

Abstract

This research explores how online sources and social media platforms link DeafTok and censorship, with a primary focus on marginalised identities. By analyzing a wide range of digital content, particularly on social media, this study examines how Deaf/HH creators react to their content being hidden or limited.

Introduction

American Sign Language is a language known by many, has a significant cultural expression and has been proven to support early language development. #DeafTok is a largely known hashtag that is a social media defining factor for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals whom post a variety of content around their daily lives. Many online sources and social media platforms have linked DeafTok to censorship particularly through the lens of marginalised communities and identities. These discussions often highlight the rise in censorship and often alleged shadowbanning of content creators based on their disabilities. This research aims to explore how social media discourse reflects these complex issues and the broader implications of censorship of content.

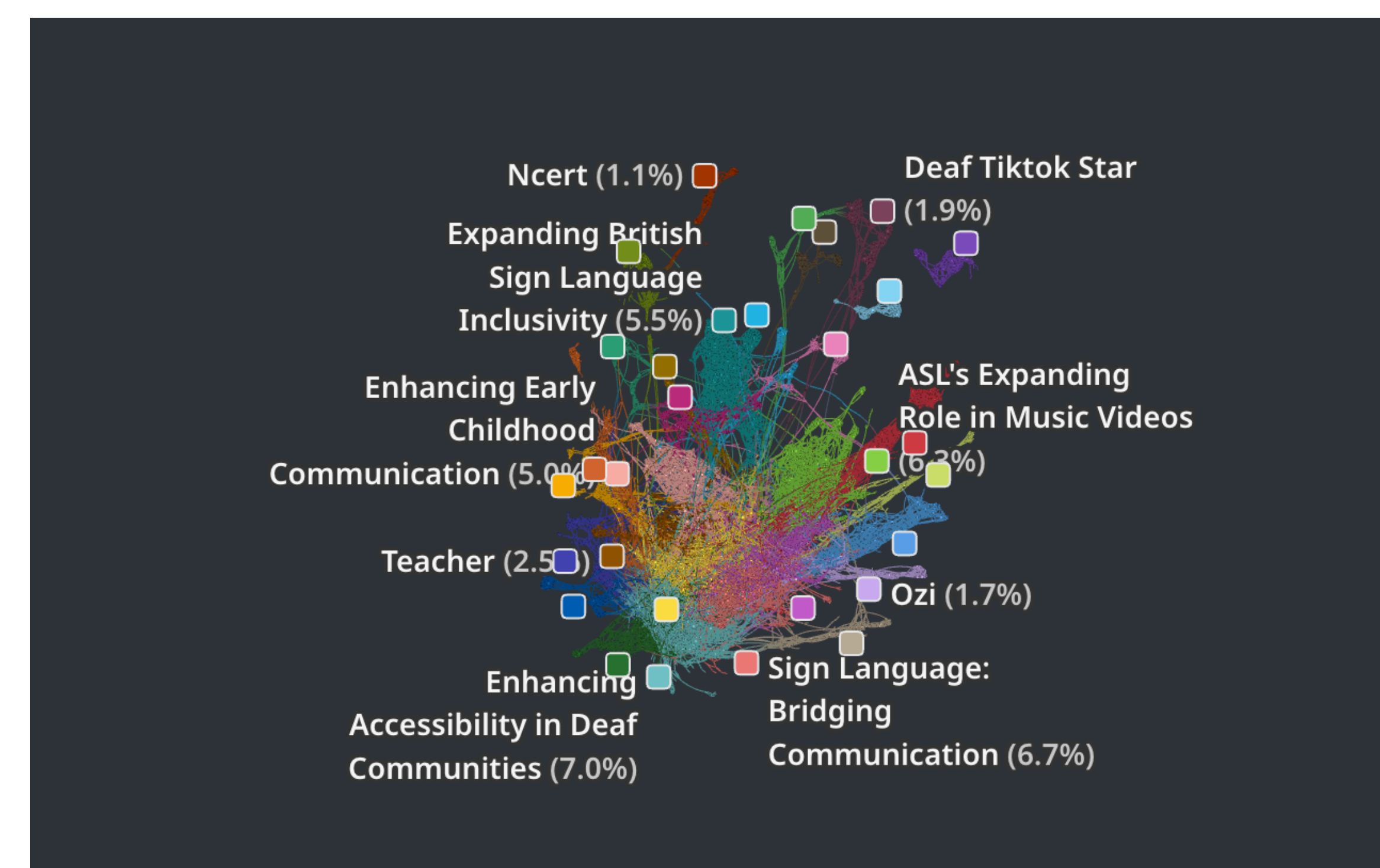
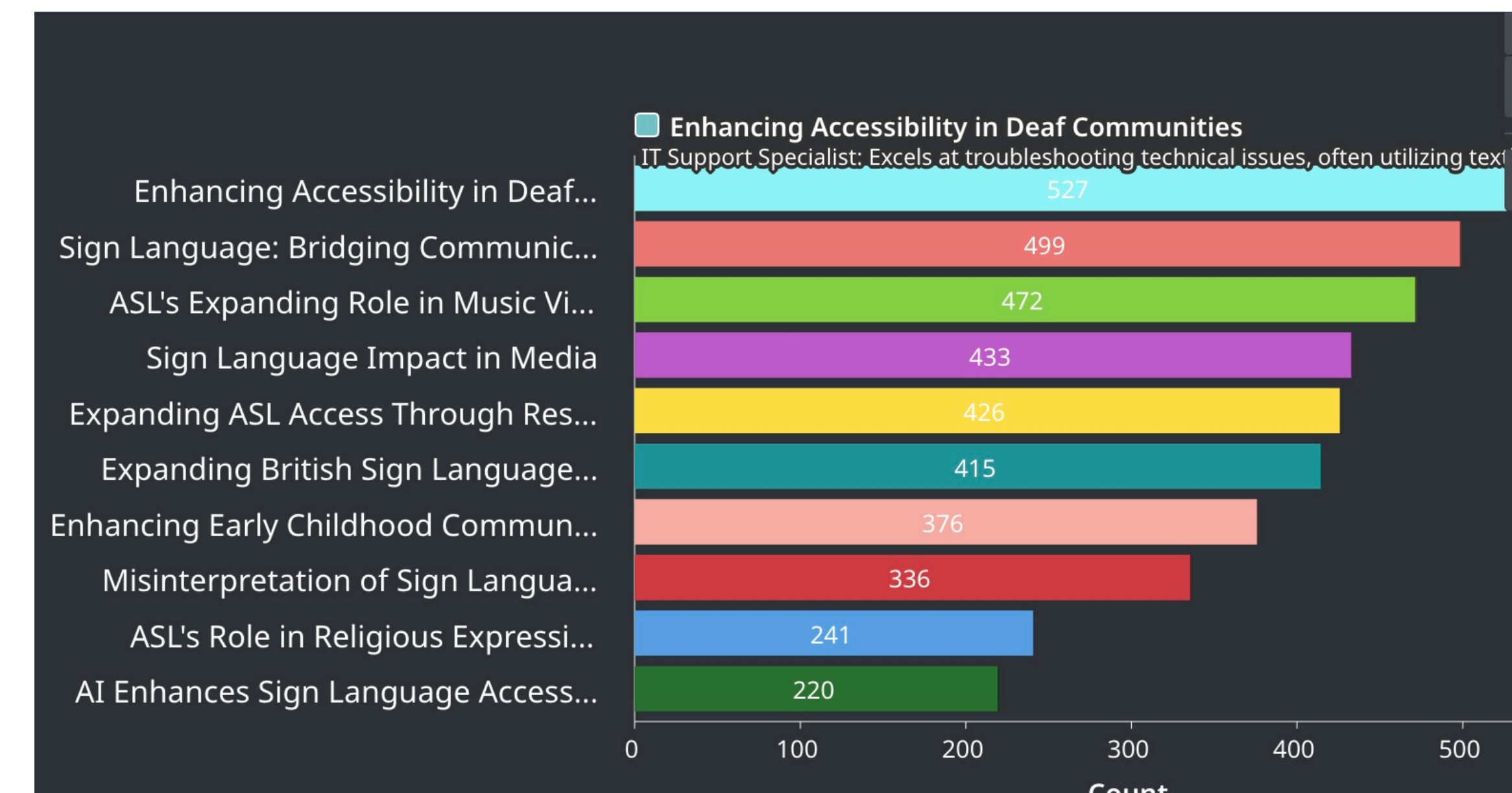
Methodology

