Gender Bias, Stereotypes and Diversity on Digital Platforms

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Abstract

Social media offer young people opportunities to socialize and experiment with identity formation, but also give rise to the gendering of digital practices. Gender bias and the platformization of gender performance concur in the masculinization of platforms that are considered most valuable in marketing terms, in gender stereotypes and hate speech towards anything that does not conform to the norm. In addition, these digital platforms are spaces for self-expression and reflection with a great potential for uncovering inequalities and reverting them. This research focuses on exploring this ambivalence in digital practices and on informing on when gender boundaries are weakened and when the inequalities are strengthened. A Likert-type scale was developed with questions on the perception of masculinity or femininity in the production of six important influencers in Spain. The sample was made up of 622 young people between the ages of 14 and 30. The results show that some platforms substantiate gender stereotypes, and that the policies of platforms such as Twitch or Discord favor certain identities and ideologies that privilege the identity declarations of cisgender, white, heterosexual men. In short, the gendering of platforms creates power relationships with cultural and economic implications, and so the underlying gender biases of their content regulation policies merit in-depth study.

Keywords

Gender Bias, Stereotypes, Diversity, Platformization, Gender Identity, Social Media, Social Networks, Influencers, Youth, Young People, Inequalities, Digital Practices, Twitch, Discord, Tiktok, Instagram.

1. Introduction

Although social media are usually considered 'neutral spaces' for the identity construction of young people, the

symbolic capital of digital platforms is permeated with norms and values shaping gender practices and performances of their users (**Van Dijck *et al.***, 2018; **De Ridder; Van Bauwel**, 2016). Within the research on toxic technocultures, characterized by a reactionary conception of gender, sexual identity, sexuality and race (**Massanari**, 2017), the main contribution of this work lies in analyzing the differences between users of different social media regarding their degree of identification with the gender performances of six Spanish influencers. Given that research on gender bias on platforms is essential for creating inclusive and egalitarian digital spaces, this study contributes to knowledge about the potential of digital platforms to challenge gender stereotypes and give way to the construction of counterpublics (**Araüna *et al.***, 2019).

This approach, attending to both the risks and the opportunities of social media with regards to identity construction, was consolidated in the first decades of the new millenium (**Livingstone**, 2009). Several studies highlighted the gendering of identities and digital practices on social media (**Ringrose; Barajas**, 2011; **Manago *et al.***, 2008), regardless of whether these were more reflexive or more dramaturgical (**Livingstone**, 2009; **Willem *et al.***, 2012). Reflexive practices have to do with the creation of identities and communities in safe virtual spaces (**Cavalcante**, 2016; **Jenzen**, 2017). In these spaces, self-presentations are created which give meaning to gender, sexuality and desire (**Burgess *et al.***, 2016; **De Ridder; Van Bauwel**, 2015). At the same time they allow to combine intimate personal exposure with breaking marginalizing stereotypes of those who do not fit in with the norms (**Barnett**, 2015; **Hiebert; Kortes-Miller**, 2023; **Raun**, 2010), thereby promoting public debate (**Blanco-Ruiz; Sainz-de-Baranda**, 2018; **Jenzen**, 2017; **Tortajada *et al.***, 2020) and opening an opportunity for reinvention (**Bates *et al.***, 2020; **Raun**, 2010).

In contrast, dramaturgical practices have to do with an idealized and normative presentation of the Self: in this regime, self-presentations are performances in order to show our 'best version' (**Livingstone**, 2009). This does not mean that these practices are free of any reflection, but they are used to strengthen exhibitions of hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity, as associated with the commercial presentations of popular culture (**Siibak**, 2010; **Tortajada *et al.***, 2013). In contrast with reflexive practices, which tend to question or challenge the established definitions of gender and sexuality, these dramaturgical identity performances are based on a normative look in order to gain social validation (**Gill**, 2009).

