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Trans vocabularies: topics, clashes, and affordances in YouTube streaming wars

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ABSTRACT

After decades of invisibility in the media, trans content creators have established popular 6 channels on YouTube and other streaming platforms. This article investigates channels from Western and non-Western locations to understand their priorities and interests from a comparative perspective. Applying a word cloud analysis and an LDA topic analysis, this study identified creators' preferred topics and occasional conflicts while allowing many insights into an emerging and diversifying trans sphere online. As creators have demonstrated varying levels of engagement in a context of mainstream media backlash and radical ideologies, the ability to generate common vocabularies within the trans community worldwide demonstrates an emerging and complex communicative power present on multiple fronts.

Keywords: Transgender; gender studies; YouTube; queer media; LDA analysis

The emerging universe of transgender content creators (henceforth, trans creators) has pushed the boundaries of trans representation online. The recent boost in social media posts, vlogs, podcasts, and channels has changed how the public understands trans people's issues (Kaufmann, [2010](#); Raun, [2012](#); Horak, [2014](#); Miller, [2019](#)). Some scholars have pointed to the activist potential of platforms like YouTube, which embed life stories and testimonials that eventually help the trans community (Tortajada et al., [2021](#)). Such a popular streaming website enables narratives by an increasingly vocal trans youth, including their fears and insecurities about gender transition (O'Neill, [2014](#); McInroy & Craig, [2015](#)). Even if all these facts are undoubtedly positive, it seems a precipitated conclusion to claim that this shift only concerns visibility and does not represent any other form of impact on the trans community as it diversifies (Berberick, [2018](#); Koch-Rein et al., [2020](#)). This article seeks to understand the content of vlogs by capturing the topics that emerge from creators' speeches. As we shall see, debunking vocabularies of trans expression appears crucial for a deeper engagement with the community's interests and everyday politics.

Some dilemmas sprout as more media is invited into trans lives. Fundamental processes for most trans people end up exposed as never before. For example, YouTubers can discuss the early stages of their self-discovery and transition, such as hormone taking and the challenges of changing documents. They can also reflect on their passing (being recognised as their confirmed gender), as others focus on post-transition and social reactions. Self-representing online can give trans and non-trans audiences a different idea from what the public can only conceive in celebrity come-outs, for example. The case of Caitlyn Jenner, the American media personality and former decathlete, illustrates trans representation in ambiguous ways. From the positive coverage it received on a 2015 Vanity Fair cover, her come out contrasts today with the Jenner's recent transphobic stances (Humphrey, [2016](#); O'Shea, [2019](#)). Despite hatred and abuse online, against which automated mechanisms are still far from full efficacy (Chakravarthi et al., [2022](#)), social media and vlogging channels may encapsulate a window for self-expression beyond these controversies.

Understanding trans-produced content online also helps identify what and how individual actors see the reality around them. Trans creators can answer questions about civil rights, access public facilities, and demand equal

treatment without being exploited with the usual mass media sensationalism (Rood et al., [2017](#)). From the ‘cis surprise’ (the trans person revealed to be a heterosexual person in movies) to Hollywood’s trans outlaw stereotype (Abbott, [2022](#)), there must exist an alternative to these portraits, whereby trans creators achieve what Cavalcante ([2018](#)) saw as a sense of ‘everydayness’ necessary for a good life. In short, he argues that trans individuals want to belong untroubled and have undisrupted relationships. Media vlogging can bridge imaginative stories, making a new scenario of trans creativity possible.

Internet-based media have indeed offered trans people more resilience during oppressive times (Craig et al., [2015](#)). Recent documentaries such as the 2017s *The Death and Life of Marsha P Johnson*, directed by David France, or *Disclosure*, by Sam Feder and award-winning trans actress Laverne Cox, attracted many kinds of audiences through worldwide distribution via platforms such as Netflix. According to IMDB (2022), thirty-nine releases hit the U.S. market in 2022, primarily favourable to trans causes. On the other hand, platforms have also eased the circulation of documentaries accused of transphobia, such as *What is a Woman* (2022), directed by Matt Walsh and sponsored by the right-wing website *The Daily Wire*. Even amidst established trans celebrities like Elliot Page, there have been episodes of calculated misgendering, deadnaming, and the failure to recognise fundamental rights such as gender reassignment and name-changing (Hansford, [2022](#)). Next, I approach how the Internet and YouTube can pivot advances for trans representation while assessing the need to engage with new repertoires.

