

# What doesn't kill you make you stronger – how technologies can leverage people with disabilities' strength.

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October 1st, 2024 — 5 minutes read

**NADI-CeRCLe**

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I've always been fascinated by the world around us, and by those people who, even when they haven't been treated gently by life, have risen from it with strength, valour and humility. By those who, as Boris Cyrulik said, have learned to cultivate resilience. But can you help people to cultivate that resilience?

So I began to investigate the subject, focusing my research on people with visual impairments.

As I pushed open the doors of certain associations, I quickly discovered a reality that was little known to the general public. Here and there, these associations offered their members workshops, coaching and other courses, privately or in small groups, to help them learn about technology. The aim of these workshops was not to promote technology in a demeaning way, but rather to offer it as a support tool, to help people in their daily lives and, quite simply, to enable their members to "do what everyone else does", by using their smartphones for entertainment too.

Within these NGO, I met some extraordinary people, all with different backgrounds, passions and stories. Some were blind from birth, others had become blind gradually as a result of degeneration. Others had lost their sight because of life's vicissitudes, either by accident or through a devastating illness. In such situations, does technology have a role to play in promoting resilience?

In the case of visually impaired people, an interesting fact stands out: despite the loss of the fundamental sense of sight, these individuals have gained faculties in other senses: touch, but above all hearing. Studies have shown that not only do people with visual impairments (congenital or developed) have a better sense of hearing, but they also use this sense to help them develop socially.



My research will therefore explore how a particular technology, voice assistants (such as Alexa and Google Assistant) can improve the well-being of visually impaired people. More specifically, it aims to understand how these technologies can have an impact on the well-being of these users and help them and their families on the road to resilience, on the road of "well-becoming".

In a new step, we will also see how we can personalize those voice assistants to better meet the needs of those people. The aim is to adapt not only technical functions, but also more subtle aspects such as intonation and voice type. This personalization could play a therapeutic role, helping users - and those close to them - to better accept and manage their disability. This study represents a major advance in our understanding of the role of technology in promoting the inclusion and well-being of vulnerable groups in society.

The ultimate goal of this research is to create positive change. We believe that academics have a responsibility to apply their knowledge to address real-world challenges. This commitment to impact not only motivates our research but also deepens our passion for discovery. Together, we can build a better future.





# Floriane Goosse

Floriane Goosse has a Bachelor's and master's degrees in management engineering from UCLouvain, specialising in innovation management and an option in marketing from the prestigious Louvain School of Management (LSM). She is pursuing her PhD at the University of Namur within the NADI-CeRCLe laboratory, a renowned centre for services and marketing research. Her research delves into Transformative Service Research (TSR), specifically exploring the inclusion of vulnerable consumers with disabilities in the era of AI-based services. Her current project investigates how Smart Voice Assistants can empower visually impaired individuals, fostering their well-being and dignity. This research utilizes a unique "strength-based approach" emphasizing users' capabilities. This research is an opportunity for her to have a real and strong impact on society. This dedication was acknowledged at the prestigious SERVSIG 2024 conference, where her research received the "Best Paper Award" – a testament to its potential for positive change. She is also, with Florence Nizette, the Social Media Coordinator of the Journal of Service Management (JOSM)