Additionally, all of these identity practices are not constructed in a vacuum but in digital contexts where teenagers and young people must negotiate with (technical) affordances they do not fully control and are often hostile. On the one hand, platforms disproportionately envisage and moderate marginalized groups (**Haimson *et al.***, 2021). Particularly women creators are underrepresented and suffer sexist attacks more frequently than men (**Döring; Mohseni**, 2019; **Wotanis; McMillan**, 2014). On the other hand, the affordances and policies of the platforms are gender-biased and damaging to women's interests (**Zolides**, 2021).

1.1. Gendered Platformization

In the tradition of cultural studies, the concept of «platformization» is conceived as «the reorganization of cultural practices and imaginations around digital platforms» (**Poell *et al.***, 2019). While initially the internet clearly had a democratic potential in terms of breaking privilege and traditional vertical power relationships (**Klonick**, 2018), privately owned digital platforms have now become important sites for regulating and disciplining contemporary production of meanings. The growing power of *big tech* –in detriment of public control– is taking place within a global trend of privatization of human interactions, as giant data infrastructures capitalize on the user's time, labour and attention (**Poell *et al.***, 2022), and only care about keeping the user on their platforms as long as possible. This affects women in more negative ways then men, as many of the companies behind the platforms are not only reluctant to protecting women users against misogynistic hate speech and online attacks, but are also failing the women workers that build and manage online social media networks (**Giugni**, 2022).

Platforms shape the public discourse and correlate with how the norms of a culture - especially a particular concept of sexuality - are established, using algorithms and moderation policies stating how user interactions must occur and how the contents must be presented (**Zolides**, 2021). The policies and affordances of these platforms, as stated in documents like the community guidelines and the terms of use, sanction and approve a particular state of affairs, an established order, as does a Constitution in the legal and political meaning of the term (**Gillespie**, 2010; **Cullen; Ruberg**, 2019). For example, despite Twitch' capacity as a space for community construction, personal expression and exploration of new frontiers in video games (**Ruberg *et al.***, 2019), its policies are biased towards certain identities and ideologies (**Zolides**, 2021). The language used in the community guidelines implicitly problematizes and sexualizes representations of femininity more often than those of masculinity, with reference to women's bodies, specific camera angles and certain clothing items (**Zolides**, 2021). This way, instead of disciplining bodies based on societal standards, the disciplining control of platforms is based on advertisements' suggestions for how to behave, constantly adapted in function of whether they are deemed 'successful' or not (**Bivens; Haimson**, 2016; **Cheney-Lippold**, 2011).

On this point, the study by **Ruberg** (2021) showed how the lack of specificity in the definition of the term «sexual content» in Twitch's terms and conditions implied that 'common sense' was applied in content moderation. In practice, however,

this 'common sense' meant the view of white, cis, heterosexual men. Research has shown that Twitch streamers who do not fit in with this gamer stereotype, like women, racialized and LGTBIQ+ people, are discriminated against on the platform (**Ruberg *et al.***, 2019). In order to promote diversity, inclusion and social justice, the underlying biases in platforms' regulation policies must be revised, given their real and immediate effects on users, especially women (**Ruberg**, 2021).

On the other hand, regarding opportunities, Twitch users with alternative sexual, gender and racial identities can create powerful personal brands that allow them to access a certain symbolic and financial capital, directly –through subscriptions and donations– or indirectly –through sponsorships and merchandising (**Zolides**, 2021). Given that platforms such as Discord and Twitter are also used by the streamer community as subcultures of Twitch (**Uttarapong *et al.***, 2021), attention should be paid to the development of the sexual orientation and gender identities of the users in these discursive spaces. A study by **Charmaraman *et al.*** (2021) observed that Discord, a platform originally designed for gamer communication (**Robinson**, 2023), was used more frequently by adolescents with non-normative sexual identities than heteronormative teenagers.

