

Social Sustainability and Transparency: A Study of Person-first and Identity-first Language in Metropolitan Transportation Authority Communication

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Abstract

Social sustainability emphasizes the importance of maintaining long-term well-being and cohesion of communities by fostering environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds can be included by interacting and developing (Elkington, 1997; Davidson, 2010). However, it remains an ever-evolving and loosely defined concept, often discussed in relation to the more widely studied environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, fostering social sustainability is a key focus for large metropolitan areas where various social groups have to coexist. In this regard, public transportation providers, such as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in New York, serve as vital mediators of social sustainability by enhancing cohesion among diverse communities, and facilitating access to shared public spaces. This applies not only to the services offered by the transit provider, but also their communication practices, which have recently incorporated participatory web tools, specifically social media, to showcase their core values and communicate directly with users, thereby enhancing transparency and trust (Criado et al., 2013; Song & Lee 2016). Social sustainability efforts, like those aimed at fostering inclusion and diversity, can be signaled by the use of Person-First Language, in which the condition of the person is placed after the head noun in a prepositional phrase or relative clause, or by Identity-First Language, which places the condition before the noun (Price, 2022). Therefore, through a corpus-assisted analysis of Instagram posts, the study analyzes the use of these two strategies to understand how disability, gender, and other markers of diversity are represented on the MTA social media. Results reveal that the MTA predominantly employs Person-First Language over Identity-First Language, reflecting their commitment to social sustainability. Additionally, findings are meant to highlight how this preference can contribute to fostering

communicative transparency, ensuring that accessibility policies and inclusion efforts are clearly conveyed to the public.

Keywords: Social sustainability, MTA, Person-first and Identity-first language, Transparency, Instagram

1. Introduction

1.1 Social Sustainability and Transparency: Bridging Definitional Challenges

The development of the Triple Bottom Line as a conceptualization of sustainability incorporates three interconnected dimensions: environmental, social, and economic performance (Elkington, 1997). The environmental dimension evaluates mainly resource consumption, carbon emissions, and overall ecological sustainability. The economic dimension is reframed to include ethical business practices and long-term value creation. Meanwhile, the social dimension considers factors such as labor conditions, community well-being, and human rights, with an emphasis on creating equitable and inclusive societies.

While the Triple Bottom Line ensures a comprehensive approach to sustainability, its three dimensions have often been approached separately or in different ways. This is particularly true for social sustainability, which not only appears to be the least examined of the three dimensions but also lacks a clear conceptual definition. Arguably, this is driven by two main factors: the nature of the concept of social sustainability and its relation to environmental sustainability. Specifically, despite its long-standing presence in public discourse, social sustainability does not imply a fixed set of policies but rather a directional shift which encompasses environmental, social, and economic aspects. This flexibility makes it challenging to establish a standardized and unitary approach to social sustainability. As for the second factor, this concerns the dominance of environmental sustainability in public discourse, particularly through the lens of the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change, which have fundamentally shaped sustainability priorities (Davidson, 2010). The Anthropocene, whose definition is still being debated, refers to an epoch characterized by the irreversible impact of human activity on Earth's geology and ecosystems (see Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Crutzen, 2002; Zottola & De Majo, 2022). In essence, this reveals the interconnectedness of human actions and environmental transformations, as human societies both contribute to and are affected by environmental change. Consequently, the two dimensions of social sustainability and environmental sustainability are bound to be deeply intertwined, as one cannot exist without the other, due to their shared foundations and root causes.

While recognizing this inextricable link, a possible working definition of social sustainability may refer to a society or city's ability to foster inclusive and harmonious coexistence among diverse social and cultural groups, ensuring long-term social integration, communication, and an improved quality of life, without causing further strain on the environment (Stren & Polese, 2000). Policymaking for social sustainability involves solidarity, inclusion, and social cohesion (Maloutas, 2003). This also spans different policy areas such as health, education, and public spaces, with key decisions relating to transport, political autonomy, social housing,

and urban development (Seguin & Germain, 2000; Polese, 2000). As a result, social sustainability has become a key framework for urban policy in many cities (Davidson, 2010).

Within this context, transparency plays a vital role in ensuring that the core objectives of social sustainability, namely inclusivity, equity, and community well-being, are effectively implemented and maintained. Since social sustainability remains loosely defined in terms of specific policy frameworks while continuing to guide urban policymaking, transparency may become essential in structuring its application across different sectors.

