

Transparency on Social Media: A Case Study on Diversity and Inclusion on Transport for London's Instagram

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Abstract

The study of how social actors are portrayed in business communication is essential for understanding how companies promote diversity and inclusion both internally and to the public (Maier & Ravazzani, 2021). Social media can effectively communicate company values externally, boosting interactivity and openness (Vernuccio, 2014). This study examines how transportation companies construct representations of social actors to promote diversity and inclusion, using Transport for London's (TfL) Instagram profile as a case study. Drawing on Van Leeuwen (2008) and Reisigl (2017), the analysis critically investigates how Transport for London (TfL) linguistically represents social actors on its Instagram profile, focusing on the discursive strategies used to promote diversity and inclusion. The findings show that TfL favours gender-neutral language and combines both generic and specific representations of social actors. It predominantly relies on individual narratives to address inclusion and diversity. This storytelling approach may reduce the distance between the audience and the content. The dataset also indicates that TfL uses educational posts with hedged language to advise passengers on respectful behaviour while using its services.

Keywords: Social actors, Social media, Diversity, Inclusion, Discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Diversity and inclusion are interconnected concepts that have become central to discourses of social justice and organisational ethics. Specifically, the term diversity is used here to refer to the range of differences in identities, experiences, and perspectives between people and groups (Bush, 2025, p. 15). Litvin (1997) categorises diversity into two overarching

dimensions: primary demographic dimensions such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical abilities, and secondary more flexible dimensions influenced by personal choices and life experiences such as educational background, geographic location, marital status, religious beliefs, etc. In this context, inclusion, namely the practice of creating an environment in which all voices within a society are included, respected, and supported (Bush, 2025, p. 17), goes beyond mere representation, ensuring active participation and a sense of belonging for all members of society.

With the growing importance of concepts such as diversity and inclusion, organisations pay increasing attention to their social responsibilities and the ways they communicate their commitments to stakeholders. In this sense, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) addresses environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntary dimensions to operate ethically, sustainably and to positively impact society and the environment (Dahlsrud, 2008). For organisations, demonstrating their commitment to social responsibility is essential and driven by both internal motivations and external expectations. Internally, a focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can enhance competitiveness (see Bolibok, 2021). Externally, organisations, particularly public ones, are increasingly expected to uphold ethical standards and contribute to societal well-being, reflecting a moral obligation to act responsibly (see Turnbull, 2023).

Private and public organisations use various channels to communicate their CSR values and initiatives. Traditionally, corporate websites and dedicated CSR reports have been fundamental channels for sharing sustainability and ethical efforts with both the wider public and stakeholders (Malavasi, 2023a). More recently, social media has emerged as a key medium for this purpose, especially when communicating with the public. Its participatory nature is particularly effective for showcasing ethical efforts (Howard, 2020), allowing organisations to directly share information with citizens. This reduces information asymmetry and enhances transparency, key factors in building trust and credibility (see Song & Lee, 2016). Social media enables corporations to enhance access to information (Lei et al., 2019) and foster open information-sharing. Social media plays a dual role in boosting transparency for organisations. Externally, it enables real-time updates and open dialogue with the public, fostering trust and thereby strengthening the perception of transparency (Koskela & Crawford Camiciottoli, 2020; Park & Jiang, 2023; Song & Lee, 2016). Internally, it can potentially improve communication and engagement among employees, fostering a more transparent workplace culture (see Men et al., 2020).

Transparency is a multifaceted concept in communication, incorporating accountability, clarity, accessibility, and inclusivity, while also being shaped by linguistic and semiotic choices. Ball (2009) describes transparency as a process linked to accountability, crucial for enhancing trust and open governance. Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) consider transparency in terms of accuracy and clarity of the information provided, while Turilli and Floridi (2009) emphasise information accessibility. Transparency in content creation involves openly showcasing diverse identities, allowing organisations to build trust with their audience by demonstrating an authentic commitment to inclusion (see Qian, 2025; Song & Lee, 2016; Vernuccio, 2014). From a pragmatic perspective, transparent communication implies creating

the necessary conditions for a clear and unambiguous transfer of meaning. While some scholars view this ideal as unattainable due to the inherent unpredictability of interpretation (e.g., Parret, 2022), it remains crucial in sectors such as transportation. For instance, clear communication is essential when providing instructions to passengers and promoting behaviours that respect diverse identities (e.g., see Rossato & Nocella, 2022). Conveying such messages transparently requires a careful balance between *hard* language (direct and precise) and *soft* language (flexible and empathetic), a balance often employed by companies in customer interactions (see Butler, 2016).

A growing body of literature has explored how diversity and inclusion are linguistically constructed in CSR disclosures (e.g., Malavasi, 2023b) and corporate websites (e.g., Turnbull, 2023). However, less attention has been paid in the literature to how diversity and inclusion are discursively conveyed in social media, despite evidence of the medium's potential to foster openness and trust (Vernuccio, 2014). From a critical discourse analysis perspective, the identity of social actors on social media can be recontextualised in different ways (see Maier & Ravazzani, 2021; Vernuccio, 2014). For instance, representations can be shaped by emphasising or deemphasising specific characteristics of the social actors involved (Entman, 1993). As a result, the way social actors are portrayed in such media offers valuable insight into how transport providers promote diversity and inclusion, both within the organisation and in their public communication (Maier & Ravazzani, 2021).