TikTok also shows a potential for the creation of support communities for marginalized and/or socially excluded young people (**Hiebert; Kortes-Miller**, 2023). Members of the LGTBIQ+ community find support on TikTok, where they may feel empowered and connect with other users with similar experiences (**Hiebert; Kortes-Miller**, 2023). In contrast with other platforms such as YouTube, TikTok's algorithm offers transgender content not only to those users interested in the topic, but to the public in general, which contributes to the social acceptance of trans people (**Olivares García**, 2022). On the other hand, Tiktok has also received criticism when it suppressed LGTBIQ+ contents (**Bacchi**, 2020; **Botella**, 2019), and its algorithm still plays an ambivalent role in creating contradictory identity spaces that support and reinforce the identity of the LGTBIQ+ movement, while simultaneously transgressing the identity of its users (**Simpson; Semaan**, 2021).

Finally, Instagram is clearly more prone to allow for the self-expression of dissident, non-normative sexual and gender identities such as lesbian (**Herrera**, 2018), trans (**Rutten**, 2018; **Jones; Lim**, 2022) and gay communities (**Moekahar; Amalia**, 2021).

This article looks at the gendered dimensions of platform economies focusing specifically on how entertainment interweaves with expertise of young people in the construction of contemporary sexual identities. In this context, social media give visibility to emancipatory discourses while simultaneously limiting the effectiveness of collective action (**Banet-Weiser**, 2018).

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions and hypothesis are presented:

RQ1. What role do specific social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Twitch and Discord) play in the construction of the sexual and gender identity of adolescents and young people?

RQ2. Do these social media platforms reproduce and consolidate normative patterns regarding sexual and gender identity, or do they subvert them?

Hypothesis 1. The Twitch user identifies with influencers who show stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity.
Hypothesis 2. The Discord user identifies with influencers who show stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity.
Hypothesis 3. The Discord user identifies with influencers who articulate discourse on non-normative sexual and gender identity.
Hypothesis 4. The TikTok user identifies with influencers who articulate dissident discourse on sexual and gender identity.
Hypothesis 5. The Instagram user identifies with influencers who present non normative sexual and gender identities.

2. Material and Methods

The research was carried out with a non-experimental descriptive quantitative approach through the application of quantitative techniques and tools (**Creswell**, 2012). More specifically, a survey was used as the research technique and a questionnaire gathering the data was used for analysis and discussion of the results.

For the questionnaire, six relevant YouTube video fragments were selected as stimulus: they dealt with sexual orientation, misogynist violence, gender identity and the normative beauty, featuring influencers of reference who had been identified as relevant in earlier studies (**Araüna *et al.***, 2019).

This work presents the results obtained from asking the participants on the different digital platforms about their degree of identification with the influencers in the selected video clips. The content of the video clips varied. *Dulceida* addresses her bisexuality in the video «Mi orientación sexual» [My sexual orientation]; *Isartvlog* explains the concept and the causes of violence towards women in «Violencia machista» [Misogynist violence]; *Enzo* shares his gender identity in the video «¿Qué es ser un chico FTM?» [What does it mean to be an FTM boy?]; *Un tío blanco hetero* defines himself as such [a white heterosexual guy], based on his sexual orientation and ethnicity, in the video «¿Por qué soy Un Tío Blanco Hetero?» [«Why am I a Straight White Guy?»]; *Koala Rabioso* rejects the gender binary in her video «¿Eres hombre o mujer?» [Are you a man

or woman?]; *Patry Jordan* talks about how to avoid «sleep wrinkles» in the video «Errores de belleza que deberíamos saber y que muchas cometemos» [Beauty mistakes we should know about that many of us make] (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sample of Analyzed Influencer Video Clips.

Influencer	Number of Subscribers	Link Video	Number of Views	Number of Comments	Duration
Dulceida	2,17M	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7aoarf_rpI&t=23s	3.754.046	6.023	6′15′′
Isartvlog	70.500	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMwyFPEX3OQ	35.838	344	12′41′′
Enzo	7.530	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ndcX15ckgw	34.432	89	5′26′
Un Tio blanco hetero	425.000	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QLViZgUTTg	532.265	1.369	14′02′′
Koala Rabioso	163.000	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VXVHrlZSRk	142.545	1.430	8′25′
Patry Jordan	2,81M	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkGXlZw3GAl	2.630.077	1.248	5′14′′