Transparency indicates a multidirectional strategy that promotes accountability, counters corruption, and enhances trust by making decision-making processes and policies more open, and easily understandable for the public. This is exemplified by three key metaphors. Firstly, as open decision-making, ensuring that policies and processes are accessible and understandable to the public. Secondly, as a policy tool within governance structures, guiding how information is shared and managed. Finally, as a public value, used primarily to promote accountability and restore public trust in governance (Ball, 2009). This last aspect is particularly relevant in relation to social sustainability, as it positions transparency as a guiding principle that can shape the expectations for accountability, accessibility, and democratic participation, which are essential for achieving social sustainability.

Furthermore, transparency as a public value should be understood as a fundamental principle that guides governance in a way that benefits society as a whole. A key conceptualization of transparency, therefore, would be as a normative expectation that governance bodies and institutions operate openly, honestly, and accountably, extending beyond information-sharing. In practice, this entails promoting accountability and encouraging civic engagement (Ball, 2009). As a result, citizens can actively participate in decision-making, strengthening democratic governance and, ultimately, social sustainability. This positions transparency not just as a tool but as a social and ethical expectation that shapes the functioning of governance and civil society, in line with a commitment to openness, fairness, and inclusivity.

Transparency inherently carries a communicative dimension that emerges from its very definition, yet it lacks a fixed or universally accepted interpretation (Albu & Wehmeier, 2014). Although, it has been understood as a rhetorical and discursive construct shaped by ongoing communicative interactions and practices (Koskela, 2018; Koskela & Crawford, 2020). The communicative dimension of transparency can be essential in fostering social sustainability. In particular, it could ensure equitable access to information, enabling marginalized communities to stay informed about public policies, social services and the rights to which they are entitled.

1.2 Public Transportation as a Mediator for Social Sustainability

Based on the aforementioned definition, public transportation can be examined through a social sustainability lens. This is due to its role as a vital mediator to address inclusion and equity challenges, as well as environmental responsibility. Indeed, a well-functioning transit system ensures that individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to essential services such as education, employment, and healthcare, while also minimizing the

environmental and social impact of transportation networks (Miller et al., 2016).

While the environmental advantages of public transit have been thoroughly explored (see Mattioli, 2016), its contributions to social sustainability are to be considered. In particular, as the negative impacts of private transportation disproportionately affect disadvantaged individuals, this dangerously exacerbates existing disparities in terms of health and access to resources (Vanderheiden, 2008). Likewise, transport emissions are unequally distributed across income levels, and individuals without access to a car or reliable public transportation are at an increased risk of social exclusion. Consequently, ensuring fair access public transportation can provide energy-efficient and socially sustainable alternatives for many cities (Mattioli, 2016).

Moreover, since the transport sector remains one of the most emission-intensive industries, public transportation can serve as a key solution by simultaneously mitigating environmental challenges and addressing social sustainability risks (Mattioli 2016). Therefore, the role of public transport may be fundamental in solving the inherent conflict between ensuring social inclusion and reducing emissions and energy consumption.

2. Person-first Language and Identity-first Language

The use of Person-First Language (PFL) and Identity-First Language (IFL) to describe disabilities, neurodevelopmental conditions, mental illness, and diabetes (Potts et al., 2023), as well as other experiences of marginalization and stereotyping (Gomes, 2018), has been the subject of ongoing and complex debate which has generated a considerable body of research on the use of these strategies across different domains (e.g., Brookes & Baker, 2021, Potts et al., 2023)

More specifically, PFL refers to a structure in which a diagnosis or condition post-modifies the head noun within a prepositional phrase or relative clause, placing emphasis on the person before the condition, as in *individuals with mental illness*. Conversely, IFL, also known as condition-first language, consists of a nominal phrase where the head noun is pre-modified by an adjectival phrase. In this structure, the identity or condition is placed before the noun, foregrounding it as a more integral aspect of the individual's identity, as in *mentally ill individuals* (Price, 2022; Potts et al., 2023).

There is no preferred solution between the two alternatives, although PFL may be preferred for individuals with physical or mental illnesses or conditions. Nevertheless, perspectives on these approaches vary, with preferences being highly individualized and depending on the specific identity or condition being referenced (Potts et al., 2023).

