

Tips, hacks and routines: A content analysis of YouTube© videos about intimate feminine hygiene

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1. Background



YouTube is a popular and expanding source of health information globally.

Over the last five years, there has been a marked rise in online searches for the terms “intimate hygiene” and “feminine hygiene”.¹ However, little is known about the quality or content of information available. Concerns have been raised in other areas of women’s health about misinformation online.² The aim of this study is to examine the characteristics and content of YouTube© videos about intimate/feminine hygiene.

2. Methods

The YouTube© search engine was used to identify videos uploaded by individuals containing the terms “intimate hygiene” or “feminine hygiene” on 25th September 2021. **The top 50 most-viewed English-language videos** were included. Advertisements uploaded by company accounts were excluded. Two reviewers independently analysed all 50 videos; discrepancies were resolved through discussion with a third reviewer.

Figure 1: examples of images commonly used in video thumbnails

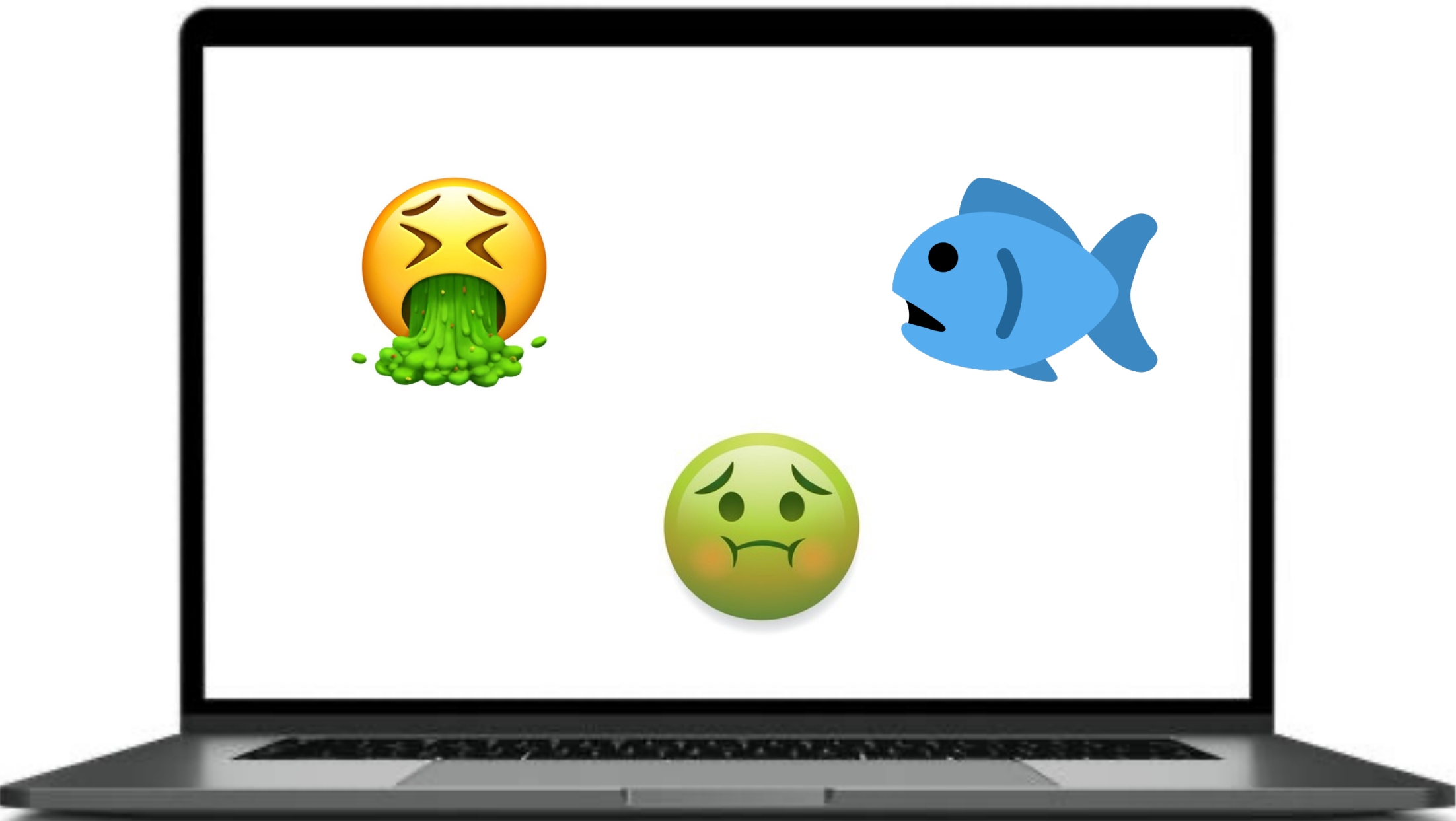


Table 1: most commonly advocated or described practices (harmful and potentially harmful practices highlighted in red)

Practice	Frequency (%) n=50
genital hair removal	23 (46%)
cotton underwear	20 (40%)
dietary changes	20 (40%)
loose underwear and/or clothing	17 (34%)
washing with unscented products	17 (34%)
sleeping without underwear	14 (28%)
genital wipes	14 (28%)
wiping front to back	13 (26%)
use of intimate washes	12 (24%)
vulval moisturisers	12 (24%)
probiotics and/or supplements	11 (22%)
keeping genitals dry	11 (22%)
washing with scented products	7 (14%)
changing sanitary products regular	7 (14%)
washing with water only	7 (7%)
panty-liners	7 (14%)
exfoliation of genital area	5 (10%)
showering/washing once daily	4 (8%)
vaginal douching	4 (8%)
showering/washing more than once daily	3 (6%)

4. Conclusions

Intimate hygiene videos reach a huge audience. Many of them provide accurate advice and support, in an accessible and user-friendly format, demonstrating the positive potential for online health promotion. **The lack of healthcare professional-created content despite the increasing popularity of online information demonstrates missed opportunities for patient education.** Despite extensive description of vulvovaginal symptoms, in the majority of videos, the role of healthcare professionals was not considered.

3. Results

