

# IROCAMM.

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW  
OF COMMUNICATION  
AND MARKETING MIX

the mainstream review  
on communication

VOL. 5, N. 1

[institucional.us.es/irocamm](http://institucional.us.es/irocamm)

<https://revistascientificas.us.es/index.php/IROCAMM>

# VOL. 5

# N. 1



**PUBLISHERS**

University of Seville

**PUBLISHING LOCATION**

Seville – Spain

**E-MAIL AND WEBSITE**

[irocamm@us.es](mailto:irocamm@us.es) / [gloria\\_jimenez@us.es](mailto:gloria_jimenez@us.es)

<http://institucional.us.es/irocamm>

<https://editorial.us.es/es/revistas/irocamm-international-review-communication-and-marketing-mix>

**ORIGINAL DESIGN**

LA HUERTA

[www.lahuertaagencia.com](http://www.lahuertaagencia.com)

**ISSN**

2605-0447

**DOI**

<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM>



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IROCAMM - International Review Of Communication And Marketing Mix is a biannual academic journal published in digital format. Since 2019 it publishes issues in the months of January and July each year.

Average time for the review process: 30 days. And, in any case, the evaluation periods shall not exceed 6 months.

Once accepted, the text is published in the section IN EDITION waiting for the closing of the issue.

### INDEXING

EVALUATION SYSTEMS: Latindex (Directory, Catalogue v. 2.0 38/38 criteria and journals online), Dialnet Métricas, MIAR, ERIHPLUS, Dulcinea, REDIB, Academic Resources Index, Cite Factor.

DATABASES: DOAJ, Google Scholar, DRJI.

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**IROCAMM**  
**International Review**  
**Of Communication And**  
**Marketing Mix**

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2022 YEAR

Vol. 5(1)

Biannual journal

Published in Seville (Spain) by EUS  
(Editorial Universidad de Sevilla)

ISSN: 2605-0447

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## The communication of sexual diversity in social media: TikTok and Trans Community

La comunicación de la diversidad sexual en los medios sociales: TikTok y la Comunidad Trans

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes the communication of sexual diversity in social networks, based on the analysis of ten accounts of influential Spanish speaking users, members of the trans community, on the TikTok platform. In addition to showing humor and dance videos, this network has also become a communication tool for all kinds of groups, including the LGTBI+ community and the trans community. The videos posted by users, in which they talk about issues related to the transition process are offered not only to people interested in the subject, but to all kinds of public, which causes an effect of normalization and visibility that is not found on other platforms, where this content is only consumed mainly by other trans people or people interested in the subject.

### Keywords

Dysphoria; LGTBIQ+; social networks; TikTok; transgender.

### Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la comunicación de la diversidad sexual en las redes sociales, a partir del análisis de diez cuentas de usuarios influyentes de habla hispana, miembros de la comunidad trans, en la plataforma TikTok. Esta red, además de mostrar vídeos de humor y de baile, se ha convertido en una herramienta de comunicación para todo tipo de colectivos, incluyendo la comunidad LGTBI+ y la comunidad trans. Los vídeos colgados por los usuarios, en los que hablan de temas relacionados con el proceso de transición se ofrecen no solo a las personas interesadas en el tema, sino a todo tipo de público, lo que provoca un efecto de normalización y visibilidad que no se encuentra en otras plataformas, donde estos contenidos sólo son consumidos principalmente por otras personas trans o interesadas en el tema.

### Palabras clave

Disforia; LGTBIQ+; medios sociales; TikTok; transgénero.

#### IROCAMM

VOL. 5, N. 1 - Year 2022

Received: 11/10/2021 | Reviewed: 25/11/2021 | Accepted: 22/11/2021 | Published: 31/01/2022

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2021.v05.i01.07>

Pp.: 83-97

e-ISSN: 2605-0447

# 1. Introduction

Every year in the month of March, when the anniversary of the creation of the World Wide Web is celebrated, Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of the web, writes an article in the World Wide Web Foundation on the state of the web. In the article published in March 2020, Tim Berners Lee (2020) focuses on gender inequalities in Internet access, with special emphasis on the fact that the Internet is not working for women and girls in a large part of the world, as well as for minority groups including LGTBQ+.

Tackling online gender inequality will be a core priority for the Web Foundation through 2020 and beyond. We'll continue to research online harms and policy gaps, to work to close the gender digital divide, and to advocate for policies that empower women. (Berners-Lee, 2020)

This objective proposed by the World Wide Web Foundation contrasts with the generalized idea of the web, and more specifically of social networks, as a playful space for communication in which nothing important happens beyond the videos and photographs shared among members.

Social networks have become a space for political and social activism as various authors have studied (Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Pérez Zúñiga et al., 2014; Rovira Sancho, 2017) by giving voice to numerous collectives, especially political ones and all kinds of social movements.

This paper is about how TikTok, a very young social network, both for the time it has been active and for its target audience, in which mainly humor, and dance videos are uploaded, has become an effective communication tool for the LGTBQ+ collective, especially for trans men and women, who, in their accounts, normalize their experience and give visibility to the whole community.

The purpose of the study is to analyze TikTok as a communication tool for the normalization and visibility of the trans community, integrated in the LGTBQ+ collective, for which the activity of ten accounts in Spanish of representative users of this collective will be analyzed. These users, who are not activists or declared members of any association or institution, include, among other contents, in their TikTok channels, videos in which they answer questions, respond to comments or speak openly about their experience as trans men or trans women. In TikTok there are numerous accounts that identify as trans persone, but that does not mean that they are accounts of activists or people committed to the trans community. We can distinguish between accounts with content mainly related to activism or information from the trans movement and accounts that do not provide any content related to the trans community. All the accounts analyzed in this work are personal, they do not belong to associations or institutions, so it is very common that, even in accounts with more committed content, humorous videos, dances or TikTok own challenges are mixed with other videos that offer useful information for trans people or respond to all kinds of questions raised by other users.

