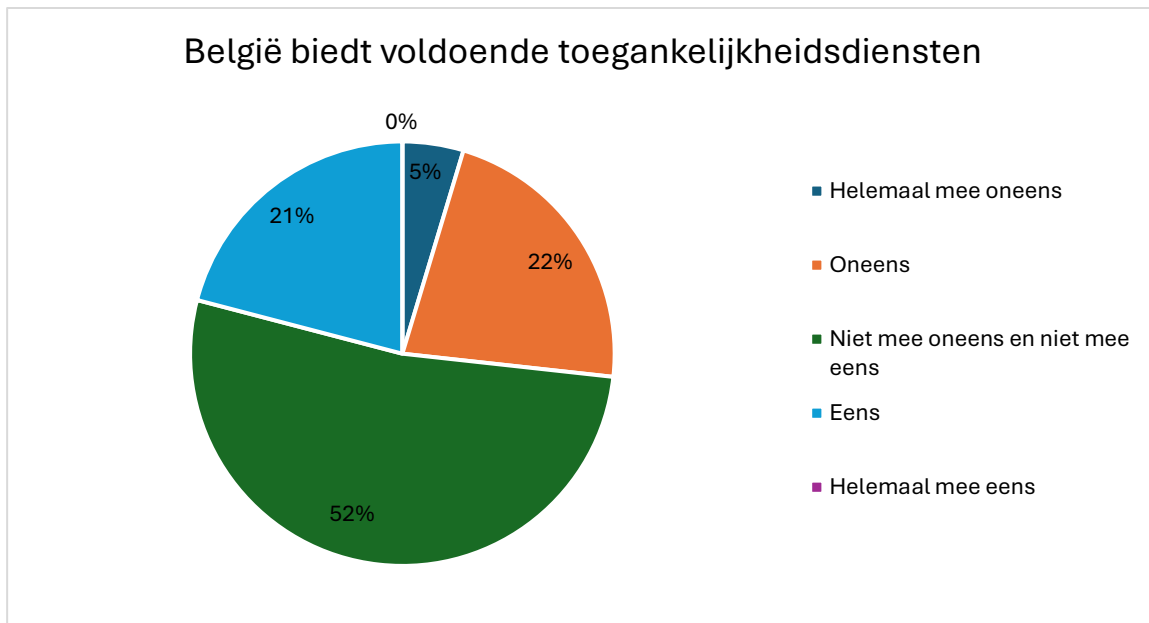


Figure 9: Participants' level of agreement with the statement that Belgium provides sufficient accessibility services

4.6. Final remarks

At the end of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to leave an optional remark. Six individuals chose to do so, and their comments offer valuable insights that complement the quantitative findings, particularly in relation to perceptual and cultural awareness. One participant explicitly acknowledged a lack of prior knowledge: *“Eigenlijk weet ik nog vrij weinig over 'mediatoegankelijkheid', maar ik vind het heel goed dat hier onderzoek naar gedaan wordt, zodat we geen doelgroepen uitsluiten!”* (“Actually, I still know very little about ‘media accessibility,’ but I think it is very good that research is being done on this so that we do not exclude any target groups!”). This remark highlights both a knowledge gap and an appreciation for the inclusive aims of the research. Another participant echoed this sentiment, noting: *“Ik heb eigenlijk wel meer bijgeleerd en vind dat dit wel op school meer gezegd mag worden,”* which points to the importance of integrating MA more structurally into educational curricula.

A particularly reflective response addressed the Likert-scale item on whether accessibility services should be legally required, arguing that the question lacked nuance: *“Ik denk dat het iets genuanceerder is dan eens of oneens. Omdat er zoveel verschillende vormen van media bestaan denk ik niet dat toegankelijkheid voor elke vorm verplicht moet zijn.”* (“I think it is a bit more nuanced than agree or disagree. Because there are so many different forms of media, I do not think accessibility should be mandatory for every form.”). This demonstrates a more sophisticated level of awareness, recognizing the complexity of legislating accessibility across

diverse media forms. Finally, several participants offered words of encouragement and appreciation for the topic, with comments such as “*succes met je onderzoek!*” (“good luck with your research!”) and “*het was een interessante reflectie op de toegankelijkheid en waar het beschikbaar is*” (it was an interesting reflection on accessibility and where it is available.”).