In search of trans themes on YouTube

Aware of all these debates involving trans rights, media productions, and the popularisation of a self-made trans sphere, the term trans content creators must be employed carefully. The modern creator’s role has symbolised power and resilience, but this activist presence stems from the early stages of the Internet. Dame-Griff ([2023](#)) charted a ‘second revolution,’ as the affirmation of transgender movements through small-scale technology adopters in the early days of online access with small websites, such as Geocities. This trans experiment on the web promoted casual meetings and tried to raise people’s awareness of the community’s use. Arguably, this movement would eventually catalyse trans-gender as an umbrella identity. Trans content creation has since risen to occupy mainstream platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, but their stories should be read in the same context as that of the trans pioneers and their small-scale occupation of online spaces. The growing interest in the trans community from the broader society, either in politics or culture, finds YouTube a relatively accessible information venue. As Cavalcante ([2018](#)) has explored in focus groups, trans individuals do not live apart from recurrent societal concerns and want to engage with ongoing societal issues. YouTube offers the chance for community discussion that mirrors daily encounters and interactions. Repeated episodes narrated in the first person become shared topics as creators replicate viral titles and styles. One finds themes such as transition, de-transition, and integration, as other specificities in different languages. There is an aspect of group knowledge production that should not be underestimated and can undoubtedly be internationally adopted (Raun, [2012](#)). YouTube has globalised transness to the extent that trans creators can find and boost self-recognition by propping up their arguments, either praising, reacting to or attacking divergent political alignments.

Of course, studying a massive platform such as YouTube has its challenges and limitations. The website carries many issues of excessive commercialisation, with some creators optimising videos to boost views (Tafesse, [2020](#)). The platform can gather hubs of misinformation (Hussein et al., [2020](#)) and be over-lenient when homophobes reach a large audience (Maurer, [2022](#)). YouTube’s algorithmic influence enables the enactment of bias and polarisation when political debates are at stake (Heuer et al., [2021](#); García-Marín, [2021](#)). The latter is especially problematic because of the complex stances that split trans YouTubers into distinct political camps. In effect, this research sought to problematise trans vocabulary, e.g., the textual content of their videos, as links to such differences vis-à-vis the broadening of trans expression.

Considering such kerbs, trans fluency on YouTube offers a unique location to make sense of boundaries and opportunities. Their discourse can reveal local variations that trespass the platform’s global design and proneness to capitalisation and surveillance (Waugh et al., [2016](#)). As controversial as some vlogs can be, they still reflect real-life dilemmas and come-outs which would be, otherwise, inaccessible stories to many. One can reveal where subjectivity lies in shaping topics, conversations, and self-doubts. One can also notice trans creators’ emerging expectations of developing profitable careers, even under algorithmic unpredictability (Duffy & Meisner, [2022](#)). In line with recent studies about visibility on social media platforms (Abidin, [2016](#); Cotter, [2019](#)), it is possible to see a ‘game’ or a ‘labour’ of visibility that creators might play while imbued with expectations of being suggested on users’ streams and getting more followers. Otherwise, Martino et al. ([2021](#)) saw the ‘desubjugation’ of trans and non-binary youth in the sense of the latter being able to elect

priorities that are not necessarily institutionalised or cis-gendered.

The case of Dylan Mulvaney, a trans creator who crossed the 10 million follower mark on TikTok, has epitomised trans presence across the stream due to her capture of public attention. Still, this creator has hitherto left local trans community members out of most of her videos. Elsewhere on YouTube, channels with partisan views and agendas, such as Blaire White or Buck Angel, on the right, or on the left, ContraPoints, have also accumulated millions of followers and sponsorships. Swedish YouTube Mia Mulder has reportedly engaged in the institutional politics of her country. In these cases, creators might not have aimed to have trans pages but philosophy-directed or political channels. Seeing where they coincide or disagree sheds light on what I see as trans affordances and interests. In fact, one should not perceive trans creativity as intermittently predicated on self-eulogies but as an attempt to delve into other affairs from a unique perspective, according to each creator's sense of scope and priority.