The activity in social networks of the trans community has been constant in recent years, especially on YouTube. On the one hand, associations and institutions have had a presence in networks and, on the other hand, some members have shared their experiences in social media (Haimson et al., 2015; Krueger et al., 2015). In the case of associations and institutions, the most used networks have been Facebook and Twitter, while YouTube and Instagram are the networks most used by users who report their transition process in first person (Horak, 2014; Southerton et al., 2020; Tortajada et al., 2019).

It is important to highlight how a large part of the community that had been created on YouTube around the trans movement has migrated to TikTok and how the protagonists are now younger. A change in trend is observed that evolves from YouTube channels to TikTok accounts, so that, while on YouTube trans people tell their past experience, from the point of view of a transition already completed (Miller, 2019), in TikTok there are younger protagonists who tell their experience in the present, during the transition process.

Social networks also fulfill an informative objective for certain groups, which are not reflected in traditional media, for example the LGTBI + group. A few years ago, this function was provided by YouTube, but right now it is much easier to find trans testimonials on TikTok, more than on other social networks.

In this way, social networks become minority public spaces to represent the opinion of members of social groups subordinates, among which are workers, women, gays and lesbians (Fraser, 1990).

Fraser introduces the concept of «subaltern counterpublics», based on Jürgen Habermas's concept of public opinion, to refer to «parallel discursive spaces where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn it allows them to formulate opposing interpretations of their identities, interests and needs» (Fraser, 1990, p. 67), adding:

In stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training groups for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. (Fraser, 1990, p. 68)

This concept of subaltern counterpublics, which has been applied to content contributed on trans-themed YouTube accounts (Jenzen, 2017; Tortajada et al., 2019), does not apply to TikTok, since most of the comments and users of these accounts are not part of the trans community, but are cisgender people, i.e. those whose gender assigned at birth matches the gender the individual identifies with, who do not even have to have shown interest in the topic for TikTok to show them these types of videos. In this case, the way TikTok's algorithm works offers trans-themed videos to any user, simply for the curiosity that these videos may generate in an occasional viewer, by showing in the "for you" section those videos that he/she wants to promote on the platform. The result is that, compared to other social networks such as Twitter or Facebook, the followers of trans users' accounts are much more heterogeneous, which completes the objective of making known the problems of trans people outside the community and at the same time these readers generate doubts and questions that feedback the production of new content in the channel, with the result of increasing the visibility of the collective and a normalization effect.

Horak (2014) refers to an evolution of the audience on trans issues in the generalist media in which the subject is discussed for a cisgender audience, while trans accounts on YouTube seek to access trans users. On TikTok, the opposite happens to YouTube, instead of generating informative accounts for community members the opportunity provided by this network is used to promote visibility and standardization through direct communication with cisgender users who come across this content by chance.

Three stages, or generations, could be proposed, depending on the contributions of the trans community on the Internet. Based on the data collected by Professor Laura Horak, there is a first generation of content prior to the birth of YouTube in which blogs and videoblogs abound, a second generation after the popularization of YouTube from 2005 and now a third is being considered generation of young authors speaking to an equally young audience on TikTok.

Horak writes that the appearance of the Internet helped create communication spaces for trans people, but that the appearance of YouTube in 2005 will be the trigger for a change in the expression of this community that will now have the possibility of broadcasting videos globally. In TikTok, this diffusion is much greater since now the channels are not only visited by members of the community, but by all types of public.

Horak (2014, p. 572) collects a typology of trans-themed videos on YouTube, among which stands out what she calls hormone time, in which trans people show a physical evolution of how the use of hormones causes a physical change in their bodies, we even found testimonies such as Miller (2019) who recognizes that he himself, a trans man, was looking for information on YouTube videos to find out about testosterone treatments. However, although this type of informative videos will be found on TikTok, the most common type is the response to comments or questions, a much more direct and participatory style than the videos that are usually found on YouTube.

Horak proposes a division of YouTube videos into five categories that is perfectly applicable to the videos that appear on TikTok in the accounts of trans people:

1. Daily or weekly update
2. Autobiographical stories about childhood or the moment of admitting to being different
3. Explanations of important concepts or ideas from the trans experience
4. Tutorials on interesting skills for the collective
5. Comments and responses

An important reference that will appear when analyzing the videos is the presentation of the torso in the case of trans men, something that Raun (2012) already analyzed in his doctoral thesis and that he studied from various points of view. For example, we find this reference in many videos showing the naked torso of trans men and the scars resulting from the mastectomy operation.

Many trans male vloggers appear bare-chested in their vlogs (after having top-surgery) for supposedly educational purposes (showing other trans people how it looks and how the scarring heals or for showing off the results of their workout program) and / or simply because they seem to take great pleasure in their new chest. On the one hand, the vlogs become a didactic technology offering education on the sculpting of the chest. On the other hand YouTube becomes an important part of a trans male visual culture, offering numerous representations of how trans male bodies should or could look. (Raun, 2012, p. 170)

These videos have great educational and informative content for a community that searches the Internet for medical information about the transition process from other people who have already gone through it (Miller, 2019).