The key difference between PFL and IFL lies in how they reflect two distinct approaches to framing disability in discourse. In particular, PFL prioritizes the individual over the condition by placing the person before the modifier, using post-nominal modification rather than pre-nominal modification. This structure highlights the individual's humanity first, rather than defining them primarily by their condition (Bednarek & Bray, 2023). By shifting the disability term to a post-nominal position, disability becomes one characteristic among many, rather than the defining feature of the individual, potentially reducing unintentional

dehumanization (Gomes, 2018). In contrast, IFL positions the modifier before the noun, making disability an integral aspect of the person's identity. Furthermore, PFL is sometimes favored for its potential to reduce stigma and avoid defining individuals solely by their disability. Meanwhile, IFL can reinforce the idea that disability is an inseparable part of an individual's life experience, thereby fostering empowerment and self-identification.

Despite the ongoing debate, the use of these different linguistic strategies continues to be essential for shaping and representing diverse life experiences, highlighting the role of language in representing diversity and its broader implications for fostering a more socially sustainable society. Most importantly, as PFL and IFL are means of distinguishing disabled individuals, or individuals with specific conditions, from those without them. This confirms that naming conventions are not neutral descriptors but socially and ideologically loaded categories that actively shape how these experiences are perceived and understood (Potts et al., 2023). Additionally, as preferences vary across different communities (Bednarek & Bray, 2023), the evolving nature of disability-related language reflects the diverse and individualized ways in which people identify with their experiences (Mellifont, 2017). In this context, the most important aspect is recognizing and respecting individual preferences, as language not only shapes how diversity is perceived and understood but also reinforces individuals' autonomy in defining their own identities and life experiences.

Building upon these considerations on PFL and IFL, this study seeks to explore their usage within the discourse of public transportation, specifically in the MTA's social media posts on Instagram, by addressing the following research questions:

1. Which strategy, PFL or IFL, is more prevalent in the MTA's Instagram posts?
2. How does the use of PFL or IFL contribute to the MTA's communicative transparency efforts regarding disability and marginalization?

3. Data and Methodological Approach

3.1 The MTA_IG Corpus

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is the largest public transit agency in the United States, overseeing subway, bus, and commuter rail systems across the New York metropolitan area (i.e., New York City, Long Island, the southeastern part of New York State, and Connecticut) (Metropolitan Transportation Authority, n.d.). In this wide metropolitan area, the MTA plays a crucial role in addressing social disparities by providing affordable mobility options, particularly for marginalized communities who rely on public transit as their primary means of transportation. In addition, since 2021, the MTA has been subject to legislation mandating the publication of accessible data on its finances, routes, and services. This regulatory requirement makes the MTA a particularly relevant case for investigating its communicative practices, as it has been significantly influenced by a strong demand for transparent communication efforts (see Wanek-Libman, 2021).

For this analysis, the MTA's use of PFL and IFL strategies was examined on a specific social media platform, Instagram. The transit provider uses this platform mostly to inform riders

about ongoing initiatives and to foster more direct, open, and transparent communication with its user base, as previously explored by Falcone (2025).

The dataset for the MTA_IG includes the textual portions of the MTA posts from its official four profiles. In particular, the MTA operates four official Instagram accounts covering the entire New York metropolitan area: @mta, which provides general information about the MTA services; @mtalirr, dedicated to Long Island Railroad services; @metronorth, focusing on connections between New York City and its suburbs in New York and Connecticut; and @mtaaway, which highlights activities and destinations accessible via the MTA services. All accounts have been active on Instagram for over a decade, except for @mtaaway, which launched in 2022. The final composition of the MTA_IG is as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Composition of the MTA_IG corpus

MTA_IG	Tokens
@mta_subcorpus	63,766
@metronorth_subcorpus	25,229
@mtalirr_subcorpus	74,072
@mtaaway_subcorpus	48,649
Total	211,716

3.2 Methodology and Procedure

Identifying instances of IFL and PFL in a corpus can be approached through various methods as shown by a variety of works, including Bednarek and Carr (2021), Brookes and Baker (2021), Bednarek and Bray (2023), Potts et al., (2023), reaffirming the diverse and adaptable methodological approaches available for corpus-based analyses of this kind.

