



## Narratives in online health communication: A qualitative content analysis of YouTube videos and user comments on the topic of food intolerances

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The number of people who deal with the consequences of food intolerances has risen over the recent years. Food intolerances cause a variety of unspecific, severe and painful symptoms, which makes diagnosis complicated and a long-lasting. Even their treatment can be very difficult. The scientific community is somewhat ambivalent whether food intolerances pose a serious threat to health and how they should treat affected patients. These problematic issues often lead to dissatisfaction and unpleasant experiences on the patient side, who may feel misunderstood or even mistreated. Our survey from 2016 showed that 3% of our participants perceived doctors and nutritionists to be poorly informed. These complaints are not limited to the analogue world. Affected persons form narratives to share their experiences and emotions, also in the digital world e.g. on platforms like YouTube. Besides, their online self-presentation is carefully crafted. Focusing our research on food intolerances and new media we encountered those narratives in the digital world as well, especially in YouTube-Videos and their comment histories. For the project we analysed German YouTube-Videos made by vloggers, which were chosen because of their high viewer rates. We also analysed the comment section below the YouTube-Videos. We searched for the emotional aspects in the

shared narratives and observed that persons were sharing personal experiences with doctors, nutritionists, family members, friends and personal “suffering” seemingly without inhibitions. YouTube-Videos are seen as a media for self-expression. The analysed vloggers used them to give advices about certain topics and they shared narratives about personal experiences and memories with their viewers. We observed the level of emotional communication in the YouTube-Videos was mirrored in the comment section. It seems that the narratives embedded in the YouTube-Videos and comment histories are not only conserved but also global, and they also have the ability to ignite feelings in people who consume them. It is this kind of ability to influence which makes the examination interesting and which is also the topic of my research.

### KEYWORDS

Online narrations,  
Health communication,  
YouTube-Videos,  
Emotions