With many creators boasting over one million subscribers, it is possible to craft conversations that cater to broader audiences. Popular channels have dedicated to reproducing informative topics as much as trends that quickly disappear. Videos titled with the likes of How to start a transition, What sex is like with a trans guy, or 15 days on Testosterone appear in different languages (Raun, [2015](#)). The propagation of some themes and not others also reveal specific trends within the trans community. The challenge to this research was to identify these topics' relationship with the community (1), the differences in themes between the locations or languages spoken by creators (2), and their rapport with trans and broader audiences (3). For these specific purposes, I inquired on the extent to which trans creators can participate in different conversations or settle in specific areas based on their affordances or interests. Next, I discuss methods that can help quantify their words in spoken videos in the format of topics.

Methods for investing in trans topics

Aware of the diverse ecology of trans content creation, this section describes methods of sampling channels and the use of video content. First, this paper sought to engage with creators with a minimum established audience. On YouTube, the level of following one can get is arguable (Perelli, [2022](#)). Still, creators with over 5,000 followers should be able to attract an audience and navigate YouTube's styles and idiosyncrasies, including its quick-paced language and avatar-making. This ability-based selection is necessary to perceive how trans communicators can consciously penetrate these globalised dictates of a highly capitalised platform. It could also allow for seeing smaller channels showcasing crafted skills even if following less commercialised purposes. To serve a scholarly inspection, this number can still reflect the minimum commitment to posting, a solid determination to make a channel, and possibly offer a backlog of videos. In the case of trans content creators, this number could prove commitment to a broader audience, assuming the risks of this exposure, including bullying, abuse, and stalking.

The sampling has similarly brought forward a trans-oriented sense of relevance that can encompass less followed trans content creators, either producing for trans audiences only or not. These criteria, allied with the strategies outlined below, should alleviate some of the algorithmic bias and meet the critical relevance necessary. Kwon et al. ([2018](#)) have pointed to the need to partly automate and annotate names more likely to appear on searches and those not benefitting from algorithmic suggestions. From them, the choice was to skip names associated with organisations, journalism, and political or promotion accounts. From Latzkho-Toth et al. ([2017](#)), strategies to 'thicken' the validity and trace-ability of small data were adopted. That included verifying users' traces online, such as presence on other platforms or communication, continuity, and interaction with other creators. Especially when aiming for a geographically dispersed group, that strategy helps advance voices representing competing interests or following opposed political agendas that could be artificially boosted or shadow-banned by the platform's policies. Conveniently, this conscious tracing allowed bringing names that have yet to become popular in other spheres, such as mass entertainment or TV or part of lucrative media contracts.

After getting over fifty names, a mixed approach of purposive and snowballing sampling methods (Konijn et al., [2013](#)) was crucial to arrive at 20 names in five languages. As the first list of creators has been identified thanks to a simple metadata search on YouTube (Malik & Tian, [2017](#)), the narrowing of this sample appeared after seeing mentions in the press or by other YouTubers from the languages explored in this research. The final sample counted content creators speaking English, Russian, Chinese-simplified, Portuguese, and Spanish. While it is not possible to provide a deeper look into or compare these languages in

all of their differences, their choice, while limited, mirrors complex realities, including post-colonial knowledge and outtakes from trans individuals located under distinct socioeconomic affordances. For example, Spanish can reflect Spain and trans stories and realities from Latin America, like Portuguese and Brazil. Russian and Chinese give us insight into trans lives in countries where homophobia has been much more normalised. English is due to being the world's lingua franca, as well as its breadth of trans communicators speaking it in translation or a second language.

A set of five self-identified trans content creators, two trans masculine and feminine, plus one non-binary, made it to the last sampling. They all had five videos randomly selected, their spoken content transcribed and analysed uniquely to model the topics in their discussion. Samples of the content translated were analysed and contrasted for accuracy. Machine translation has shown a high degree of accuracy in a scenario of growing improvement (Groves & Mundt, 2015). Issues are also minimised because only a few repeated words from a large corpus ($n = 101.897$) are critical for the data interpretation, which can be easily verified and assured meaning.