These remarks not only underscore ongoing gaps in public understanding, but also reveal a general openness and willingness to engage with the topic. They support the interpretation that, although awareness of MA remains limited, it is developing, and is met with curiosity rather than resistance.

5. Discussion

This study examined public awareness of Media Accessibility (MA) across four dimensions, general, cognitive, perceptual, and cultural, while also exploring the influence of demographic variables, as well as both theoretical and practical implications. The results reveal that while surface-level familiarity with MA is relatively high, deeper conceptual understanding remains limited. Cognitive awareness, particularly regarding legal mandates and service availability, was notably deficient, and respondents frequently failed to recognize their own use of accessibility features. MA was most strongly associated with disability-specific and sensory services in audiovisual contexts, reflecting a prevailing particularist orientation, although signs of a growing universalist perspective were also observed, especially in references to broader beneficiary groups and support for mandatory accessibility.

5.1. Awareness Dimensions

The findings presented in Chapter 4 indicate that public awareness of MA is uneven across the four dimensions, with patterns that confirm and expand on the theoretical concerns outlined in Chapter 2. While general awareness appears relatively high, most respondents had encountered the term “media accessibility”, the depth of understanding was limited. This finding echoes theoretical concerns regarding the fragmented understanding of MA among the broader public (Greco, 2018; Greco & Jankowska, 2020; Romero-Fresco, 2018). While a substantial majority (84.9%) of respondents reported having encountered the term, only 28.1% claimed to understand its meaning, and half were unable to recall the duration of their familiarity, revealing a conceptual fragility aligning with Gafoor’s (2012) distinction between mere awareness and actual comprehension. The open-ended responses on the question “How would you define media accessibility?” reinforced these findings by revealing a broad but often superficial understanding of MA. Participants often articulated inclusive intentions, such as “making media accessible to everyone” or “ensuring all people can understand or use media,” without specifying target groups or technical implementations.

Some respondents demonstrated familiarity with specific services, including subtitling, AD, or SLI, particularly for people who have hearing or visual impairments, as in “*media (films, series, toneel, etc.) toegankelijk maken voor doven, slechthorenden, blinden*” [“making media (films, series, theatre, etc.) accessible for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and blind people”]. A smaller portion reflected universalist thinking, identifying groups including older adults or those with low digital literacy: “*mediatoegankelijkheid is er vooral voor degenen die moeilijk kunnen deelnemen aan de*

media (bv. ouderen die niet digitaal vaardig zijn)” [“media accessibility is mainly for those who have difficulty participating in media (e.g., older adults who are not digitally skilled)”]. However, confusion was widespread. Several participants associated MA with usability (*“hoe gemakkelijk je toegang hebt tot bepaalde media”* [“how easy it is to access certain media”]), censorship (*“media zonder dat het gecensureerd is”* [“media without being censored”]), or general access to platforms and content (*“media toegankelijk maken voor iedereen in de wereld, zoals muziek, nieuws, etc.”* [“making media accessible to everyone in the world, such as music, news, etc.”]). The varied interpretations of what counts as “media,” ranging from television and social media to theatre and art, further reflect conceptual ambiguity. These findings point to semantic overlap between MA and adjacent concepts such as usability and availability, and highlight the need for more targeted public education on the ethical, technical, and social dimensions of MA.

A notable tension emerged regarding the perceived target groups of accessibility services. Some participants adopted a narrow, particularist perspective focused on persons with disabilities and traditional services such as subtitling, SLI, and AD. Others exhibited a more universalist outlook, recognizing broader beneficiary groups including older adults and language learners. This duality reflects ongoing scholarly debates contrasting MA as a reactive, compensatory practice with its conceptualization as a proactive, user-centered model serving diverse populations (Greco, 2016b; Romero-Fresco, 2018, 2019).