On TikTok, these naked torso videos that proudly show scars appear in a large number of accounts, even many trans tiktokers have joined a challenge that consists of showing the scars that each one has. There are also numerous queries and doubts on TikTok regarding the surgery, types, price, exercises to develop chest and shoulder muscle building or even anecdotes that happened when other people see the mastectomy scars.

It should also be noted that many of these videos are censored, due to complaints from users who feel offended by the images of the partially naked body of trans users. In an interview with tiktoker @theeagle96 - Noa Xavier, in August 2020, comments that they have censored some videos in which he appears without a shirt: «TikTok likes the trans theme because it very viral, but not so much the visibility of bodies that break with the normative in a free and unabashed way».

By November 2019, TikTok had already become the third most downloaded app in the social networking sector, behind only WhatsApp and Messenger (Chapple, 2019), which can be considered the fastest growth of any other social network to date, and the first social network not created in the U.S. with a relevant global presence (Kemp, 2019).

Since January 2020, TikTok is the sixth most used social media globally. The third, below Facebook and Instagram without counting WhatsApp, Messenger and Wechat, which are messaging applications, according to data from the Digital 2020 Global Overview report of the consultancy Datereport (Kemp, 2020). At the end of September 2021, the company announced on its website that they had reached one billion users (Tiktok, 2021).

We must also consider the global nature of TikTok and its Asian origin, 60% of its users live in China (Dawley, 2020), something that affects the way the network is perceived in many countries that, like The United States, where its content is seen as a potential danger to the population (Haunt et al., 2020).

However, success on TikTok does not pay the same as other networks that are more profitable. The *tiktokers* that are successful on the platform are trying to transfer traffic to networks in which they can obtain a greater economic benefit, such as Instagram or YouTube. There are few cases like @charlidamelio, who with almost 127 million followers achieves millionaire income thanks to TikTok, although not directly from the platform but from its ability to influence its community of followers.

## 2. Objectives and methodology

This work presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis based on the accounts and videos on TikTok of a selection of ten influential users, who claim to be part of the trans community and use the Spanish language. The study focuses only on users whose content provides information on issues related to the trans community, that is, they create videos answering questions, responding to comments or sharing experiences, both to help other members of the group, as well as to provide visibility and normalization to society in general.

Additionally, an interview has been conducted extensively with @theeagle96, one of the tiktokers selected to have first-hand information on some aspects related to their activity on social networks, relationship with users or experience with the platform, among others. Likewise, a corpus of two hundred videos created by users has been generated to analyze the most repeated structures and themes.

Getting to the selection of these accounts and their videos is a complex process that is described below, in case it may be of interest for future research on TikTok, a platform that is not characterized by offering open access to your data.

The first step is to use the general search engine of the mobile application and perform several searches, testing with various terms until the most popular tags are found, in order to find out which ones concentrate the most videos. In the analysis of the contents, the tags included are also considered to check that there are no tags that have not been analyzed.

Nine searches have been carried out, with the following results:

- #Trans: 5.4 billion views
- #Transboy: 917 million views
- #Transgirl: 427 million views
- #Chicotrans: 32 million views
- #Chicatrans: 12 million views

The data provided by these searches confirm that one of the main problems posed by the research on TikTok is the lack of adequate tools to deal with the abundance of information offered by the platform with millions of users, videos, tags, trends, etc. It is also observed that on TikTok there is more content related to trans men than trans women, in a ratio of almost two to one.

The TikTok search engine allows you to sort the results based on the following filters:

- **Users:** List of accounts that include the search term, in the user's name, account name or description.
- **Videos:** List of videos that include the search term, in the description of the video or in its tags.
- **Hashtags:** Selection of tags that include the search term and the number of videos included in each tag. Clicking on each of the results returns a list of videos that include the tag.
- **Popular:** It is not a filter, but a page in which popular videos appear separated by users and by tags, here there is no clear criterion for the presentation of the results, but it is understood that they all have many views and interactions.

To prepare a list of one hundred users who meet the criteria established for the analysis, people who declare they are trans people and publish content in Spanish, we start working on the #trans search on the popular page. Users are first analyzed and then tagged videos are reviewed.

After this process, we have the names of one hundred users who at some point have tagged a video with the hashtag #trans, or have written trans in the description of their profile or as part of their name, but it does not mean that those users are people trans or that their channels regularly upload trans-themed videos, with the profile we are looking for, so it is necessary to create a spreadsheet to increase the data for each account. An Excel file is then created for each account with the following fields:

- **Account name:** It is the name by which the user is recognized in TikTok
- **User name:** The platform allows the use of an extra field for the name that many users use to put their real name or anything else.
- **Gender:** It has been chosen to distinguish only between male or female based on the information declared in the description or obtained from the comments made by each user on their channel, without taking into account the non-binary or fluid options.
- **Activism brand:** Not all users who use the trans tag in a video or who declare themselves as trans people in the description of their account, have content that conforms to the filter that has been proposed in this work, generation of informative content about the group or response to questions and comments, so that with this brand you can separate those accounts that, being trans people, do not generate videos with this content.
- **Indicate in the description being a trans person:** Yes or no, depending on the information provided in your description.
- **Indicate in the description belonging to the LGTBIQ + group:** Yes or no, same as the previous field.