The choice for a word cloud responds to the variety of topics covered and the stress put into words. As discussed earlier, trans communities worldwide seek to own the terms that amount to their identification. In that case, the terminology employed, emphases, or word omission carries significant political weight due to the historical circumstances. This vocabulary also exists as a reaction to hateful or violent connotations. Word cloud consists of maps with words sized according to their numerical repetition in a dataset. I furthered my interest by checking the embeddedness of words and their context (Xu et al., 2016). I followed other research akin to understanding gender-based parlance (e.g., Yeganeh et al., 2020) to problematise the use of certain words and not others and the timing of these words, observing aspects regarding sensitivity, history, and the local associations of words.

Furthermore, topic modelling appeared as a valuable resource to scope subjects from the vast amount of information available on Internet channels (e.g., Kee et al., 2019). For this research, a model tailored based on Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to extract YouTube data aimed at thematic analysis (Daniel, 2017) was an asset for debunking trans narratives that span from such different places but also languages. This technique has inspired multiple studies about finding topics amid the dominance of natural text, conversations, emojis, irony, and other metaphorical language uses that can prove misleading for the researcher's perception (Towne et al., 2016). While I did not pursue an entire debate on complexities behind all the indices possible to extract from an LDA, I consciously sought to queer those methods out of masculine assumptions of exactitude and correction. My commitment stands with presenting transparent data that allows a departure to imagine the subtleness and subjectivity that stem from these topics. Beyond debates of efficacy and predictability that lie in quantitative methods, one can also profit from an exploratory prompt first. From that, subsets of data containing each channel were merged to form a complete set of word data that would base both a longitudinal bank that cuts across time and several geographies.

Besides, several cross-sectional attributes allow the perception of the same topic or event in words repeated by distinct creators and their lenses. Trans controversies and backlashes, new debates triggered by media coverage, and questions from the audience should pop up in videos produced within the same timeframe. All the content was transcribed, translated into English, and analysed using a Python application that calculated their latent topics via LDA and word distance. The analyses yielded scores based on word coherence, uniform distribution, and corpus distribution. These items offer no base for a more profound reflection on their statistical value except to anchor the discussion on the emphases found on trans YouTube and how the words hint at the connection between topics reflexive of shared or distinct interests among the creators.

In the following sections, I flesh out the results from this series of word clouds and LDA analyses conducted on this transcribed text sample. The word sample ($n = 101.897$) appears contextualised from a global perspective: the summative weight of all videos. It also offers space to discuss the local emphases and their relative differences to counterparts in other languages and countries. First, I present an analysis based on the word clouds. It should help visualise stressed points and annotate their context in each video. Secondly, topic modelling analysis sees the position of these terms relative to others, their coherence and exclusivity. These sub-sections work on grasping the absences in this debate and how specific conversations appeared in trans YouTube both from a global, English-speaking perspective and lesser-known, local contexts.

Vocabularies of trans YouTube

Content creation, overall, has been subdued to a general perception of algorithm-based visibility and

paced interventions on TikTok. These types of videos have allowed Trans fact-checking or rebukes just after the headlines provoke controversy on Twitter or other social media. Non-binary CopsHateMoe has launched a mini-documentary titled JK Rowling's His- tory of Transphobia. The same narrative is true for other creators seen as adversarial or enemies against trans-inclusive policies. Lesbian YouTuber Arielle Scarcella has come as another frequent mention in these rebuttals due to her agenda against many of the so-called progressive trans, including the equal recognition of trans women as women. Her pursuit of antagonising popular trans speakers directly, by using their images as avatars or using their videos' excerpts, is a step beyond the viewpoints associated with the so-called Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERF) group. Scarcella has been accused of engaging in debates and battles aimed at delegitimising and personalising cri- ticism of rival YouTubers such as Noah Finnce. Like these mini YouTube wars, many other creators have turned against other trans creators seen as transphobes or right- wing sympathisers. In the U.S., this segment of trans YouTube has come out as Republican and trans, gathering names such as Blaire White and Buck Angel. The recurrence of terms connected to these disputes involving several online person- alities is common to all English-speaking channels. When YouTuber Calvin Garrah 'fat- shamed' another YouTuber, Brennen Beckwith, this led to the latter's going 'closeted,' a slang for Beckwith vanishing from the Internet. Allegedly, Beckwith only re-emerged online with videos three years later. In this highly concentrated set of interests, political rivalries mingled with arguments such as mental health and trans health in general. Hence the popularity of terms such as blockers, hormones, healthcare, children, puberty, surgery, and co-related others.