However, the limited role of public-facing institutions such as government bodies, media outlets, and professional events suggests that MA remains largely confined to academic and specialist spheres rather than being embedded in wider public consciousness. This is further underscored by participants’ uncertainty regarding the duration of their familiarity, highlighting the fragility of such awareness in the absence of repeated reinforcement through lived experience, policy engagement, or media representation.

The contrast between general and cognitive awareness was particularly striking. Very few respondents (3.5%) could identify the legal status of MA in Belgium, suggesting a disconnection between regulatory frameworks and public understanding. This mirrors observations made by Leite et al. (2021) that legislation alone does not ensure effective implementation or uptake without public knowledge and engagement. Although instruments such as the UNCRPD, EAA, and the Flemish Act on Radio and Television Broadcasting position accessibility as a legal right and regulatory obligation, these frameworks remain largely invisible to the public. This gap weakens the societal pressure needed to enforce compliance and risks reducing accessibility to a technical formality rather than a shared responsibility.

Respondents' recognition of contexts where accessibility services are available was largely confined to audiovisual entertainment, such as television, cinema, and streaming platforms. More civic and functional environments, including workplaces, schools, and public spaces, were underrepresented. This narrow recognition reinforces the idea that accessibility is perceived as a specialized, context-bound service rather than a systemic right. Such a view weakens support for universalist accessibility reforms that emphasize proactive, inclusive design (Greco, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2018). These findings emphasize that cognitive awareness must be enhanced through transparent communication and public education to align societal understanding with policy objectives.

Perceptual awareness was similarly constrained. Nearly half of participants were unsure whether they themselves used accessibility services, indicating that MA often operates “invisibly” and is recognized only when explicitly linked to disability. The predominance of sensory-related services in responses reflects the dominance of particularist associations, while the relative invisibility of universalist measures, such as plain language, surtitling, or easy-to-read formats, points to an incomplete cultural shift toward design-for-all principles. Open-ended responses about which accessibility services participants used revealed further misunderstandings, with some naming platforms instead of services. This suggests gaps in conceptual knowledge that could limit individuals' ability to use accessibility features effectively and hinder broader public support for policy improvements.

Cultural awareness, though limited, revealed the most promising signs of change. The dominance of sensory disabilities as the perceived primary beneficiary group of MA, reaffirms the persistence of particularist frameworks (Greco, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). Simultaneously, numerous references to “everyone” and respondents identifying broader groups, including older adults, language learners, and individuals with limited digital literacy, suggest an emerging receptivity to universalist thinking, even if it remains underdeveloped. The coexistence of these views illustrates a transitional cultural landscape marked by increasing multidimensional awareness. However, ongoing unfamiliarity and conceptual confusion, especially regarding cognitive accessibility, remain evident. This is corroborated by respondents' relative neutrality on cognitive barriers and underscores the difficulty of integrating less visible accessibility needs into mainstream discourse. This ambiguity likely reflects a cultural and conceptual gap in public discourse surrounding cognitive accessibility. Unlike sensory or language barriers, which are more frequently addressed in visible and tangible ways, such as through subtitles or sign language interpreting (SLI), cognitive barriers are often less visible and more complex, making

them harder to identify or understand without targeted awareness. The limited public familiarity with cognitive accessibility may therefore explain the comparatively lower recognition observed in the responses. While participants broadly endorse the societal value and legal necessity of accessibility services, perceived deficiencies in public awareness and service provision highlight a significant gap between aspirational ideals and practical realities. Without sustained cultural engagement and visibility, accessibility risks remaining a marginal issue rather than a societal norm, an outcome Greco (2016a) refers to as the “ghetto effect.”

Taken together, the survey findings reveal that public awareness of MA is multifaceted and uneven across four distinct dimensions. Surface-level familiarity contrasts with limited cognitive understanding; perceptual ambiguity coexists with emerging cultural recognition. Addressing these gaps requires comprehensive strategies that integrate education, communication, and policy advocacy to foster inclusive media environments and ensure equitable access for all members of society.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study carry important theoretical implications for the ongoing debate between particularist and universalist accounts of MA. As outlined in Section 2.2.2, particularist models conceptualize MA as a compensatory response to disability, typically framed within a medical or deficit-based paradigm. In contrast, universalist models, particularly those informed by Greco’s (2016b, 2018) work and the proactive, user-centred approach, conceive of accessibility as a human right and universal design principle that benefits all users, not only those with sensory impairments.