- **Country of origin, if known:** It is not a fundamental value for the study, but it can give some interesting value, for example, knowing that the country that contributes the most content in Spanish is Spain, with 28% of users, but once we delete the accounts that are not activists, this value increases to 36%.
- **Other accounts:** Many users use multiple social media platforms and even have strategies to shift traffic from one to another to gain a greater degree of influence.
- **Followers:** The number of people who follow each user.
- **Following:** The people the user is following.
- **Like:** Total sum of acceptance marks that all videos have had. These data on followers, following and likes are very important when calculating the level of influence of each user since they are used to obtain percentage values between the times a video has been seen with respect to the number of followers or the relationship between visits to a video with the amount of likes it has achieved.
- **Full text of the description:** In the descriptions, users provide data of interest, such as the way in which they decide to communicate to their audience that they belong to the trans collective, which may be through the inclusion of the trans flag, made up of five horizontal bands with the colors blue, pink, white, pink, blue; highlight the letter T over the acronym LG (T) BIQ +, the #ftm or #mtf tags, declare the pronouns you prefer to use: He-Him or She-Her, or finally the expression trans boy or girl, as well as any other text explanatory.

After completing this spreadsheet, the database is filtered by the value "activism" to remove accounts that do not include trans content, which does not mean that the resulting accounts are of people who dedicate their TikTok account to trans activism. But now, amongst other content, they include a large number of videos on trans issues. Of the original hundred users, fifty-two remain.

The next step is to select only the ten people who have videos on their channel that are dedicated to:

1. Answer specific questions and doubts posed by users in comments to their videos.
2. Respond to comments made on their videos. These are not questions, but rather the author decides to respond publicly to certain comments on video.
3. Make videos in which they tell their own experiences related to their life as a trans person or with their transition process.

The selection of these ten people is carried out by analyzing the videos of their channels, an analysis that is used to save the 200 videos with which the list of topics and content structures will be prepared.

From this selection of users, a new database is created with the following fields:

1. Username
2. Number of followers
3. Sum of all the likes of their videos
4. Total number of videos uploaded
5. Sum of views of all videos
6. Sum of all written comments
7. Sum of all times a video has been shared
8. Average likes per video
9. Average comments per video
10. Average times a video has been shared



In order to obtain this data, professional tools must be used, since TikTok does not provide all this information and counting each of these data would take a considerable amount of time that would make the research unfeasible. A professional application called Exolyt specialized in TikTok analytics has been used, which can be accessed from the Internet.

As a result of all this process, the ten user accounts that meet all the requirements for the analysis are obtained, ordered by number of followers.

1. @danielarequenaest
2. @planettas
3. @marcosdurnmateos
4. @alex\_millan\_
5. @itsnoahgomezz
6. @elbudistaconflow
7. @ axelsoto87
8. @ophcourse
9. @ theeagle96
10. @srayuridia

From this list, the profiles and videos of each channel are carefully analyzed with special interest in the following data.

1. Number of views
2. Number of likes
3. Number of shares
4. Number of comments
5. Content of comments

As a complement to the procedure described above, an email interview was conducted with one of the tiktokers who is part of the list of the ten users studied. Between August 27 and 31, 2020, an exchange of emails took place with the tiktoker @theeagle96, Noa Xavier, who collaborated selflessly with this research.

## 3. Discussion and results

In this section we will first analyze the accounts and the content provided by each of the ten selected tiktokers. Secondly, a thematic and structural categorization of the videos studied will be made.

Most of the data that is analyzed is constantly changing so that the number of followers, videos, interactions, etc. that are provided at the time of writing the work will change a lot over time, it is even changing while the analysis is being carried out, so for the purpose of the study all the data corresponds to the photograph taken on September 3, 2020.

### 3.1. User analysis

In the following table you can see the advanced data of the 10 accounts analyzed. The first part includes the basic data: number of followers, total likes, total videos uploaded, total views of the videos and total comments. The second part shows the total number of times the videos have been shared and the averages of likes, comments and shares for each video.

Table 1. Statistical data of the analyzed accounts

Account	Followers	Likes	Videos	Total views of videos	Total comments
@danielarequenaest	127,200	745,600	39	18,600,000	15,400
@planettas	77,700	1,100,000	144	8,100,000	13,600
@marcosdurnmateos	61,400	687,300	63	7,200,000	10,300
@alex_millan_	56,700	657,500	133	5,200,000	7,500
@itsnoahgomezz	51,000	2,000,000	327	18,800,000	46,000
@elbudistaconflow	34,900	613,000	311	7,100,000	17,300
@ axelsoto87	13,300	204,800	287	5,600,000	14,000
@ophcourse	9,200	86,700	68	458,800	1,500
@ theeagle96	6,100	166 800	1,700	2,600,000	11,700
@srayuridia	6,100	137,000	1,300	1,800,000	8,800
account	Total video share	Avg. Likes	Avg. Comments	Avg. Video share	
@danielarequenaest	17,500	19,100	394	448	
@planettas	5,500	7,900	95	38	
@marcosdurnmateos	5,100	11,200	167	82	
@alex_millan_	4,100	5,300	60	33	
@itsnoahgomezz	9,200	6,300	141	28	
@elbudistaconflow	5,200	2,200	62	19	
@ axelsoto87	1,600	716	49	5	
@ophcourse	994	1,300	22	15	
@ theeagle96	1,800	102	7	1	
@srayuridia	1,300	1 03	7	1	

Source: Author own elaboration

**@danielarequenaest:**

It is the account with the most followers of the list of 10 tiktokers, more than 100,000. Among the 100 accounts selected in the first place, there are those with the most followers, but they do not usually include trans informational content, so their followers are strangers to this topic. In the description of the profile, the transgender condition of its author, Daniela Requena, diary of a transgender girl, and the purpose of the account, posed as a diary that recounts her experience, is clear. Although it does not say so in the profile, it is Spanish.