Initially, the contents of the questionnaire were validated by experts, and a pre-test study was administered to 50 participants. The reliability and internal consistency of het questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of α = .802, which is considered a good value (**George**, 2011). Because of the ordinal nature of the scale, the indexes of Composite Reliability and McDonald's Omega were calculated, returning values of .771, which is considered acceptable (**Hair *et al.***, 2009) and .851, considered good, almost excellent (**Ventura-León; Caycho-Rodríguez**, 2017). The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to confirm the validity of the construct gave a KMO coefficient of.63 for the two dimensions of the questionnaire, after verification of the significance of the Bartlett Test (p-valor = .000), which dismisses the similitude of the data matrix with the identity matrix.

Finally, the participants answered a Likert-scale-type questionnaire prepared *ad hoc* after an exhaustive review of the literature, to respond to the established objectives of the research. This tool was made up of 38 questions, seven on the sociodemographic profile of the participant and 31 Likert-scale-type questions scoring from 1 to 5 regarding their perception on the masculinity or femininity of certain images and videos by important influencers. After the fieldwork data, the reliability indexes were re-calculated, returning a Cronbach's Alpha of α = .871, a value which is very close to being considered excellent, a Composite Reliability score of.859 and a McDonald's Omega of .902, considered excellent.

For each of the dimensions of users' perception of the selected influencers *(Dulceida, Isartvlog, Enzo, Un Tio Blanco Hetero* [A Straight White Guy], *Koala Rabioso* and *Patry Jordan*), a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out with the data obtained in order to verify the validity of the model. Table 2 shows the resulting goodness-of-fit indicators.

Table 2: Goodness-of-fit Indicators for the Model Regarding the Dimension 'Masculinity/Femity'.

Video	Chi^2	gl	p-value	Chi^2/gl	TLI	CFI	RMSEA[IC]
Dulceida	1.660	2	.436	.830	1.003	1.000	.000[.000-.063]
Isartvlog	15.377	2	.000	7.689	.985	.995	.069[.024-.123]
Enzo	64.216	2	.000	32.108	.877	.959	.179[.135-.229]
Un Tio Blanco Hetero	73.953	2	.000	36.976	.942	.981	.196[.151-245]
Koala Rabioso	75.005	2	.000	37.503	.957	.985	.162[.117-.211]
Patry Jordan	4.884	2	.087	2.442	1.000	1.000	.000[.000-.079]

As seen in Table 2, most of the p-values of the Diagonal Weighted Least Squares (DWLS) estimator take significant values, indicating that the models fit well (**Beaujean**, 2014). In addition, the TLI and CFI values are all above .95, also indicating a good to excellent fit. Similarly, the RMSEA values are close to 0 or slightly above .1, indicating a good to moderate fit. Considering these indices, it can be affirmed that the proposed model is adequate.

2.1 Procedure and Treatment of the Information

The questionnaires were administered online using the digital application Google Forms. Through the web link and before completing the questionnaire, the participants were informed of the aim of the research and their right to abandon their participation in the study at any time. The participants accepted the university's privacy policy and gave their informed consent for their personal data to be processed in accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned policy. The data gathered were then processed and analyzed with the R free software statistical package (**R Core Team**, 2021). In order to find significant differences in the questions in accordance with sociodemographic variables, non-parametric tests were applied, as they are more robust for the detection of significant differences in ordinal data (**Ibáñez López *et al.***, 2022). Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used for independent variables with two levels and Kruskal-Wallis H Test for independent variables with over two levels (with a p-value inferior to .05 and a significance level of α = .05). The size of the effect was calculated using Cohen d and the eta squared respectively and the post-hoc was carried out with the Pairwise Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test with Bonferroni correction. These nonparametric tests act on the data median, although, for greater understanding of the analyzed data, also presented in the descriptive statistical tables are the mean and the standard deviation of same.