Links between the Deaf and Hard of Hearing content creators, Shadowbanning, and Censorship Topics:

- **Coincidence vs. Algorithmic Bias:** Debate over whether censorship is caused by coincidence, like sensitive topics, or such as recurring shadowbanning due to risk of “bullying”
- **Risk Communication:** How the post is framed—either as a flagged for using ASL or self-reported experiences with censorship—and its effect on Deaf/HH content creators
- **Use of Fear:** The Media's use of fear to ban accounts due to the number of posts “takedowns”.
- **Misinterpretation of Sign Language:** Differences in how content creators use Sign Language and expression cause misleading assumptions.
- **Social Media Perspectives:** Variations in how different cultures and backgrounds react to Sign Language posts.
- **Captioning Error Claims:** Social media claims about platforms’ lack of accurate captions, causing misinformation.
- **Scientific Findings:** A survey of 200 D/HH TikTok creators reported unexplained drops in engagement and takedowns.

Materials

Social media conversation data from Quid—Sprinkler was analyzed to show discussion around Deaf/HH community accessibility and visibility online. Analyzed trending social media hashtags (#DeafTok, #DeafCommunity #LearnSignLanguage) Assessed how social media narratives about censorship of marginalised identities shape public understanding of Deaf culture. Reported on the number of websites checked, main topics, and subcategories, with thematic analysis of key discussions, including influencers, shadowbanning, and claims of captioning errors.



Results

Survey Findings n = 200 D/HH TikTok creators.

- 72% of participants reported experiencing unexplained drops in engagement, such as fewer likes, shares, and views, despite no changes in content type.
- 48% reported that one or more of their videos were removed or flagged without explanation.
- 65% claimed they have been shadowbanned at some point.
- 80% identified captioning issues with either inaccurate captions or missing captions.
- 43% of users mentioned modifying their signing style or avoiding certain signs to prevent content flagging or takedowns.

Conclusion

- This research shows the complicated nature of D/HH content creators, censorship, and shadowbanning from social media platforms, specifically with #DeafTok. By focusing on hashtags and personal survey responses by the Deaf community, it addresses the underlying censorship by social media platforms that Deaf content creators face.
- The study's findings suggest that the takedowns of Deaf creators' content are led by algorithmic bias. Overall, social media platforms highlight the issues surrounding poor showcasing of Sign Language and Deaf culture understanding. There is a clear indication that social media platforms and accessible content should be reviewed and tailored to all people.

Recommendations

This research is a guide to improve the public's understanding of the Deaf community. Content monitoring and social media teams must be informed on the differing misinformation related to Deaf culture and American Sign Language. This in turn will improve media accountability, and intensify public response to Deaf and marginalised community social media content.

Acknowledgements

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