Daniela is a trans woman who only has 39 videos on her account. The first video is from March 5, 2020. The first videos do not add anything special in terms of content, they are typical TikTok videos doing dances or repeating trends.

Until August 26, she published 11 videos without any reference to trans content, although in the comments she did talk about her status as a trans woman. On August 28, she published a video of a storytime or autobiographical account in which she tells how she had a relationship with a boy and did not tell him that she was a trans woman until two months later. The video, which does not conform to Horak's classification for videos created by trans people, is presented as a debate and represents a radical change in the generation

of content on TikTok by this user. The comments skyrocketed reaching 4,614 interactions, 1,326 shares were shared and more than 50,000 people clicked on likes. It should be noted that this video is the first in which Daniela speaks directly to the camera. From here, the video production activity intensifies, the foreground is maintained, and the topics focus on answering questions and comments about her condition as a trans woman with sex reassignment, that is, in addition to hormonal treatment, vaginoplasty surgery has been performed. In other videos, she directly encourages users to ask questions that will be answered in other videos. The questions of the users are related to hormonal treatments, the vaginoplasty operation, the price of the operation and about the need or not to inform their partners about their status as a trans woman, all of them very controversial topics that TikTok promoted a lot during the month of September 2020, so that with less than six months old and only 39 videos published, of which the last 28 have been uploaded in six days, Daniela has more than 100,000 followers and 700,000 likes.

On Instagram, Daniela's account is 12 years old and even with hundreds of entries, it barely reached 6,000 followers. Getting a high number of followers on TikTok is relatively easy, if the platform considers that the videos of an account are attractive enough to be liked by most users (Anderson, 2020). This concept of attractiveness is also known as engagement (Ballesteros, 2018) and refers to the ability of multimedia content to connect with the viewer in a way that makes comments, expresses approval or shares it. The rapid growth of accounts presenting controversial content or bordering on TikTok's level of censorship for offering sexual content has been heavily criticized by many TikTok creators who see their content being relegated to very low positions compared to other videos allegedly created only to get thousands of comments and increase the number of followers and thus the level of influence of its author.

Daniela has managed to create a video style that brings together all the ingredients to be placed on the cover of TikTok and reach millions of users, by speaking openly about her sexuality as a trans woman, fostering debate and exposing controversial issues, such as whether the Spanish Seguridad Social must pay for gender change operations.

Most of the comments on Daniela's videos are positive and support her public exposure and informational work. Although contributions from other members of the trans community appear in the comments, the vast majority are texts from cisgender people who have found Daniela's videos on the main TikTok thread by chance, which also increases the number of hate messages and because of consequently the level of interaction of the rest of the commentators.

The average values of comments, likes and shares for each video are very high, but this is because it is an account with very few videos and those videos have been uploaded in a very short time and at the same time, they have been very successful, which it has created a lot of interest in the account, increasing the number of followers very quickly. This effect of increasing followers in an explosive way affects the views of the rest of the videos on the account. Someone sees a video of Daniela by chance, accesses the profile and looks for similar content in the rest of her videos, as in this case almost all the videos are of a very similar profile, some type of interaction is generated.

### **@planettas:**

Gabriel Sepúlveda, a Puerto Rican living in Chile, defines himself as: I like to dance, I'm a transboy. The first videos were uploaded in March 2020 and were choreographed. Gabriel's account consists of dance videos along with answers to questions that people ask him on topics related to his experience as a trans man. In total, it has 144 videos, of which less than half are dedicated to trans issues, although the trend is that the frequency of publication of trans-themed videos increases over time.

During the month of March, he uploaded several videos doing choreographies, which have some positive but inconsequential comments, but he also uploads two videos in which he declares his trans condition and stands out for having many more comments than the rest of his videos. The first of these videos is a photographic evolution from his childhood to today, including images of his mastectomy surgery, the second is very similar to the first, but includes a voiceover of him making a presentation. During the month of April, he continues to upload dances and some videos of repetition of trends, the only variation are two videos in which he says that the name is going to be officially changed, again these videos are the ones with the highest number of comments.

The big change in the account happens on May 1, 2020, the date on which Gabriel uploads two videos entitled frequently asked questions that people ask me because I am a trans boy, in which he answers directly to the camera some questions that he has read in the comments to his videos. During the rest of the month of May, he hardly uploads videos, resuming the usual activity during the months of June and July in which

practically only the typical TikTok music videos are found. Informational videos are becoming more common, for example: "Things you shouldn't ask a trans person", "Phrases that they once told me because they belong to the LGTBIQ + community" or "How I told my family that I was trans", published on the 16th, July 17 and 18, 2020 respectively.

Gabriel's videos do fit into Horak's video classification, for example in the categories "Autobiographical stories about childhood", "The moment of recognizing being different" or "Explanations of important concepts or ideas from the trans experience", in addition to "Comments and responses", as will be discussed below.

On August 8, he began to make videos in direct response to comments received on his videos. Until now those videos only responded to varied comments on the same topic, but now the answer is to a specific comment made by a specific person. This type of video, which resembles a doctor's office, is one of the most popular on TikTok, thanks to a platform functionality called "video response to comment" that facilitates the creation of new content from the comments of the videos.

Gabriel's account is very informative on issues related to the transition process, talks about transphobia and especially about his experience, with the aim that it can serve as an example for other people who are in a similar situation.