Bednarek and Bray (2023) have compared different corpus search techniques based on key parameters, such as the number of types identified (recall proxy) and false positives (precision proxy), to determine which method is best suited for accurately detecting all occurrences of PFL or IFL in a corpus. Among the approaches discussed, exact-phrase search, which involves using a simple form-based query to identify instances, offers high precision but may fail to capture variations based on word order or on additional descriptors. To improve recall, regular expressions (regexes) may be used, allowing for greater syntactic flexibility, but may increase the likelihood of false positives.

Despite these limitations, exact-phrase search can be particularly well-suited for smaller or highly specialized corpora. In fact, while each method has its own strengths and weaknesses

in terms of accuracy and recall, their effectiveness may be also influenced by the size and scope of the corpus. For a smaller dataset like MTA_IG, exact-phrase search can ensure accuracy while minimizing false positives. In addition, since manual inspection of concordances is feasible and not overly time-consuming, false positives can be efficiently excluded, enhancing result reliability. Consequently, exact-phrase search was chosen as the primary method for the retrieval of instance of PFL and IFL, supplemented by manual analysis where necessary. More specifically, the analysis and retrieval of instances of PFL and IFL in the corpus were conducted using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014), along with Corpus Query Language (CQL) to allow for possible syntactic flexibility (i.e., structural variations in word order or modification) in the concordances (Note 1).

To identify instances of PFL, where a condition or identity descriptor follows the noun in a prepositional phrase (e.g., *people with disabilities*), the following CQL query was employed in combination with a wild card (Note 2):

[lemma="people|person|individual"] [lemma="with"] []{0,1} [] (1)

In this way, in the resulting concordances *with* would be followed either directly by a noun or by an optional adjective before the noun (e.g., *people with severe disabilities*). The inclusion of the wildcard placeholder increased recall, capturing both basic and more elaborate structures, while preserving the syntactic pattern.

Additionally, an alternative query incorporating specific adjectives that normally are used to indicate the degree of the conditions being referenced was also tested, but did not give out any results. The query used is illustrated below:

[word="severe|chronic|serious|mild"]? [] [lemma="people|person|individuals"] (2)

For instances of IFL, where an adjective or identity descriptor precedes the noun (e.g., *disabled individuals*), a different CQL was employed. In this case, it was necessary to design a query that could capture adjectives or descriptors appearing before nouns without relying on explicit grammatical annotations to allow for possible structural variation. Therefore, the first query used to retrieve IFL structures was:

[] [lemma="people|person|individual"] (3)

Afterwards, to account for multi-word identity descriptors, such as *visually impaired people*, the extended query below was used:

[]? [] [lemma="people|person|individual"] (4)

This query allowed for an optional second word before the noun, ensuring that a wider range of IFL expressions involving multi-word modifiers could be identified.

Furthermore, to ensure comprehensive coverage of the community of people represented in the MTA corpus, another CQL query was also developed to account for more context-specific terminology, including additional terms that may be commonly used in transit-related contexts (i.e., *rider, commuter, client, passenger*). For PFL, this meant identifying cases such as *passengers with disabilities* or *riders with severe disabilities*. Therefore, the following

queries were tested:

$$[lemma="rider|commuter|client|passenger"] [lemma="with"] [] \{0,1\} \quad (5)$$

$$[lemma="rider|commuter|client|passenger"] [lemma="with"] \\ [word="severe|chronic|serious|mild"]? \quad (6)$$

Meanwhile, for IFL to identify cases such as *disabled passengers* or *severely disabled riders*, the queries below were used:

$$[] [lemma="rider|commuter|client|passenger"] \quad (7)$$

$$[]? [] [lemma="rider|commuter|client|passenger"] \quad (8)$$

Eventually, after retrieving the concordance lines containing PFL and IFL, a manual inspection was also conducted to enhance accuracy and identify potential false positives. Subsequently, for the remaining concordances the frequency of each linguistic strategy was assessed to provide an initial overview of their prominence in the MTA_IG. Following this, a qualitative analysis of the concordance lines was conducted to explore their contextual usage.