‘(...) A diagnosis of gender dysphoria may be appropriate. The distress is typically a combination of anxiety, depression, and irritability gender dysphoria can often lead to the development of mental

illnesses like anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. People with severe gender dysphoria may experience serious long-lasting symptoms' (...)

Zooming out also becomes essential for seeing creators outside the Anglosphere. Words in the graph appear less concentrated around topics that relate to cultural differences, private issues, and diverse ways of naming oneself versus using political language. Often, times, creators are echoing preoccupations that completely escape common threads on social media. For example, when analysing the Ros4 channel in Portuguese, it becomes clear that trans and transvestite are not interchangeable for her but a trigger for self-reflection on the condition of a trans person. LGBT, community, rights, country, and Brazil enshrine immediate issues that concern that creator. Such readings of her own reality do not trend on English-speaking social media pages. The strong presence of LGBT, a globalised term in more usage than queer, reveals how local queerness may not always call itself queer, but resort to other epistemological waves not shared by other trans folks based in the West, for example.

Therefore, another aspect of non-English speaking content relates to the affordance of repertoire that engages with the trans debate happening on a global level. While aware of trending topics, non-English speaking creators have provided more insight into their daily lives locally than demonstrated awareness of the series of backlashes mentioned earlier. These local vocabularies generally address policy issues and the oppression of trans people in smaller cities. As it happens in the sample in Portuguese, the Russian channel amalgamates less obvious terms such as understand, church, transgender, and person, to mention specific trans debates of theirs, as far as the Spanish channel dwells more on health care and medical transition topics. These channels are preoccupied with how to frame trans issues from a more practical perspective instead of placing transness as a political struggle that happens at the showbiz level, for example. It is worth noting that most discussions extracted have also approached media transphobia based on conducted interviews and auto-biographical stories, not quoting from the media or departing from the week's big news.

This dialogue with mainstream society or lack thereof can appear less problematic in the Taiwanese channel Allie Liao. Most data from this creator appear as understatement related to trans issues. The topic of transition, for instance, is waved through with generic terms. Reassignment, surgery, what, why, own, maybe express concerns about the transition process while not bringing any political dimension to this critical step. This creator frequently films travel blogs or live streams from what seems to be her room. By doing so, she skips the political positioning of other YouTubers. By contrast, on the other side of the world, YouTuber Rosa interviews another trans woman recently discharged from jail in Brazil. In Russia, emphasis is placed on ideas of transgender individuals being over-sexualised or seen as escorts by mainstream society. In sum, this prioritisation of local agendas in the global south over viral or backlash-focused media coverage resonates with the Taiwan-based creator. Allie Liao has actively covered annual rituals such as the Chinese New Year from a trans person's viewpoint. Words such as reassignment, surgery, more, should, own, and can't denote a frequent emphasis on fitting into her immediate environment but from a beauty or personal care perspective. Words such as Taiwan, Taipei, and Taichung confirm the channel's inclination to travel vlogging in local destinations.

These varying emphases certainly stem from distinct affordances, whether legal or socioeconomic availabilities, which creators mirror in their vocabularies. All trans creators who are closely aligned to Western, Anglophone media participate in this economy of visibility and community much closer to an ideal of profiting from YouTube in commercial terms. It comprises competition, ripostes, and politics in which either trans allyship or transphobia is always at stake. Non-Western YouTubers in Brazil, Russia, and Taiwan prioritised each region's vernacular and immediate action on transition or fitting in. This amounted to less attention to trans politicisation, as noticed in the less prominent clusters of media coverage, celebrities, and show biz seen in Western creators. Next, I advance to show the roots of these word repetitions by studying word positioning and relationships identified in the Latent Dirichlet Allocation method (LDA).