Drawing on this theoretical background, the case study analyses the discursive strategies used by Transport for London (TfL) on its Instagram profile to promote diversity and inclusion. It examines how TfL linguistically and discursively represents social actors and considers the extent to which TfL uses Instagram to engage with the audience on concepts like diversity and inclusion. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How does TfL represent social actors on its Instagram profile? How are they linguistically realised?
- 2) What discursive strategies does TfL employ to promote diversity and inclusion?
- 3) What are the implications of TfL's social media communication for fostering perceived transparency and public trust in the context of diversity and inclusion?

2. Materials and Methods

The research focused on Transport for London (TfL) for several reasons. Firstly, TfL operates in Greater London, a highly multicultural and globally connected city, hence serving a population of 8.8 million residents and millions of annual tourists (Note 1). As a public transportation provider, TfL must address the needs of its diverse user base, making it an ideal context for exploring how public transportation providers such as TfL navigate inclusivity and representation in their social media communication. Furthermore, despite London being a multicultural city, it has recently faced several hate crime incidents happening exactly on public transport, which led TfL to initiate several campaigns against hate crime (Note 2). Hence, the initial hypothesis for this case study is that TfL might have placed greater effort into the promotion of diversity and inclusion. TfL is also particularly active on social media and has

a substantial Instagram following (257,000 followers (Note 3)), which possibly suggests its commitment to transparent communication and direct public engagement.

This study focused on the verbal content of TfL's Instagram posts, specifically the captions, to conduct a qualitative exploration of the linguistic strategies employed by TfL to promote diversity and inclusion. Although a multimodal analysis would have provided significant insights, this study prioritised verbal content to allow a more in-depth examination of how language is used to represent social actors and convey organisational values. The captions were automatically collected with the use of Apify (n.d.), a cloud-based web scraping platform. A pre-configured scraper task was executed in the cloud to retrieve captions from all posts of the Instagram profile (see Falcone & Iori, 2024). The corpus included captions published from 2016, the time when the profile was launched, up until September 2023, and it comprised a total number of 122,912 tokens and 4,914 posts.

From a methodological perspective, the analysis combined corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis approaches (Partington et al., 2013). First, it identified the most frequent words used to discursively represent social actors and then analysed their concordance lines to explore discursive strategies employed to promote diversity and inclusion. Specifically, a frequency list of words occurring in the corpus was generated and analysed using SketchEngine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014) to identify lexicalisations of social actors. The analysis focused on ten lemmas that occurred at least ten times, to ensure the focus remained on recurrent terms rather than single word occurrences. These lexicalisations primarily consisted of nouns and indefinite pronouns (e.g., *someone*). The concordance lines of these terms were qualitatively analysed to explore lexical patterns used to represent social actors and the discursive strategies employed by TfL to promote diversity and inclusion.

To analyse how social actors were discursively constructed in the dataset, the analysis referred to Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for social actor representation and the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2017). Van Leeuwen's framework was used at a micro-level of interpretation to explore the specific lexical choices used to represent social actors. Specifically, the analysis qualitatively determined whether social actors were included, excluded or backgrounded in discourse (e.g., *services were provided*) (see Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 29). It explored whether actors were represented as active or passive (activation vs. passivation), and whether they were portrayed as generic groups (e.g., *commuters*) or specific individuals (i.e., using proper names). Additionally, it distinguished between collectivisation, where actors were framed as part of a specific group (e.g., *the commuters in London*), and individualisation, where actors were presented as individuals (e.g., *the passenger in line*). The study also examined whether actors were determinate or indeterminate, depending on whether they were clearly identified (e.g., *James took the train*) or left vague (e.g., *someone took the train*).

Beyond individual linguistic choices, the study also considered the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) to explore broader discursive strategies used by TfL to promote diversity and inclusion. Specifically, it focused on four key discursive strategies: nomination, predication, perspectivation, and mitigation/intensification (see Reisigl, 2017). In the analysis, nomination

referred to how social actors and actions were linguistically represented. Predication involved the characterisation of social actors and their actions, for instance, assigning positive or negative attributes to the actors. Perspectivation examined how TfL positioned itself in relation to these topics, revealing either engagement or neutrality. This was a key aspect for considering whether TfL's communication fostered transparency by taking a clear stance on social issues and presenting related initiatives, thereby fostering a sense of openness (Ball, 2009). Finally, mitigation and intensification explored how language was used to soften or strengthen messages, influencing how commitments were perceived in terms of their epistemic and deontic status (Reisigl, 2017, p. 52). This strategy was also crucial for understanding transparency implications, as the use of soft language (e.g., hedging) might obscure transparent communication, while intensification could enhance the perceived urgency or importance of diversity and inclusion efforts (see Butler, 2016).