The format was usually informal with producers typically addressing concerns that viewers had expressed. **The content producers often employed colloquial terms when referring to vulvovaginal anatomy.**

A total of 60 different practices were described or advocated within the reviewed videos. The 20 most common practices (described as “tips”, “hacks” or “routines”) that individuals recommended or described use of are listed in Table 1.

The most commonly advocated practices included those which may be considered harmful or potentially harmful (highlighted), including genital hair removal, vaginal douching and exfoliation of the genital skin. Although noted less frequently, **some practices were identified as particularly harmful or dangerous, including: steaming the genitals with hot water or a clothes’ steamer (4%), use of apple cider vinegar (2%) and baking soda (2%).**

20 videos (40%) included statements that challenged stigma around discussion of the vulva, genital hair smell and discharge, However, 7 videos (14%) included stigmatising language about genital appearance, function or smell. 15 videos (30%) used thumbnails incorporating stigmatising imagery such as emojis depicting nausea, vomiting or fish (see *Figure 1*).

17 videos (34%) mentioned or recommended the consultation of healthcare professionals – most commonly for investigation of vaginal discharge.

Several videos recommend or describe use of potentially harmful practices and utilise stigmatising language/imagery. As healthcare professionals, it is important to have an awareness of the spectrum of intimate hygiene practices promoted on social media in order to better educate and empower our patients. This analysis highlights the need to promote evidence-based information around vulvovaginal health and challenge taboos.



Video characteristics

- Average views per video: 556,000 (337,000 - 27,000,000)
- Average length: 15 minutes
- 47 videos (94%) were uploaded by people who did not identify as healthcare professionals
- 6 videos (12%) were sponsored by companies
- 18 videos (36%) contained affiliate links to products

References

1. Google Trends. 2021. Google Trends. [online] Available at: <https://www.google.com/trends/> [Accessed September 2021]
2. Okamura, K., Bernstein, J. & Fidler, A.T., 2002. Assessing the quality of infertility resources on the World Wide Web: Tools to guide clients through the maze of fact and fiction. Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health, 47(4), pp.264–268.



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