How trans and gender non-conforming people are represented in online news media

1. INTRODUCTION

• Trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people represent one of the most marginalized groups in society and their unemployment rates are three times higher than cisgender people’s average.
• Cisgender people tend to derive stereotypes and mental representations of TGNC individuals from the media, since they lack direct contact with them\(^4,5\).
• Media coverage can therefore work as parasympathetic contact and improve or worsen people’s attitudes towards minorities\(^6\).
• This study analyzes the way TGNC people are represented in online news media across 3 countries that vary in their ranking on LGBTI rights: the UK (11/49 European states for achieved LGBTI rights\(^5\)), Sweden (9/49), and Italy (35/49).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• Which words are used to describe trans people?
• Are there differences between countries with different legislations?
• Is the headlines’ valence positive or negative?
• Which words are related to positive and negative sentiments? Which ones weigh more?

3. DATA & METHODS

• 830 headlines (Sweden = 300, UK = 300, Italy = 230) were selected from the 3 most read news websites for each country, starting on the 31\(^{st}\) of August 2021 and going backwards. The headlines had to include one or more of the following words: trans, transgender, transsexual, transphobia, transphobic, transition, transvestite, non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer.
• Both data-driven (text mining) and theory-driven (content analysis) methods were used to investigate the headlines.
• Text mining analyses were conducted following Silge and Robinson’s procedure\(^9\).

4. ANALYSES & PRELIMINARY RESULTS

After Swedish and Italian headlines were translated into English with online software DeepL, text mining procedures were applied in R.

1. Word clouds. Graphical representation of the most frequently used words in each language.
2. Frequency by sentiment. Histogram of the frequency of the headlines’ sentiments derived from Bing lexicon (integrated in R package tidyr and sentiment dataset).
3. Most used words by sentiment. Histograms of the most frequently used words in each language divided by sentiment (Bing lexicon).

5. CONCLUSIONS

• Figure 1: in all three countries TGNC-related discourse gravitates almost exclusively around trans women. The UK shows a lot of sport content, Italy features crime often, Sweden discusses the gender binary, transition, the military.
• Figure 2: general representation of TGNC people in online newspaper headlines is significantly more negative than positive in all countries.
• The negative representation is not inversely proportional to the degree of legal protection the country offers to TGNC people; instead it appears to be equally distributed.
• Figure 3: terms with negative sentiment are often related to crime and/or violence. Also, while the situation is more balanced in UK and Sweden, the frequency of the most used negative word in Italian is more than 4 times higher than the frequency of the most used positive one.
• Negative stereotypical content can be observed in the words that link TGNC people with crimes and violence (attack, killed, dead, murder, etc.). Positive words refer to pride, winning, support, but also to stereotypical gendered sexual characteristics (hot and beautiful). This could imply positive acceptance of trans women as long as they “pass” as sexually desirable women.

REFERENCES