2.2 Participants

The sample was made up of a total of 622 teens and young people between the ages of 14 and 30 (M = 18.85 and SD =

3.18). The selected sample of participants is within the age range of the most active social media users in Spain (**IAB**, 2022; 2023; 2024). Regarding gender, a total of 312 participants identified as women (50.16%) and 298 as men (47.91%), while 12 people chose other options (1.93%). When asked about their sexual orientation 81.51% (n=507) stated they were heterosexual, 13.18% (n=82) indicated they belong to the LGTBIQ+ community and 5.31% (n=33) identified with other types of sexuality.

Table 3 shows the access and use of the main platforms reported by 622 participants (access and use at the time of completing the survey).

Table 3: Self-reported access and use of Social Platforms.

	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok	Twitter	Twitch	Discord
User	580 (93.25%)	489 (78.62%)	444 (71.38%)	273 (43.89)	171 (27.49%)	142 (22.83%)
Non user	42 (6.75%)	133 (21.38%)	178 (28.62%)	349 (56.11%)	451 (72.51%)	480 (77.17%)

With reference to teens and young people's access to and use of social media, 93.25 % use Instagram, followed by 78.62% using YouTube, 71.38% using TikTok, 43.89% using Twitter and the lowest percentages are Twitch and Discord users (27.49% and 22.83% respectively).

Table 4 shows the profile of participants in terms of identified gender and sexual orientation, taking into account their access and use of different social networks.

Table 4: User Profile Regarding Identified Gender and Sexual Orientation According to Access and use of Social Networks.

Social network	User	Identifies as Woman	Identifies as Man	Heterosexual	LGTBIQ+	Other
Instagram	Yes	300 (52.36%)	273 (47.64%)	475 (82.90%)	72 (12.57%)	26 (4.54%)
	No	12 (32.43%)	25 (67.57%)	30 (81.08%)	4 (10.81%)	3 (8.11%)
YouTube	Yes	222 (46.06%)	260 (53.94%)	396 (82.16%)	59 (12.24%)	27 (5.60%)
	No	90 (70.31%)	38 (29.69%)	109 (85.16%)	17 (13.28%)	2 (1.56%)
TikTok	Yes	250 (57.08%)	188 (42.92%)	358 (81.74%)	62 (14.16%)	18 (4.11%)
	No	62 (36.05%)	110 (63.95%)	147 (85.47%)	14 (8.14%)	11 (6.40%)
Twitter	Yes	140 (52.04%)	129 (47.96%)	216 (80.30%)	42 (15.61%)	11 (4.09%)
	No	172 (50.44%)	169 (49.56%)	289 (84.75%)	34 (9.97%)	18 (5.28%)
Twitch	Yes	30 (17.86%)	138 (82.14%)	139 (82.74%)	16 (9.52%)	13 (7.74%)
	No	282 (63.80%)	160 (36.20%)	366 (82.81%)	60 (13.57%)	16 (3.62%)
Discord	Yes	27 (19.42%)	112 (80.58%)	116 (83.45%)	12 (8.63%)	11 (7.91%)
	No	285 (60.51%)	186 (39.49%)	389 (82.59%)	64 (13.59%)	18 (3.82%)

With regards to gender in the use of the different platforms, the masculinization of Twitch and Discord stands out, as respectively 82.14% and 80.58% of the participant users identify as men, versus 17.86% and 19.42% as women (see Table 4).

3. Analysis and Results

Hypothesis 1. Twitch users identify most with influencers who show hegemonic male stereotypes.

Table 5 lists Twitch users indicating which influencers they have the best affinity with. In this sense, users reported that they identified more with *Un Tio Blanco Hetero* (M = 2.32; SD = 1.41), who clearly responds to the stereotype of hegemonic masculinity, as well as with *Isartvlog* (M = 2.06; SD = 1.21) and with *Patry Jordan* (M = 2.01; SD = 1.12). However, the identified less with *Dulceida* (M = 1.78; SD = 1.09), *Enzo* (M = 1.85; SD = 1.11) or *Koala Rabioso* (M = 1.92; SD = 1.16).