Analysing trans topics on trans YouTube

As a more sophisticated method for text analysis, Latent Dirichlet Analysis (LDA) can find patterns in words articulated in their natural form. In the last section, stop-words, slang, and the concurrent use of vocabulary may have hindered more detailed explanations of how words appear for speakers and why creators have chosen to employ them. Here, words are measured according to their distance from one of the other groups of words, and common associations of words in several languages were assigned topic's names. To ease the

understanding, make sense of these topics, and allow a more critical outlook, topic titles were assigned based on the closest keywords identified (Table 1).

As Table 1 demonstrates, subtle intersections between topics deserve further attention. Some of them may overlap, e.g., medical procedures and hormones. However, not all trans YouTube revolve around these conversations or framings. Instead, many nuances depend on the dialogue creators and their audiences are having at the time. Despite all the constraints from excessive commercialisation or algorithmic censorship, the trans topics analysed here provide a mix of public service and identity-related discussions, besides addressing the dangers against the community. The streaming wars identified here refer to the frequent clashes identified either within the trans community or against non-trans individuals who comment on them. Imminent or not, personal or not, these disputes exist to various degrees of criticality, cite multiple actors outside of the trans community, and vary according to their location.

Table 1. Topic names according to keywords found in LDA analysis.

Number	Topic's name	Top keywords (sampling: Gibbs)
1	Transition	people, sex, transition, transgender, trans, different, dysphoria, social, often
2	General impressions	like, people, know, don't, ant, think, really, that's, one, time
3	Health issues	don't, good, ill, today, can't, save, talking, keep, start, public
4	Clashes within the trans community	video, calvin, sort, gonna, opinions, bad, yeah, non-binary, brennen, hate
5	Beliefs	it's, don't, yes, already, something, everything, I'm, say, life, God.
6	Hormones	trans, people, puberty, woman, kids, access, care, women, used, blockers.
7	Medical procedures	operation, everything, surgery, didn't, vagina, sex, would, hospital, one, reassignment.
8	Body changes	well, year, person, testosterone, hair, going, everything, super, put, change.
9	Clashes outside the trans community	trans, people, Rowling, transphobic, tweet, women, sex, transgender, men, woman
10	Identities	non-binary, you're, they're, identity, coming, yeah, transphobic, guy, lesbians, love

Let's take the coherence index, for instance, a high coherence index (>0) means the number of times a group of words appear together in a document (Röder et al., 2015). In this case (Figure 3), the topic with the maximum score is Clashes Within the Trans Community. This index shows us how mentioning names such as Brennen and Calvin connected to controversies involving these YouTubers, who were protagonists of disputes and accusations. The same goes for identity, another topic with an expressive coherence index that anchors in keywords such as transphobic or lesbian. It shows that a small range of words can base a whole set of conversations that make sense or react

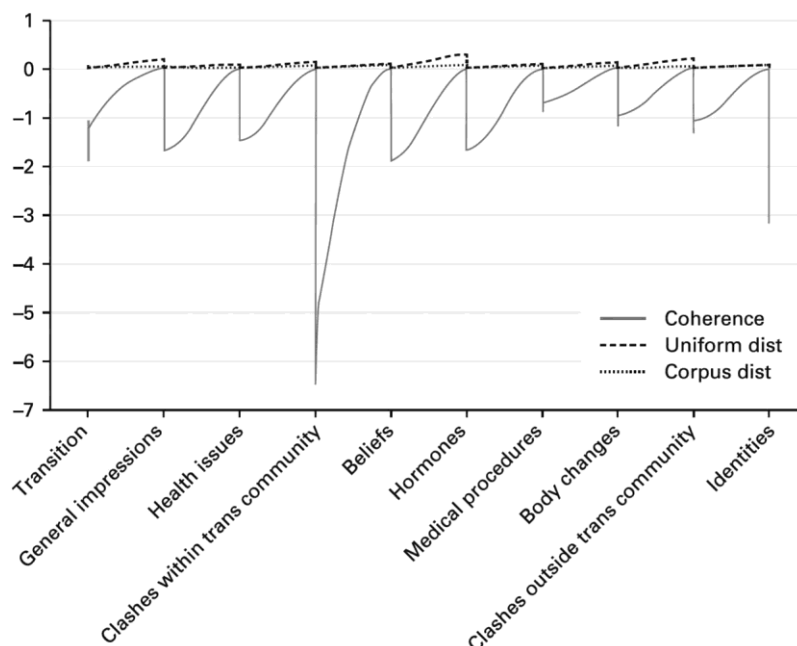


Figure 4. The most repeated terms according to corpus distribution (>0).