On his Instagram account he has more than 50,000 followers and although there are many comments on his posts, the level of interaction is not like what can be found on TikTok. The content on Instagram is photos or videos of dances, so the informative videos and responses to comments are only found on TikTok or on its YouTube channel, where it uploads weekly original videos created specifically for this platform, in which it also exceeds the 50,000 subscribers.

#### **@ marcosdurnmateos:**

In the profile of Marcos Durán's account we can read transboy, Spain and his Instagram handle. Marcos's account is very similar to Gabriel's, both have a very informative approach to their accounts with the aim of clarifying doubts to the cis community and at the same time helping other trans people with the account of their own experience. His first videos are from March 2020. He has published 64.

In the first four videos there are no references to their trans condition, neither in the content nor in the comments, however, on April 24, 2020, a video with only music and lettering is uploaded called "Things they tell me for being trans" that exceeds 900,000 views, 1,700 comments and more than 40,000 likes. In this video, the labels say:

But are you already a "complete" man?

Are you really trans? You don't look like it.

What was your name before ???

What constitutes a catalog of topics related to the group: operations, cispassing and what the community calls deadname, that is, the name given at birth, which in many cases generates dysphoria.

In the following days, he continues to upload videos without voice over, with lettering on trans issues, he even publishes a video with images from the past in which you can see his evolution since childhood. On May 12, 2020, he uploaded his first comment response video, in which he combines the capture of several comments in the same video. He speaks to the camera directly, but uses a filter to alter the voice. On May 26, he began to reply to direct comments, in the foreground and speaking to the camera without any type of filter.

If Gabriel does a lot of choreography videos, Marcos usually does trend repetitions and playbacks. Videos of responses to comments become common from the end of June to the point of becoming the most repeated content structure on your channel. Although he continues to make all kinds of videos, amongst the most recently uploaded content, information videos or responses to comments are already the majority.

The main topics are the same as in Gabriel's account: transphobia, hormonal treatment, beard, mastectomy, genitalia, gender dysphoria, among others, with a focus for both cisgender users and people who are in the process of transition.

On Instagram, he has 11,000 followers, he does not upload videos, only photos and the entries have few comments.

#### **@alex\_millan\_:**

Alex Millán. He uses his full name and in his profile, he says that he is a trans boy, that he is from Bogotá and he links his Instagram account. He has 133 videos on TikTok and has over 55,000 followers. His account

is from January 2017, during that year he only uploaded five videos and they are all dances. In 2018 the frequency of his videos increases, but he continues to challenge, trend and music videos, with minimal impact on likes and comments. There is no reference to the trans community, nor their belonging to it. You have to wait until the end of October 2018 to find the first video in which he mentions following a testosterone treatment. In the video you can see several photos of him from different moments in the past, while in the audio a countdown is heard. There are no labels and the text says:

"I am almost 11 months on Testosterone and I am very proud of what I have accomplished."

The video has 10,000 views, but only four comments. The most important thing about this date is that it is the moment when he begins to publish content related to the trans community.

On June 23, he made his first voice video to respond to a direct comment. In this video, he tells how it was when he explained to her family that he was trans.

In Alex's account there are few videos responding to comments, most of the trans content that he contributes are music videos without voice in which the information is provided by graphic elements superimposed on the video. For example, there are several videos denouncing transphobic attitudes or the typical video of people's reactions when they find out that they are trans. The greatest value of Alex's account, which does not do information work like that seen in the Daniela, Gabriel or Marcos accounts, is the visibility he offers as a trans man and the feeling of normality that his videos convey.

#### **@ itsnoahgomezz:**

Account of Noah Gómez, from Spain, in her profile she defines herself as a trans girl. She has 51,000 followers and more than 300 videos uploaded. The origin of her account is in February 2018. She has many likes on her videos.

Most of the videos uploaded to her account deal in some way with the trans issue, prejudices, the transphobia of her environment and her daily life as a trans woman in the process of transition.

However, the way all this content is displayed is very different from how other TikTok users do it. Noah uses TikTok's challenge and trending structures to tailor his message to the platform's style. Amongst its content stands out the large number of haters and hate messages that this young tiktoker has to deal with.

Her first reference to being trans is a video from June 2019 in which she compares a recent video with a video of hers to see how much it has changed and uses the hashtags #trans and #transgender. The vindictive and more activist content begins in March 2020. Although she has in his account almost the entire catalog of videos that have been seen in other accounts of trans people, there are only two videos in which he responds to comments by looking at the camera and talking to his voice. There is no practical or informative content related to the transition process, it is something that you consider to be part of your privacy and you do not discuss it with your followers.

Although by number of followers Noah is in the middle of the table, in terms of total number of likes, number of comments and number of video views she is in first position. Her personal commitment and the large number of videos related to the problems and prejudices that a trans person faces has generated a community around her that supports and attacks her in equal parts, hence the intensity of the interaction that surrounds each uploaded video. Although at first glance, Noah's account looks like that of any 19-year-old girl, full of music videos made in her bedroom, in its content it has a content of protest and fight for the rights of trans people, which reaches very directly younger TikTok users.

#### **@ elbudistaconflow:**

He is the first on the list that does not give his last name in the profile, only his first name, Ian. Nor does he make any reference in the description to the LGTBIQ + community or to belonging to the trans collective. His profile data only includes links to his Instagram, a website where he sells his designs and his Younow channel, where he broadcasts live. Although the description does not say anything about his nationality, in some videos he says that he lives in Valencia, Spain.

The first video for the account was uploaded in August 2016, although the activity does not begin until the end of 2019.