Significant differences were detected between Twitch users and non-users regarding identification with the influencers *Isartvlog* (W = 45051; p = .000; d = .30), *Un Tio Blanco Hetero* (W = 32456; p = .004; d = .35) and *Koala Rabioso* (W = 43816; p=.016; d = .23). Thus, Twitch users identify more with the discourse of *Un Tio Blanco Hetero,* while non-users identify more with the self-expression of *Isartvlog* and *Koala Rabioso*. Thus, hypothesis 1 is corroborated.

Table 5: Assessment of Videos by Twitch Users.

Descriptives					Significant Differences		
Video	User	*M*	*Med*	*SD*	*W*	*p-value*	*d*
Dulceida	Yes	1.78	1	1.09	42173	.051	-
	No	1.98	2	1.18			
Isartvlog	Yes	2.06	1	1.21	45051	.000*	.30
	No	2.44	2	1.29			
Enzo	Yes	1.85	1	1.11	36750	.313	-
	No	1.74	1	1.03			
Un Tio Blanco Hetero	Yes	2.32	2	1.41	32459	.004*	.35
	No	1.89	1	1.15			
Koala Rabioso	Yes	1.92	1	1.16	43816	.016*	.23
	No	2.20	2	1.21			
Patry Jordan	Yes	2.01	2	1.12	41441	.139	-
	No	2.17	2	1.20			

Hypothesis 2. Discord users identify most with influencers who show hegemonic male stereotypes.

Table 6 lists the identification results of Discord users. Again, these users indicated that they identified more with *Un Tio Blanco Hetero* (M = 2.37; SD = 1.44), *Isartvlog* (M = 2.06; SD = 1.21) and *Koala Rabioso* (M = 2.01; SD = 1.23), and less with *Dulceida* (M = 1.82; SD = 1.09), *Enzo* (M = 1.93; SD = 1.08) and *Patry Jordan* (M = 1.95; SD = 1.08). Regarding significant differences, Discord users identify more with *Un Tio Blanco Hetero*, who represents hegemonic masculinity (W = 28332; p = .000; d = .39). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is corroborated. It is also to be highlight that, in contrast to the expression of hegemonic masculinity, it is significant how non-users of Discord identify more with *Isartvlog* (M = 2.06; SD = 1.21; compared to M = 2.42; SD = 1.29), whose discourse deals with gender violence (W = 39527; p = .000; d = .28).

Hypothesis 3. Discord users identify most with influencers who articulate discourse on non-normative sexual and gender identity.

The results in Table 6 show significant differences only for *Enzo* (M = 1.93; SD = 1.08; compared to M = 1.73; SD = 1.04), who represents transsexuality, so hypothesis 3 is corroborated in part (W = 30194; p = .029; d = .20).

Table 6: Assessment of the Videos by Discord Users.

Descriptives					Significant Differences		
Video	User	*M*	*Med*	*SD*	*W*	*p-value*	*d*
Dulceida	Yes	1.82	1	1.09	36309	.201	-
	No	1.96	2	1.17			
Isartvlog	Yes	2.06	2	1.21	39527	.000*	.28
	No	2.42	2	1.29			
Enzo	Yes	1.93	2	1.08	30194	.029*	.20
	No	1.73	1	1.04			
Un Tio Blanco Hetero	Yes	2.37	2	1.44	28332	.000*	.39
	No	1.90	1	1.15			
Koala Rabioso	Yes	2.01	1	1.23	36734	.141	-
	No	2.15	2	1.19			
Patry Jordan	Yes	1.95	2	1.08	37454	.067	-
	No	2.18	2	1.20			

Hypothesis 4. TikTok users identify most with influencers who articulate dissident discourse on sexual and gender identity.

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics and inference tests regarding users and non-users of the TikTok platform. The users of this network feel more identified with *Isartvlog* (M = 2.34; SD = 1.28), *Patry Jordan* (M = 2.17; SD = 1.19) and *Koala Rabioso* (M = 2.11; SD = 1.19), while less with *Enzo* (M = 1.76; SD = 1.07), *Dulceida* (M = 1.95; SD = 1.15) and *Un Tio Blanco Hetero* (M = 1.95; SD = 1.19). In addition, as can be seen, there are no significant differences between TikTok users and non-users in terms of identification with these influencers. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is rejected.