‘I came up with this word everything, which is cool and great [laughter]. There was a moment with a psychologist when I had a different personality. (...) There are some more channel drugs that block the production of testosterone, and they are very difficult for the body to give it a go. (...) From what time after the start of taking hormone replacement therapy, the chest begins to grow, and hair disappears for everyone. Everything, individually, everything depends on your age’

‘I’ve ever seen so it will just depend on your body. Obviously, try to do everything that’s within your power to try and minimise stretching and listen to what your surgeon recommends (...)’

‘You noticed when it was one year for the first year of testosterone like a rollercoaster, they change a lot of things, and you become a totally different person but when you are two years old well things are more stabilised if everything is more normal what happens (...)’

‘Well, the first year, I wanted to change everything. I used minoxidil so that it [hair] would grow faster, it let me wash them for a super long period of time. I decided to look masculine. I lost weight very fast to be better. I still did not want to have surgery on everything.’

On the other hand, this research has also tried to understand the occurrence of exclusive words (<1). The identities topic concentrates the highest concentration of unique words in a topic (Figure 5), with transphobic, non-binary, and lesbians ranking high in this criterion. Following this, one sees Clashes Outside the Trans Community as the second topic carrying the most significant number of exclusive words such as a tweet, Rowling, and transphobic. These terms denote a substantial preoccupation in reacting to and debating issues that arise from mainstream media controversies. As in Humphrey (2016), trans audiences are sensitive to backlash. Such is the case of contentious exchanges involving writer J.K. Rowling on Twitter about the latter’s opinions on public policies for trans people. Third, the body changes topic accumulates exclusive words such as testosterone, year, hair, and super ranking high. As discussed earlier, these words attest to much material documenting one’s transition phases. The categories with fewer exclusive words appear as Health Issues, General Impressions, and Transitions. While statistics relating to exclusivity here can indeed find limitations, similar words can also appear in other topic categories. Regardless of the intent, these

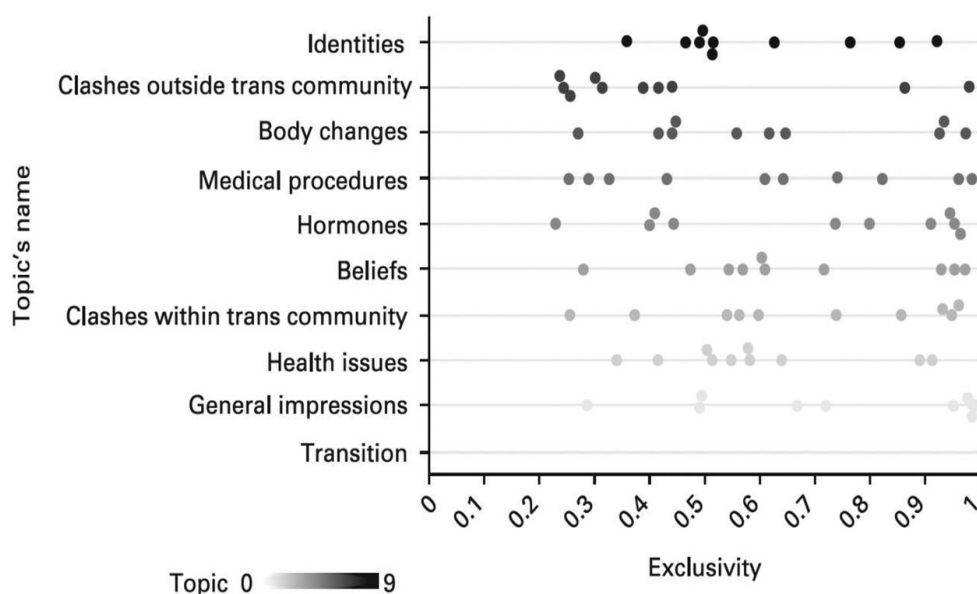


Figure 5. Trans YouTube topic as per exclusivity index (<1)