The results suggest that public awareness in Belgium reflects a hybrid orientation in which elements of both frameworks coexist, although particularist thinking remains dominant. Respondents primarily associated accessibility with traditional sensory-based services such as subtitling, sign language interpreting, and audio description. This strong linkage with disability-specific solutions aligns closely with first- and second-generation particularist models (Greco, 2016b, 2018), which treat MA as a reactive intervention tailored to a specific minority. Limited awareness of non-translation-based services, such as clean audio or touch tours (Greco & Jankowska, 2020), further underscores the restricted scope of public understanding. Such a narrow framing is incompatible with universalist models, which emphasise inclusivity for diverse user needs, including non-native speakers, older adults, children, and neurodivergent individuals (Romero-Fresco, 2018). The finding that nearly half of participants were unsure whether they

themselves used accessibility services supports Greco and Romero-Fresco's (2023) argument that accessibility often operates invisibly and is not perceived as relevant unless directly linked to disability, reinforcing the notion that it is still regarded as a specialised accommodation rather than a structural design feature.

However, there are emerging signals of universalist thinking. A considerable number of participants spontaneously mentioned older adults, language learners, and the general population as potential beneficiaries of accessibility services. These responses suggest recognition that MA can enhance usability and engagement for a broad range of users. Furthermore, widespread support for mandatory accessibility points to an underlying ethical consensus that resonates with universalist principles, even if not articulated in formal terms. While this endorsement does not fully reflect an internalized universalist paradigm, it does indicate a cultural openness to rethinking MA as a collective right rather than an individual need.

This blended orientation suggests that while universalist values are beginning to influence attitudes, they have not yet been fully integrated into the conceptual frameworks through which the public understands MA. The implication is that a cultural and epistemological shift toward universalism will require more than policy change or technical implementation; it must also involve targeted public engagement to make universalist principles explicit, relatable, and embedded in everyday experience. In line with Greco's (2018) proposition, fostering such a shift depends on reframing accessibility as a collective right and shared societal resource rather than a specialised intervention.

5.3. Implications for Practice

The insights gained from this study carry several practical implications for how MA is communicated, implemented, and normalized across public and professional domains. The results indicate that while public perceptions are shaped by blended orientation, in which particularist assumptions continue to dominate despite an underlying openness to more inclusive design principles. Addressing this imbalance requires coordinated action across education, media production, policy, and public engagement.

One pressing priority is to address the semantic disconnect revealed in the findings, particularly the high proportion of participants uncertain whether they currently use accessibility services. This highlights the need for clearer, more consistent public communication. MA should be presented not solely as a support tool for individuals with disabilities, but as an intrinsic feature

of quality that benefits all audiences. Public service broadcasters, streaming platforms, and cultural institutions could contribute by explicitly labelling accessibility features and actively promoting their value for diverse user groups, including older adults, language learners, and neurodivergent individuals. Integrating accessibility into promotional and educational content would help bridge existing gaps in perception.

Another important step is to strengthen professional training for media producers and content creators, ensuring that technical proficiency is complemented by a deeper understanding of universal design values. A comprehensive approach to MA should encompass not only sensory-based services such as subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and audio description, but also cognitive and linguistic accessibility services. Embedding these considerations into production workflows aligns with Greco and Romero-Fresco's (2023) proactive model, in which accessibility is integrated from the outset rather than added post-production as a corrective measure.

Public education emerges as a key channel for introducing people to the concept of MA. In this study, educational settings were the most frequently reported source of first exposure, encompassing university lectures, coursework, and research projects. Building on this, integrating accessibility concepts into secondary education curricula, university media studies programs, and teacher training courses could help embed inclusive thinking from an early stage. Complementary outreach through social media, alongside traditional media, streaming platforms, and cinemas could reinforce these messages and promote accessibility as a shared cultural value.

