

Clicked, Viewed, and Commented: Mapping Digital Public Perceptions of Queer Coming-Out Process on YouTube India

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Abstract

With the digital media proliferation over the years, platforms like YouTube videos have evolved as primary sites for queer individuals to articulate their coming-out experiences facilitating their visibility while also stimulating public discourses and dialogues in the process. Nevertheless, the analysis of ‘comments’ posted by the viewers in response to the ‘coming out’ process of queer persons in YouTube videos has received scant academic inquiry. The present research seeks to bridge the gap by qualitatively assessing the ‘comments section’ of 03 popular YouTube coming out videos wherein each video documents the narratives of 03 differing identities, viz., a male-to-female transitioning person, a gay individual, and an androgynous person. Considering the intersections of the coming out process, popularity of the content, diversity in queer identities, and high engagement with an overall of 1,226 comments, the 03 YouTube videos were purposively selected for analysis. Additionally, by drawing on Becker’s labelling theory, the research attempts to examine how viewers engage with diverse queer identities through their comments. As illustrated in the study, the comments are categorized as affirmative, stigma-ridden, or ambivalent among others which demonstrates how viewers engage in the public labelling process, informing broader perceptions of queer identities. However, the findings further suggest that not all labelling processes fit into the dyadic binaries of ‘acceptance’ or ‘rejection’, and instead manifests as protean responses to queer identities demonstrating the dynamism of public perception. Hence, the study underscores on how digital public perceptions view, negotiate or seek to control queer identities in contemporaneous India.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, LGBT India, Coming Out Processes, YouTube, Qualitative Content Analysis, Online Public Perceptions, Analysis of YouTube Comments