4. Results

4.1 Person-first Language in the MTA_IG

The first aspect to be assessed was the quantitative distribution of PFL and IFL in the corpus. The analysis of concordances, following the cleaning of false positives, revealed a clear preference for one strategy over the other. Specifically, PFL appeared in a total of 24 concordances, predominantly in the combination *person with disabilities*, which accounted for the majority of occurrences, as illustrated in examples 1 and 2 below.

1. We continue to work diligently in elevating transit and enhancing access to independence for **persons with disabilities**.
2. The deal: Package price from GCT/Harlem-125th Street: adults, \$31.50; seniors, **persons with disabilities** and individuals receiving Medicare.

In the cases above, the use of a PFL strategy is illustrated, placing emphasis on the individual before the disability. In addition, the use of the plural *persons* instead of the more commonly used collective noun *people*, which typically refers to a group as a whole, can be noticed. Interestingly, the use of *persons* appears to reinforce individuality and humanization. Specifically, this highlights each person as distinct and recognized separately within the group, rather than being incorporated into a collective category, as it may have been entailed by the use of *people*. This difference is particularly relevant in the context of inclusion efforts, where precision in acknowledging individuality and individual experiences is central.

Furthermore, in the first example a more advocacy-driven approach to accessibility in public transportation is suggested, further reinforcing the sense of individuality through the use of PFL. Meanwhile, in the second ticket pricing and eligibility is mentioned, grouping together *seniors, persons with disabilities, and individuals receiving Medicare*. Examples of this kind

frequently occur in the PFL concordances, in which groups of individuals are often categorized based on their eligibility for specific fare discounts and deals offered by the MTA. This strategy allows the transit provider to clearly communicate their accessibility policies for different passenger categories, ensuring transparency and ease of access to relevant information.

Another way in which the MTA applies PFL was by focusing on the users of its services, which, on the one hand, reinforces humanization and, on the other, fosters a sense of inclusion and community around public transportation. This is evident in the use of PFL patterns around the noun *riders* (examples 3 and 4).

3. **Riders with mobility impairments** and all express bus riders will board through the front door. Back door boarding will help keep riders and operators at a safe distance so we can keep people working in healthcare, emergency response, utilities and foodservice moving.
4. Agents will provide face-to-face wayfinding help, OMNY & MetroCard assistance, help **riders with disabilities**, report quality-of-life issues throughout the station, & more.

Though *riders* as a noun indicating a specific group of humans may not traditionally be associated with PFL, its usage in this context is particularly relevant. In fact, similarly to previous cases, the noun is post-modified in a humanizing attempt. As a result, the centrality of individuals, predominantly in their role of users of public transit, is emphasized, rather than defining them by their *disabilities*. This can be interpreted as a strong inclusion effort, reinforcing the idea that mobility impairments, or any other limitation, do not hinder individuals from fully participating in the transit system and the community of MTA users. Instead, they are recognized as *riders*, ensuring a sense of belonging and equal access to public transportation.

A similar approach can be observed in the use of *customers*. The humanizing aspect here is linked to the concept entailed by *customer*, meaning individuals that pay a fare to receive a service, which inherently entitles them to accessible transportation solutions. Similar to *riders*, *customers* reinforces both the human and individual aspects while also fostering a sense of community among transit users. More specifically, it conveys the idea that accessibility is a right, not a privilege, placing greater emphasis on the neutral transactional relationship between the transit provider and users of the service. This distinction is especially significant for individuals with mobility limitations, as it highlights that they are not merely recipients of assistance but paying customers entitled to equal access and accommodations. The use of *customers* in PFL constructions is shown in examples 5 and 6 below.

5. If you need help boarding & exiting the train, we can help. The LIRR Care Program is a 24/7 service for **customers with mobility limitations**.
6. Have you heard of LIRR Care? This 24/7, 365 program provides assistance to **customers with mobility limitations**.

In the examples above, accessibility services are presented as a standard offering rather than a special accommodation. This conveys that individuals with mobility impairments are just as much a part of the commuter base as any other paying rider. In the same way, it reinforces the idea that public transportation is a service that all users pay for and, therefore, deserve full and equal access to, conveying a clear inclusive stance. Furthermore, this perspective highlights how public transit may function as a shared resource, where all paying users should expect the same level of accessibility.