Moreover, the under recognition of services such as clean audio and touch tours, classified by Greco and Jankowska (2020) as non-translation-based accessibility services, highlights a systemic neglect of measures that move MA beyond translation and support the universalist account of accessibility. Public institutions, including museums, cinemas, and online media providers, should be encouraged, perhaps through policy incentives or funding conditions, to broaden their accessibility strategies beyond sensory accommodations. Normalizing features such as plain language summaries or easy-to-read instructions as standard elements of content design could help embed a more inclusive understanding of accessibility.

Finally, advancing MA requires involving the public as active stakeholders in the accessibility ecosystem. Consulting a broad spectrum of users, both disabled and non-disabled, should be standard in developing and evaluating accessible media experiences. Co-creation and participatory design not only improve quality and relevance but also help shift public discourse

away from paternalistic models and towards a view of accessibility as an expression of inclusive citizenship.

In sum, practical progress in MA depends on moving beyond technical compliance towards a cultural shift in how accessibility is understood, valued, and practised. Achieving this will require cross-sector collaboration, clear and proactive communication, and sustained public education that presents accessibility not as a specialist accommodation but as a public good enhancing the media experience for everyone.

5.4. Limitations and Further Research

While the findings of this study offer meaningful insights into public awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of MA, several limitations must be acknowledged. The participant sample was predominantly composed of younger, well-educated individuals. This demographic skew may have shaped the responses, potentially amplifying familiarity with digital technologies or progressive views on inclusion, while underrepresenting the perspective of older adults, individuals with lower educational background, or those less engaged with media accessibility. Furthermore, the survey was conducted primarily among Dutch-speaking participants in Flanders. As a result, the findings may not be fully applicable to the French- or German-speaking regions of Belgium, where differing regional policies, educational approaches, or media environments could influence understandings of MA in distinct ways.

In addition, although skip logic ensured that participants received only relevant questions, it also led to smaller subsamples in some sections. Coupled with a degree of participant dropout, this means that findings based on these reduced datasets should be interpreted with caution, as they may not be fully representative of the wider sample. The use of self-reported data further introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly in responses related to inclusivity or support for accessibility measures. Participants may have provided answers they perceived as socially acceptable rather than ones reflecting their true opinions or behaviours. Lastly, despite efforts to use simple and clear language throughout the questionnaire, certain terms, such as “audio induction” or “induction loop,” may have been challenging for respondents unfamiliar with MA- specific terminology. This could have affected both the accuracy and consistency of some responses.

These limitations highlight the need for caution when generalizing the findings. They also point to important directions for future research, including more diverse demographic sampling, cross-

linguistic or cross-regional studies, and the use of complementary qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to capture more nuanced perspectives on MA.

6. Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore public awareness and perceptions of media accessibility in Belgium, an area still underexplored beyond academic and professional domains. Using a framework based on four dimensions of awareness, familiarity, knowledge, recognition, and attitudes, the study aimed to provide empirical insight into how members of the general public understand, experience, and reflect on MA in their daily lives. The study was guided by four research questions, which are revisited here to summarise the key findings.

1. How familiar are participants with the concept of MA, and how do they define it?
The findings indicate that most participants had at least heard of the term “media accessibility,” suggesting a relatively high level of general familiarity. However, when asked to define the concept, their responses varied widely. Many described MA as a way to make media accessible to everyone, sometimes specifying services for persons with disabilities, while others confused it with general media usability, platform availability, or even censorship. This points to a surface-level recognition rather than a well-developed conceptual understanding. The dimension of familiarity thus revealed that exposure to the term does not necessarily translate into accurate or nuanced knowledge.
2. What knowledge do participants have about the availability of MA services and relevant legal frameworks? The results show that participants’ knowledge was limited. While many were aware of certain services such as subtitles or audio description, they often underestimated the range of services available. Awareness of relevant legal obligations, such as the European Accessibility Act (EAA, Directive 2019/882) or national accessibility requirements, was particularly low. This suggests that legislation, though central to policy-making, is not effectively reaching or resonating with the public. The knowledge dimension therefore highlights a clear gap between regulatory frameworks and public understanding.
3. How do participants recognize and experience MA services in their daily lives? When asked to identify MA in real-world contexts, participants primarily associated it with entertainment media, including TV, cinema, and streaming platforms. Far fewer mentioned its presence in educational, civic, or cultural contexts. A small number of participants confused accessibility services with platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, or VRT. While they may include MA features, they do not constitute accessibility services themselves. These findings highlight a narrow framing of MA within public discourse and indicates that recognition, while present in certain domains, remains partial and context-