Table 7: Assessment of the Videos by TikTok Users.

Descriptives					Significant Differences		
Video	User	*M*	*Med*	*SD*	*W*	*p-value*	*d*
Dulceida	Yes	1.95	2	1.15	37323	.243	-
	No	1.87	1	1.18			
Isartvlog	Yes	2.34	2	1.28	39256	.891	-
	No	2.33	2	1.28			
Enzo	Yes	1.76	1	1.07	40889	.451	-
	No	1.80	1	1.02			
Un Tio Blanco Hetero	Yes	1.95	1	1.19	42432	.128	-
	No	2.16	2	1.35			
Koala Rabioso	Yes	2.11	2	1.19	39950	.826	-
	No	2.15	2	1.23			
Patry Jordan	Yes	2.17	2	1.19	36509	.128	-
	No	2.02	2	1.16			

Hypothesis 5. Instagram users identify most with influencers who offer non-normative sexual and gender identities.

Finally, Table 8 presents the results of Instagram users and non-users. Participants who were users stated that they felt more identified with *Isartvlog* (M = 2.34; SD = 1.27), *Koala Rabioso* (M = 2.16; SD = 1.21) and *Patry Jordan* (M = 2.13; SD = 1.18), while less with *Enzo* (M = 1.75; SD = 1.02), *Dulceida* (M= 1.92; SD = 1.14) and *Un Tio Blanco Hetero* (M= 1.99; SD = 1.22). Hypothesis 5 is thus partially corroborated, as there is a variety in the answers, while the only significant differences are detected in the identification with *Koala Rabioso*, whose discourse deals with the gender binary (W = 9310; p = .017; d = .43).

Table 8: Assessment of the Videos by Instagram Users.

Video	User	M	Med	SD	W	p-value	d
			Descriptives			**Significant Differences**	
Dulceida	Yes	1.92	1	1.14	11774	.702	-
	No	1.95	1	1.36			
Isartvlog	Yes	2.34	2	1.27	11344	.442	-
	No	2.24	2	1.41			
Enzo	Yes	1.75	1	1.02	13321	.269	-
	No	2.07	1	1.40			
Un Tio Blanco Hetero	Yes	1.99	1	1.22	12724	.602	-
	No	2.19	1	1.47			
Koala Rabioso	Yes	2.16	2	1.21	9310	.017*	.43
	No	1.64	1	.96			
Patry Jordan	Yes	2.13	2	1.18	11677	.644	-
	No	2.07	2	1.24			

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In a society characterized by «the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around platforms» (**Poell *et al.***, 2019), this work focuses on the construction of the sexual and gender identities of teenagers and young people on these digital agoras. Responding to our first research question, this study has analyzed the role of platforms in the gendering of identities and digital practices (**Manago *et al.***, 2008; **Ringrose; Barajas**, 2011; **Oakley**, 2016). Its results have also answered the second research question on whether young people's practices reinforce or challenge identity canons, which, explicitly or implicitly, perpetuate or transgress what is hegemonic or normative: on some platforms the frontiers of gender are weakened (Instagram) and, on others, gender stereotypes are reinforced (Twitch and Discord).

These results suggest, in agreement with prior review of the literature, that Twitch policies favour certain identities and ideologies (**Zolides**, 2021) empowering the identity manifestations of white, cis, heterosexual men (the demographic core of this platform). Thus, those who state they are Twitch users tend to identify with the hegemonic masculinity stereotype performed by *Un Tio Blanco Hetero*. In the video used as the stimulus in this work («¿Por qué soy Un Tío Blanco Hetero?») [Why am I a Straight White Guy?], certain declarations regarding feminism and «their concept of the heteropatriarchy» may explain the identity practices of Twitch users and their lower adhesion compared to non-users, linked to *Isartvlog's* discourse on gender violence. Similarly, statements by this influencer like «If you want to be part of a committee on diversity which controls the way in which people speak, think and act in our universities …» may explain the lesser identification of these users, as compared to the non-users, with a discourse in favour of diversity and the rejection of gender binarism of the influencer *Koala Rabioso*. Twitch, then, consolidates the gender stereotypes.