4.2 Identity-first Language in the MTA_IG

In contrast to the prevalence of PFL in the corpus, IFL was identified only in five concordances. However, despite its lower frequency, IFL exhibited greater variation in the types of identities referenced. This may suggest that while PFL is the dominant strategy in the MTA's communication, IFL is used selectively in contexts in which specific identities may need to be referenced.

The majority of occurrences reported the combination *disabled individuals*, where the IFL structure positions *disabled* as a premodifier to *individuals*. In this case, *individuals* serves as a relatively neutral term, yet it is specified by the defining characteristic of being disabled rather than presenting it as an incidental trait. The choice of *individuals* may also reflect a more formal approach, aligning with language commonly found in public policy, which is in line with the eligibility criteria for the discount illustrated (example 7).

7. Discount admission to the American Museum of Natural History and choice of Giant Screen Film or Planetarium Space Show: adults, \$25; students/seniors/ **disabled individuals** /individuals receiving Medicare, \$20.

A second combination found was *disabled persons*, which follows the same aforementioned IFL structure. However, here the choice of *persons* appears more typical of referring to rights, protections, or services designated for a specific group (example 8).

8. These seats are designated for **disabled persons**. While all customers may sit there, they must relinquish these seats to a customer in need.

The use of *individuals* and *persons*, though in an IFL combination, may reveal a similar strategy to that illustrated for the PFL combinations that included the same nouns. In particular, *individuals* and *persons* appear to be more individualizing than the collective noun *people*. Once again, by referring to a group as a whole, *people*, may potentially produce a more generalizing effect in relation to the experiences of those being categorized. Meanwhile, *individuals* and *persons*, used in their plural form, can highlight the distinctiveness of each member of the group and, possibly, recognize personal agency.

It is important to note that, since the MTA primarily manages public transportation in the form of subways and buses, it goes without saying that the predominant diversity-related discourse would focus on physical disabilities and mobility challenges. However, some instances of non-disability-related experiences of marginalization were also mentioned. This is the case of the use of *homeless persons*, as shown in example 9 below.

9. Pat received the Leonard I. Saltzman Unsung Hero Award for his work in advocating local municipalities and outreach groups to focus on **homeless persons** at LIRR stations, providing them access to appropriate shelter facilities, where food and counseling is available.

The pre-modifying adjective *homeless* presents the condition as central to the individual's identity. The preference for IFL in this case suggests an intent of clarity and categorization, particularly when referring to public services and accessibility regulations. Yet, the use of *persons*, which, once again, places a subtle emphasis on individuality rather than the collective, can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid dehumanization of the experience of homelessness, while simultaneously aligning with more policy-oriented discourse.

Interestingly, another marginalizing experience is also mentioned, namely that of confinement or legal detention, as illustrated in the following example.

10. While you're there, you can also gift a book that's on the wishlist of **incarcerated people** at Rikers, which will be delivered through the NYPL's Jail & Prison services.

The use of IFL in example 10 contributes to a clear humanizing representation of incarceration, possibly reducing stigma and challenging dehumanizing narratives surrounding confinement. The use of alternative terms, such as *inmate*, may carry stronger legal connotations. Similarly, *convict* or *felon* may foreground criminal identity or reinforce more punitive views. In contrast, *incarcerated people* shifts the focus solely to the current state of being held in custody, without implying judgment and thereby maintaining a human-centered approach.

The final condition indicated by IFL in the dataset is that of being pregnant, as demonstrated in example 11 below.

11. Kindly offer your seat to an elderly, disabled, or **pregnant person** and enjoy a fresh cup of "feel good".

Here, the use of *pregnant person* reflects a gender-inclusive strategy. Rather than using a more gender-specific term (i.e., *women*), binary definitions of gender are avoided, acknowledging that pregnancy is not exclusive to those who identify as women. This choice is particularly significant in recognizing the experiences of gender-nonconforming individuals, who may become pregnant but do not necessarily identify as women or wish to be categorized as such. Additionally, the use of this strategy also challenges more traditional views that have historically reduced women to their reproductive roles. By using *persons*, a term that, as previously discussed, emphasizes individuality over collective categorization, the focus remains predominantly on the individual beyond their gendered identity.