He has 35,000 followers and a very high number of comments and video views. The most characteristic thing about this account is that at no time does Ian intend to make an activist account, his videos are the usual TikTok, dances, challenges, trends, etc. However, between May and June 2020 he began to answer comments



about trans issues and created a lot of controversy and confrontation with users, to the point of not responding to these comments. Ian at no time denies his status as a trans person, what happens is that he considers that being trans does not have to be a point of information or that he has to dedicate his channel to answer the doubts or questions that any user could publicly ask him.

In the month of June, he made four close-up videos looking at the camera explaining how he sees himself as a trans person. This video series begins with the following sentence: "Hello, my name is Ian, I am a man, and I am also a trans person." The purpose of these videos is to respond to the comments people leave on their videos, some of which are intended to please, but have the opposite effect. For example, Ian complains that he continually receives "you can't tell" comments.

Although this account has very few videos in which the trans issue is addressed, those that can be seen serve, for the purpose of this study, as an example of a user who considers that his belonging to the collective does not have to condition his presence in networks and that just as other users are not asked about their sexual preferences, he does not have to explain anything either.

### **@ axelsoto87:**

In his profile we can only read his full name, Axel Soto, and the phrase "I'm just a visible trans man." Although he does not put it on the profile in several videos, he says that he is Mexican. His YouTube account is also linked but has not been updated since he started on TikTok. The style of the YouTube channel, created in 2015, does coincide with the research on the trans community in Youtube (Tortajada et al., 2020) and the concept of subaltern counterpublics, since the channel is presented as a space for information for the trans collective. In the first videos, he informs that the hormonal treatment process is about to begin. During the 30 videos that are on YouTube you can follow his entire transition perfectly documented. Switching from YouTube to TikTok means stopping targeting the trans community and starting to speak to a general audience.

The date of the first video on the account is April 25, 2020. He is a very active user who uploads more than two videos a day on average. From the first video, he makes clear his belonging to the trans collective, in fact, this account can be considered an activist account, since all the videos deal with this topic. On May 7, 2020, Axel uploaded a video without voiceover, but with lettering, called "Why am I doing TikTok?" whose content is the following: «To give trans visibility and to teach about the issue and try to end transphobia and homophobia. More love, less hate.

The objective of Axel's channel on TikTok is to give visibility to trans men, in almost all the videos the author appears with a naked torso and when asked why he responds that he is proud of his body and the process that has led him to the present moment. There are very few videos in which he speaks directly to the camera or responds directly to comments. Most of his production is music videos, without voice over, in which in the purest style of TikTok he uses lettering and effects to publish his message. Axel talks about his past, posts photos of his youth, speaks clearly about the operations he has undergone and creates content to promote pride in being a trans man.

Most of the responses to direct comments are for transphobic messages, to the point that in some videos Axel complains about the transphobia that exists in Latin America and that he personally suffers because of his condition as a Mexican trans man.

Axel's account has just over 13,000 followers, a fairly discrete number, but much higher than the 600 he has on YouTube. His content is not controversial, nor is it scandalous, which is why it does not usually appear on the cover of TikTok and that greatly limits the massive arrival of users to its videos.

### **@ophcourse:**

Ophelia Pastrana. In the description of her profile she calls herself: «The Explainer. Physicist, transgender / LGBT +, media girl and former guru ». She is Colombian by birth although she lives in Mexico, she does not say so in the profile, but she does comment on it in some videos. She uses her first and last name and makes a clear reference to the trans community and the LGTBIQ + community in her profile.

Ophelia is a communicator in technology and science, she is also a humorist and has created a character, called the Explainer, which she uses to deal with various issues, for example the trans issue. She has a lot of social media experience and creates very well produced content. She has an updated YouTube channel in which she gathers more than 75,000 subscribers. The content she uploads to YouTube is more professional than what can be seen on his TikTok account, where humor and trans activism predominate.

The first video of the account is from June 11, 2020. It does not refer to trans people, neither in that nor in the following 18, although she really is a well-known person who has never hidden that she is a trans person. The first videos are humorous, very TikTok style, vertical video, use of musical audios, challenges and trends.

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#### **IROCAMM**

VOL. 5, N. 1 - Year 2022

Received: 11/10/2021 | Reviewed: 25/11/2021 | Accepted: 22/11/2021 | Published: 31/01/2022

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2021.v05.i01.07>

Pp.: 83-97

e-ISSN: 2605-0447



The first trans reference is from June 15 and is also humorous. During her first days on TikTok, she uploaded an average of 3-4 videos a day.

Most of her content is humorous, it is like a complement to her YouTube channel where she deals with more serious topics, always with a casual approach. In August, she begins to publish content where she begins to talk about prejudice, gender ideology or transphobia, with a communicator approach, something her followers like a lot.

With just 9,000 followers and 68 videos uploaded, Ophelia Pastrana is not a TikTok product, clearly her target is in other networks, but she brings a different point of view to TikTok with a discourse of normality and visibility of trans women that can be inspiring for many people. Ophelia is upbeat in her videos and always maintains her sense of humor. There are hardly any hate messages in the comments, which are usually supportive and admiring. Ophelia, even as a trans woman, does not show herself as an example of a person who has experienced a liberation situation in the first person, but speaks to us as a confident woman who knows what she is saying.

The number of videos on trans issues, as with other accounts studied, increases in frequency as time goes by.

### **@ theeagle96:**

Noa Xavier is the author with the highest production of all that have been analyzed in this work, more than 1,700 videos during the 19 months of his account, with an average of three videos per day. In his profile we can read his first name, without surnames, references to the LGTBI + community, trans, and Harry Potter.