The emergence of Discord as a satellite platform of Twitch may explain the appropriation of the gamer stereotype and its normative canon of hemogenic masculinity that the influencer *Un Tio Blanco Hetero* self-presents with. Likewise, as seen on Twitch, Discord users identify to a lesser extent than the non-user with *Isartvlog*'s discourse on inequality and gender violence with arguments and statements such as: «*macho* violence is violence against women and anyone who says the opposite does not know what they are talking about. This violence is the product of the system in which we live and is the product of the fact that men think they are better than us». Despite this gender-normative profile of Discord users, they do seem to identify with the discourse of the trans influencer *Enzo*. This, however, is likely due to the fact that *Enzo* - as a trans man - displays a highly hegemonic masculinity, rather than questioning gender norms. As in the case of Twitch, the appropriations of this platform legitimize hegemonic masculinity and consolidate gender stereotypes.

In the prior literature review, Instagram was seen as an appropriate platform for the self-expression of gender and sexual diversity (**Rutten**, 2018; **Herrera**, 2018; **Jones; Lim**, 2022; **Moekahar; Amalia**, 2021). Instagram users in our study, in effect, identify more than non-users with alternative gender displays. For example with *Koala Rabioso*'s discourse questioning the gender binary in expressions like: «We have to stop fitting everything into two little boxes. Gender is a spectrum of little boxes […] gender is not merely he or she […] gender is very complex […] however, our society invisibilizes and simplifies this complexity […]».

Finally, despite TikTok's potential as a public space for the creation of support communities for young people in danger of marginalization and/or social exclusion (**Hiebert; Kortes-Miller**, 2023), the TikTok users in our study do not identify - any more than non-users - with influencers who articulate dissident discourse on sexual and gender identity. Thus, the results do not show significant differences between users and non-users of this platform in their identification with any of the selected influencers. The playful setting of this platform, characterized by short music videos, could depoliticize identity discourses and justify the non-ascription of TikTok users with any of the identity arguments emerging in our study. TikTok appears to be a space where trivialization and criticism coexist; a platform where these contradictions are not overcome, but rather accepted simultaneously (**Araüna; Moreno-Segarra**, 2021). We should also take into account that - in contrast with other platforms that base a user's content feed on the creators they follow - the algorithmic personalization of TikTok in «For you» allows the visualization of content based on factors such as time spent viewing, completion rate, hashtags and trending sounds, users'

location and the videos they save (**Sánchez-Castillo; Mercado-Sáez**, 2021). Although TikTok is not free of criticism as it regularly suppresses LGTBIQ+ content (**Bacchi**, 2020; **Botella**, 2019), the special algorithmic feature of this platform may create a democratizing digital sphere where ascriptions to sexual and gender identity are attenuated.

5. Limitations and Further Research

Although the sample is limited and the results of this study are not surprising nor fixed or final, they do represent a wake-up call regarding the heavy gender inequalities on platforms and their potentially dangerous consequences, especially for women users and creators. It should encourage academia to further investigate the biases underlying the policies for regulation of platform contents, given their undeniable immediate effects on the users (**Ruberg**, 2021). We have shown that in the process of identity building in digital settings the capitalist logic of personal branding also comes into play (**Hearn**, 2008; **Genz**, 2015), so the gendering of platforms creates power relationships with economic and cultural implications (**Zolides**, 2021; **Giugni**, 2022). Educational digital actions should take into account the complexity of the interrelation between platforms, practices and identifications, and should strengthen reflectivity in order to break with the gender dynamics that hinder universal participation.

Future research can include qualitative approaches reinforcing, expanding and enriching the results of this quantitative study as a starting point. Both the size and representativeness of the sample at the national level, makes this study a good overview of gendered platformization in Spain. Furthermore, the study could be extended with innovative techniques to other stakeholders such as the developers and managers of the different platforms, as well as the content creators themselves, which would allow for a more holistic vision of the study object.

6. Funding

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