repetitions can show, for instance, how speakers are ‘transing’ their terms (Koch-Rein et al., 2020). That means, to appropriate language from one episode of trans life and metaphorise its application to describe another unrelated fact. Topics that scored less in exclusivity, such as Transition, in which dysphoria, transition, and different figures are exclusive occurrences, signal the aim of narrating facts of life chronologically, but, perhaps, less purposefully. Another possible interpretation of the remaining topics with the highest score of exclusive terms, namely, Identities, Clashes Within the Trans Community, Body Changes,

and Medical Procedures, relates to creators closing ranks around some debates, making them more specific and less subjective. They can articulate a joint discourse that purports to represent them to outsiders. At the same time, Health Issues, General Impressions, and Transition reserve less of a defensive stance from them or words with less relatable potential are employed. In the latter's case, exclusive words such as want, think, and know are likely to feature in conversations with their viewers about broader subjects.

The main gain from understanding exclusivity in this scenario is fortifying the perception of using these words as more discursive power in the trans community. In effect, word usage confers to Trans YouTube an ability to articulate priorities and name opponents or potential partners. By giving gravity to highly exclusive words such as hormones or kids, puberty, and blockers, these channels anticipate much of the legal or societal challenges against them. For example, the issue of puberty blockers crowns a whole discussion that crossed transmedicalism, repeated in at least three of the languages researched. Although an agenda against the compulsory use of hormones has been growing (e.g., Preciado & Despentes, 2020), it was not much of a priority for trans creators. Alas, one could hypothesise that the low exclusivity scores in transition are down to the lack of uniformity in how transition is accepted and operated internationally. From the dream of affording surgeries to the possibility of a non-medical transition, these topics reflect what Berberick (2018) saw as the paradox of trans visibility, where imagining transformed bodies and contemplating one model of trans existence taps into distinct forms of societal acceptance or refusal of trans communities.

On the one hand, whether nearing consensus or not, one could argue that fracturing terms and their multidirectional nature can nurture the community with groups of ideas instead of homogenising them around the static interface of YouTube. As I discuss next, despite the clashes presented here, these findings introduce us to new possibilities for trans online spheres, as much as a recent diversification of topics and priorities exists across several geographical locations.

From trans YouTube to broader avenues of expression

Both methods allowed for a deeper insight into the array of topics about trans life in the West and a few non-Western contexts. Unlike the expectation of sameness that YouTube often rewards (Wolf, 2016), the evidence showed a few differences across these contexts. If common themes included transition and health care, the data has also shed light on the attention paid to distinct levels of trans politics, with non-Western content much more directed to local life. Remarkably, the diversification in trans YouTube and an evolving forest of trans language mark another step towards an emancipatory trans sphere online, notable since the early 2000s (Dame-Griff, 2023). Aware of the vast constraints that can still affect trans-created media, this research reinforces that essential networks of knowledge and intimacy thrive on the steps of past trans creativity (Horak, 2014; Tortajada et al., 2021).

As Raun (2016) saw visual elements as critical for trans self-representation, mostly linked with legacy performative acts, language appeared as a viable element to track these new affordances and struggles in this as on other platforms. More research on the attempts to reverse the use of derogatory words and images against the trans community could unveil a new range of successful ideas that have enhanced trans creators' ability to vocalise change. In line with past episodes of trans leadership with pioneers such as Sylvia Rivera on multiple fronts (Enderle, 2020), creators can still wrestle against problematic mainstream media presentations while probing other agendas. As this research showed, radical lines of thought and ideology have not stopped trans insertion in debates sponsored by a heteronormative society. Eventually, the potential of online spaces to generate sophisticated trans debates comes from within the community, from which broader trains of thought can influence other media outlets and publics. Future research can take on this diversity of trans debates to invest in contextualising language with creators' labour and welfare needs, which remain less evident to an audience increasingly eager for their content.

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