dependent. Moreover, this dimension connects directly to the theoretical discussion of particularist and universalist accounts: participants' recognition patterns suggest that MA is still often perceived through a particularist lens, as a specialised service for a specific group, rather than as an integral and universal element of media design.

4. What attitudes and beliefs do participants hold regarding the societal importance and beneficiaries of MA? Participants generally expressed positive views, recognising MA as important for social inclusion. However, their perceptions of who benefits reflected a mix of particularist and universalist thinking. Many saw MA primarily as a resource for people with disabilities, but others also mentioned broader groups such as older adults, migrants, or language learners. These responses suggest that while the traditional association between MA and disability remains strong, there is also an emerging awareness of its wider societal relevance. This gradual shift may indicate a slow movement toward more universalist perspectives, although the transition is far from complete.

By revisiting the research questions through the lens of the four awareness dimensions, this study provides a clearer picture of where public understanding is strongest and where gaps persist. Familiarity with the concept of MA is relatively widespread, but this familiarity often lacks depth. Knowledge of services and legislation remains limited, pointing to the need for more effective public communication strategies. Recognition of MA services is largely restricted to entertainment contexts, reflecting a particularist framing that could be broadened through public awareness initiatives. Attitudes toward MA are largely positive, but the blend of particularist and universalist thinking suggests that conceptual change is still in progress.

These findings carry relevance beyond the immediate study context. While the sample was limited to Belgium, similar challenges in public awareness may exist in other countries where MA is legally mandated but not widely discussed outside specialist circles. The results underscore the importance of bridging the gap between policy and public understanding, as legal requirements alone do not guarantee widespread awareness or recognition. They also highlight the role of education, media coverage, and public campaigns in shaping perceptions of accessibility.

Possible next steps for research could include qualitative studies to explore in greater depth how people interpret and experience MA in specific contexts, as well as cross-national comparisons to identify patterns and differences in awareness. On a practical level, the findings suggest that communication strategies around MA could be reframed to emphasise its relevance for all users,

thereby encouraging a shift toward universalist perspectives. This might involve integrating MA topics into school curricula, promoting its benefits in mainstream media, and highlighting its presence in everyday situations beyond entertainment.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of how the Belgian public perceives and engages with media accessibility. By mapping awareness across four key dimensions and linking public perceptions to broader theoretical accounts, it offers a nuanced view of the current state of MA awareness. While positive attitudes provide a promising foundation, limited knowledge and recognition point to the need for targeted efforts to make MA more visible, better understood, and more widely valued. Continuing work in this area is essential to ensure that accessibility becomes not only a legal obligation but also a recognised and integral part of everyday media experiences for all.

7. References

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8. Appendices

The Media Accessibility Awareness Questionnaire was developed specifically for this study to examine participants' knowledge and perceptions across four dimensions of awareness: general, cognitive, perceptual, and cultural. It comprises 16 closed-ended questions, using a combination of dichotomous (yes/no) and five-point Likert-scale items, as well as two optional open-ended questions. The complete questionnaire, including all instructions and response formats, is presented in the Appendix.