In addition to the data that can be seen in the videos on this account, we also have the information obtained from an extensive interview that this author gave us.

Noa Xavier's channel, active since January 2019, uses several different video formats. Many of his videos have the style of a digital diary in which he tells on camera what he is going to eat, how he has done in class, the series he watches, the music he hears, in other videos the author establishes a « dialogue » with his followers, comment on what they write to him or discuss their points of view.

Noa Xavier's account, without being the one with the most followers of the study, is the one that includes the most trans content of all those analyzed, and it can also be considered a fundamental account for studying the trans presence on TikTok. If it was stated above that Ophelia Pastrana was not a TikTok product, here we are faced with the opposite case, Noa Xavier, dances, sings, challenges, records in his bedroom, in the bathroom, on the street, speaks to the camera, answers comments, makes duets, videos with labels and effects. In Noa Xavier's account we not only find the entire catalog of what can be done on TikTok, but also, and this is the most important thing, the complete account of the transition process of a trans person, told in the first person, not as a scientific experiment, but as part of a vital process, to the point that it would be very easy to edit all these videos and put together a single two-hour video that would make sense on its own.

Together with Noah Gómez, they are the youngest people in the studio and those who are still immersed in the process of transformation, which does not prevent them from showing themselves confidently and without complexes before their audience, an attitude that undoubtedly contributes to normalization. of trans people and to increase their visibility.

Noa Xavier, regarding his trans-themed video creation activity, uploads two types of videos. On the one hand, videos with practical information for other trans people, for example, legal issues, changes in ID, hormonal treatment, use of the binder. On the other hand, he talks a lot about aspects related to trans activism, such as transphobia, sexuality, the LGTBIQ + movement or gender dysphoria, among others. These videos are aimed at all types of audiences, in fact there is a lot of debate in the comments of these videos.

Noa Xavier's channel is a very clear example of how TikTok, with its style of direct and first-person videos that encourages discussion in the comments, facilitates the visibility of trans people.

### **@srayuridia:**

The last account analyzed corresponds to a Spanish Puerto Rican trans woman, although based in the United States. In her profile she defines herself as trans, feminist, Latina and lesbian. She signs with her first and last name, Yuridia García. Yuridia also has an extensive production with 1,300 videos uploaded to the platform. It is also one of the most recent accounts, June 3, 2020, and the one with the highest average daily publication, with an average of 14 videos per day. During the month of June, she posts more than 200 videos, but it is not until June 30 that she posts her first video looking and talking to camera, talking about harassment of women. In the videos published during June and July, Yuridia did challenges and synchronized audios and songs. In almost all the videos she proudly shows her womanhood and her body, without complexes. In these videos,

she almost never speaks, although she uses labels in which she makes it clear that she does not hide her status as a trans woman, always from a positive, optimistic point of view and even with a point of humor. As of August, the videos in which she addresses herself directly to the camera begin to be more common and she begins to tell personal matters, she talks about his origins, when she felt the need to start the transition, her sexual orientation or the hormonal treatments she is following.

One of the topics that Yuridia deals with the most is the vindication of the rights of trans homosexual people, she also talks a lot about the rights of Latin women and the situations of harassment to which they are subjected.

It has a very low level of comments and likes. Only some entries have more than one hundred comments and usually coincide with videos in which insults appear, to which Yuridia responds directly in other videos, which is shaping the channel towards a space in which there are more and more videos in which the author speaks directly to the camera, to her audience, and produces fewer dance videos and song synchronization. Despite these hateful messages, Yuridia continues to maintain the same spirit in her videos and continues to show herself without complexes and with the same pride that could be seen in the first videos of the channel.

## 4. Conclusions

The concept of subaltern counter-audiences that was seen in some studies on trans Youtube channels hardly appears in TikTok. From analysis of the content of the comments, the most successful accounts have most cisgender followers.

Most users give their first and last names publicly, they do not hide, quite the contrary, they openly show themselves as trans men and trans women.

The accounts are not created to become referents of the trans community, nor to practice activism. The process happens little by little, as confidence in front of the camera increases. The videos evolve from dances and songs to, first, non-audio videos with signage and then close-up videos speaking directly to the camera. Almost all the accounts analyzed have been active for less than a year or it has been during the last year that the uploading of trans content has intensified.

Most TikTok users who previously had channels on Youtube stop updating them. Those who create a Youtube channel from their TikTok experience do not manage to emulate on Youtube the success they have on TikTok and end up stopping updating or updating less frequently.

The same applies to Instagram accounts. Almost all the TikTok users studied have Instagram accounts, but they do not have the same success as on TikTok and many try to divert traffic to Instagram to increase their level of influence.

TikTok proves to be an ideal tool for the analysis of communication on sexual diversity, due to the freedom and spontaneity with which the members of the platform express themselves, opening new possibilities of study in the field of social communication.

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**Citación:** Olivares-García, F. J. (2022). The communication of sexual diversity in social media: TikTok and Trans Community. *IROCAMM - International Review Of Communication And Marketing Mix*, 5(1), 83-97. <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2021.v05.i01.07>



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IROCAMM- International Review Of Communication And Marketing Mix | e-ISSN: 2605-0447

**IROCAMM**

VOL. 5, N. 1 - Year 2022

Received: 11/10/2021 | Reviewed: 25/11/2021 | Accepted: 22/11/2021 | Published: 31/01/2022

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2021.v05.i01.07>

Pp.: 83-97

e-ISSN: 2605-0447







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