5. Conclusion

From a quantitative perspective, the analysis revealed a clear preference for PFL strategies in the corpus over IFL ones. Over a total of 29 concordance lines identified, PFL was identified in 24 concordances, with the combination *persons with disabilities* accounting for the majority of occurrences. In contrast, IFL appeared in only five concordances, making it

significantly less prevalent. This suggests that MTA's communication on Instagram predominantly favors a PFL approach that emphasizes individuality and human identity before the condition. However, despite its lower frequency, IFL displayed greater variation in terms of the identities being referenced and in the ways in which these identities were presented, possibly suggesting a more selective yet intentional use of this strategy. In light of this, it can be argued that IFL may have served more a categorization function, ensuring clarity in defining the specificities of different groups, while keeping PFL the dominant approach for more broader communications on matters of inclusivity.

The qualitative analysis revealed that the use of PFL was primarily associated with fare eligibility and accessibility initiatives, while reinforcing individual recognition and a human-centered approach. Notably, the use of *persons* instead of *people* in phrases like *persons with disabilities* suggested a central emphasis on individuality rather than collective identity. Further instances of PFL were also observed in the use of combinations around *riders* and *customers*, which reflected an inclusion strategy more oriented towards the community of users of the services of the MTA. In particular, these combinations humanized transit users by reinforcing their role as active participants in the public transportation system. Conversely, IFL was selectively used in cases where categorization or clarity appeared necessary, particularly when referring to *disabled individuals* and *homeless persons*. Other interesting cases were also noticed for the use of IFL, such as *incarcerated people* and *pregnant persons*, reinforcing once again the humanizing and inclusive effort towards experiences of marginalization in MTA's communication.

Nonetheless, the variety in the diversity represented remains limited in the corpus. In the context of the MTA, mobility issues are naturally going to be at the forefront, as people with mobility impairments face specific challenges when navigating the system, making accessibility a central focus. However, while mobility-related concerns may be more prevalent, it should be recognized that in public transit systems not all individuals experience public spaces in the same way, and further research may be needed to examine how other marginalized experiences (e.g., neurodivergence, sensory impairments, language barriers, and economic vulnerability) are represented in public transit discourse. Like all public spaces, transportation systems are shaped by social, economic, and physical barriers that affect different groups in distinct ways. Therefore, expanding research beyond mobility impairments could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how transit agencies can achieve more ambitious social sustainability goals.

So far, there has been limited corpus-based research on how transit agencies linguistically represent social inclusion on social media. However, these findings may be significant for several reasons. First, the presence of both PFL and IFL in the MTA's social media reveals the centrality of naming practices in making public transit systems more socially sustainable. As social media has now become a primary space for the interaction between public bodies and citizens, the communicative choices made on these platforms are highly visible reflections of institutional values. Consequently, the MTA has been signaling a clear commitment to social sustainability by employing these inclusive naming strategies. Moreover, public transit, along with its online communicative spaces, acts as a vital third

space where diverse individuals interact, making fostering inclusivity in these spaces vital for social cohesion.

In terms of how the representation of diversity experiences on MTA Instagram may contribute to their transparency efforts, it can be recognized that presenting different marginalizing experiences in relation to accessibility services and eligibility criteria may contribute to a fairer access to information about the public service, which is essential for transparency. Additionally, transparency may be further reinforced by the alignment between the centrality of accessibility in MTA's discourse and the values the organization claims to uphold, particularly regarding social sustainability. This ensures that issues of social sustainability are clearly communicated to the public, demonstrating the transit provider's commitment to inclusivity. At the same time, presenting these experiences as an integral part of the broader public community is reinforcing the idea that diversity in mobility-related experiences is rightly acknowledged within the MTA.

Eventually, as from a communicative perspective, transparency emerges from discursive practices, it remains crucial to examine how marginalizing experiences and disabilities are represented in discourse and how social sustainability goals, mainly in terms of accessibility, are being integrated into these depictions. Consequently, the role of PFL and IFL strategies extends beyond mere linguistic choices, impacting communicative transparency and openness, as well as the broader representation of marginalized groups in public discourse.

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Notes

Note 1. Corpus Query Language allows to create structured search queries incorporating linguistic patterns, word relationships, and syntactic structures to look for word sequences on Sketch Engine.

Note 2. Wildcards are special characters used in CQL search queries to indicate unspecified elements in a corpus. They are used to capture different word forms, flexible word order, or optional elements without specifying exact words.

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