Appendix Questionnaire

Je wenst deel te nemen aan een wetenschappelijke studie naar het bewustzijn van mediatoegankelijkheid, uitgevoerd door Jara Van den Berge onder leiding van professor Anna Jankowska. We zullen je zo dadelijk een aantal vragen stellen omtrent jullie bewustzijn, perceptie en kennis over mediatoegankelijkheid. Dit zal ongeveer 5-10 minuten duren. Dit is een anonieme studie: je bent nooit herkenbaar tijdens het verloop van deze studie, noch in de gegevens die we verzamelen. Alle gegevens van deze studie worden zo nodig gedigitaliseerd en tot 10 jaar na het beëindigen van de studie digitaal bewaard. Je hebt het recht te weigeren om deel te nemen en te allen tijde jouw deelname te stoppen. Je hoeft hiervoor geen uitleg te geven en dit zal geen enkel nadeel of verlies van voordelen met zich meebrengen. Alle op dat moment al verzamelde gegevens kunnen gebruikt worden voor data-analyse. Bij verdere vragen of opmerkingen kan je contact opnemen met Jara Van den Berge (jara.vandenberge@student.uantwerpen.be)

Q2 Ik heb de informatie in het inlichtingenformulier gelezen en begrepen en (kruis aan wat van toepassing is):

☐ Ik stem geheel vrijwillig in tot deelname. (1)

☐ Ik wens niet deel te nemen aan deze studie. (2)

Skip To: Q6 If Q2 = Ik wens niet deel te nemen aan deze studie.

Q3 Heb je ooit gehoord van de term “mediatoegankelijkheid”?

Ja, en ik weet wat het betekent (1)

Ja, maar ik ben niet zeker wat het betekent (2)

Nee, ik heb er nog nooit van gehoord (3)

Q4 Hoe zou je "mediatoegankelijkheid" definiëren?

Display this question:

If QID3 = Ja, en ik weet wat het betekent

Or QID3 = Ja, maar ik ben niet zeker wat het betekent

Q5 Waar heb je voor het eerst gehoord over mediatoegankelijkheid? (Selecteer alle opties die van toepassing zijn)

- ☐ Door persoonlijke ervaring (bijv. zelf een beperking hebben of iemand kennen die dat heeft) (1)
- ☐ Op school of universiteit (bijv. tijdens een cursus, lezing of onderzoeksproject) (2)
- ☐ Op het werk (bijv. via jobtraining, collega's of sectorvereisten) (3)
- ☐ Via de media (bijv. tv, radio, kranten, online artikelen of blogs) (4)
- ☐ Op sociale media (bijv. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube of TikTok) (5)
- ☐ Via belangenorganisaties of toegankelijkheidsorganisaties (6)
- ☐ Op een evenement (bijv. conferentie, workshop of openbare lezing) (7)
- ☐ Via de overheid of juridische bronnen (bijv. wetten, regelgeving of openbaar beleid) (8)
- ☐ Via streamingplatforms of entertainmentaanbieders (bijv. Netflix, YouTube of toegankelijkheidsdiensten in de bioscoop) (9)
- ☐ Anders (gelieve te specificeren): (10)

Display this question:

If QID3 = Ja, en ik weet wat het betekent

Or QID3 = Ja, maar ik ben niet zeker wat het betekent

Q7 Hoe lang weet je al over mediatoegankelijkheid?

Minder dan 6 maanden (1)

6 maanden tot 1 jaar (2)

1 tot 2 jaar (3)

Langer dan 2 jaar (4)

Ik weet het niet (5)

Q8 Gebruik je momenteel toegankelijkheidsdiensten?

Ja, regelmatig (1)

Ja, soms (2)

Nee (3)

Ik weet het niet (4)

Display this question:

If Q8 = Ja, regelmatig

Or Q8 = Ja, soms

Q9 Zo ja, welke toegankelijkheidsdiensten gebruik je en waarom?

Q10 Noem alle mensen die voordeel halen uit het gebruiken van toegankelijkheidsdiensten.

Q11 Welke van deze beschouw je als een toegankelijkheidsdienst?

- ☐ Audiodescriptie (AD) (1)
- ☐ Ondertiteling/captions (2)
- ☐ Ondertiteling voor doven en slechthorenden (SDH) (3)
- ☐ Nasynchronisatie (4)
- ☐ Voice-over (5)
- ☐ Braille tekst (6)
- ☐ Gebarentaalvertolking (7)
- ☐ Surtitling (8)
- ☐ Eenvoudige taal (9)
- ☐ Eenvoudig te lezen (ETL) (10)
- ☐ Clean audio (11)
- ☐ Audio-introductie (AI) (12)
- ☐ Braille transcriptie (13)
- ☐ Touch tour (14)
- ☐ Inductielus (15)
- ☐ Tactiele tentoonstellingen / Tactiele dialogen (16)
- ☐ Geen van bovenstaande (17)

Q12 Nadat je de toegankelijkheidsdiensten in de vorige vraag hebt gezien, in hoeverre ben je het eens dat de volgende barrières aanwezig zijn bij het toegankelijk maken van media:

	Helemaal mee oneens (1)	Oneens (2)	Niet mee oneens en niet mee eens (3)	Eens (4)	Helemaal mee eens (5)
zintuigelijke barrières (1)					
cognitieve barrières (2)					
taalbarrières (3)					

Q13 In hoeverre ben je het eens met de volgende uitspraken:

	Helemaal mee oneens (1)	Oneens (2)	Niet mee oneens en niet mee eens (3)	Eens (4)	Helemaal mee eens (5)
Ik ben een gebruiker van mediatoegankelijkheid (1)					
Toegankelijkheidsdiensten zijn alleen voordelig voor mensen met een beperking (2)					
Toegankelijkheidsdiensten zijn voordelig voor alle doelgroepen (3)					
België biedt voldoende toegankelijkheidsdiensten (4)					
Over het algemeen is de Belgische samenleving zich bewust van het belang van mediatoegankelijkheid (5)					
Toegankelijkheidsdiensten zouden wettelijk verplicht moeten zijn (6)					

Q14 Zijn toegankelijkheidsdiensten wettelijk verplicht in België?

Ja (1)

Nee (2)

Ik ben niet zeker (3)

Ik weet het niet (4)

Q15 Waar weet je dat toegankelijkheidsdiensten beschikbaar zijn? (Selecteer alles wat van toepassing is)

☐

Op televisie (1)

☐

In bioscopen (2)

☐

Op streamingplatforms (bijv. Netflix, YouTube, Disney+) (3)

☐

Op sociale media (4)

☐

In musea of culturele locaties (5)

☐

Bij live evenementen (6)

☐

In openbare ruimtes (7)

☐

Op werk of school (8)

☐

Ik heb geen toegankelijkheidsdiensten gezien of ervaren (9)

☐

Anders (specificeer): (10)

Q16 Wat is je leeftijd?

Q17 Wat is het hoogste opleidingsniveau dat je hebt voltooid?

Geen formele opleiding (1)

Basisonderwijs (2)

Secundair onderwijs (3)

Beroepsopleiding (4)

Bachelor (5)

Master (6)

Doctoraat (7)

Anders (specificeer): (8)

Q18 Heb je een beperking of gezondheidsprobleem dat invloed heeft op je dagelijks leven?

Ja (1)

Nee (2)

Ik antwoord liever niet (3)

Display this question:

If Q18 = Ja

Q19 Zo ja, selecteer wat van toepassing is:

- ☐ Visuele beperking (bijv. blindheid, slechthoortendheid) (1)
- ☐ Gehoorbeperking (bijv. doofheid, slechthoortendheid) (2)
- ☐ Lichamelijke beperking (bijv. mobiliteitsproblemen) (3)
- ☐ Cognitieve beperking (bijv. leerstoornissen, geheugenproblemen) (4)
- ☐ Psychosociale beperking (bijv. mentale gezondheidsproblemen) (5)
- ☐ Anders (specificeer): (6)
- ☐ Ik antwoord liever niet (7)

Q20 Ken je iemand met een beperking of gezondheidsprobleem dat invloed heeft op hun dagelijks leven?

Ja (1)

Nee (2)

Ik antwoord liever niet (3)

Q21 Is er verder nog iets dat je zou willen toevoegen?

Q6 Dank je wel voor je overweging om deel te nemen aan de enquête.