Throughout the analysis, references to diversity were based on the dimensions outlined by Point and Singh (2003, p. 757). Accordingly, diversity was discussed considering various dimensions, including geographic characteristics (cultural, national, and linguistic backgrounds), visible differences (gender, race, ethnicity, age, and disability), opinions and beliefs (religion and sexual orientation), social status (marital status, class, family, and health), and educational and professional background (academic and career experiences). This classification provided a useful framework for structuring the analysis; however, it is important to acknowledge that diversity is inherently intersectional, meaning these dimensions often overlap and interact in complex ways.

The result section is divided into two parts. The first sub-section explores the lexical realisations used to represent social actors identified in the dataset. The second sub-section discusses the findings of the qualitative analysis. Frequencies were normalised per 10,000 tokens.

3. Results

3.1 Overview of Lexical Representations of Social Actors

The analysis of the frequency list reveals trends in TfL's representation of social actors, both in accordance with inclusive tendencies and potential omissions. The data show a clear trend towards more generic and gender-neutral language (see Baker, 2010). This first observation seems to be in line with TfL's efforts towards the promotion of diversity and inclusion. Table 1 provides a list of the lexical representations (i.e., instances of nomination) of social actors identified in the frequency list of the corpus alongside their number of occurrences.

Table 1. Raw and normalised frequencies of lexical representations of social actors

Lexical representation	Raw frequency	Normalised Frequency
Londoner	273	22.21
people	103	8.38
someone	33	2.69
queen	31	2.52
woman	16	1.30
passenger	14	1.14
customer	13	1.06
guy	11	0.89
man	11	0.89
adult	10	0.81

As shown in Table 1, the data reveal a marked preference for generic and collectivised representations of social actors. For instance, the high frequencies of lemmas such as *Londoner* (273) and *people* (103) might indicate a preference towards broad, inclusive categories rather than individualised identities. Despite the high number of occurrences of the term *Londoner*, which might reflect a strong geographical identity in TfL's communication strategy, it is worth noticing that 81% of the occurrences are actually hashtags, which are not particularly significant for the qualitative analysis of how social actors are represented. The frequent use of *people* reflects a generalising approach that avoids specifying particular identities. The presence of terms like *someone* (33) and *passenger* (14) points to indeterminate representations, where social actors are referenced vaguely rather than explicitly. This suggests a discursive preference for generic and indeterminate nomination strategies, which align with inclusivity goals but may obscure individual identities. The high frequency of role-designator words such as *customer* (13) and *queen* (31) suggests that certain actors are defined by their status or position within the transport system or broader societal context. Gender-marked nouns such as *woman* (16), *man* (11), and *guy* (11) occur with relatively low frequencies, indicating a potential backgrounding of gendered identity in favour of gender-neutral or impersonal terms. The term *queen* (31) recurs frequently, with 81% of occurrences referring to Queen Elizabeth II and 19% to drag queens. Furthermore, the inclusion of terms like *adult* (10) suggests the presence of age-based categorisations as well, though the absence of terms like *child* or *elderly* might indicate gaps in representing certain age groups.

The lexical representations in the frequency list show TfL's preference for generic, collective, and often neutral representations of social actors, accentuating an inclusive discourse. From a discursive perspective, this reflects a nomination strategy which leans toward representing social actors with broadly inclusive yet non-specific terms. This approach might contribute to avoiding exclusionary language but could potentially background specific identities and social groups. The following section will analyse qualitative aspects of how social actors are represented in more detail and the discursive strategies used to promote diversity and inclusion in TfL's Instagram profile.

3.2 Qualitative Findings

The analysis of social actors' representations reveals that they are generally included in the discourse (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Although social actors are occasionally represented in generic or indeterminate terms, the data show a balance between generic and more specific representations. Transport for London's Instagram posts seem aimed at celebrating diversity through two main types of content: posts that provide visibility to minority groups and encourage interaction with the members of the represented communities, and educational posts that promote respectful behaviour on public transport, highlighting TfL's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. In terms of visible and non-visible differences (Point & Singh, 2003), TfL's Instagram profile includes various lexicalisations of social actors referring to disability, gender, and age.

Representations of disability are particularly insightful in the transportation sector, as transport should be accessible for everyone, especially for people with physical impairments. From TfL's Instagram profile, it emerges that the organisation places a particular emphasis on portraying invisible disabilities. Furthermore, the investigation highlights the presence of various educational posts aimed at sensitising TfL's passengers and customers to pay attention to diversity and inclusion when using TfL's services. TfL uses various discursive strategies on its Instagram profile to represent people with disabilities and promote diversity and inclusion. One such strategy involves shedding light on the negative experiences of disabled individuals when using TfL's services. These posts provide public visibility to the group and highlight both individual and collective narratives, as illustrated in the following example:

- 1) *Many of **our customers**, particularly **disabled people** and **those with non-visible impairments**, conditions or illnesses, find it difficult to get a seat.*

In Example 1, two main types of social actors are represented with the nouns *customers* and *people*. *Customers* are quantified and categorised through the preceding determiners *many of our customers* and this reference is further specified in the following part of the sentence *particularly disabled people and those with non-visible impairments*. The use of the expressions *disabled people* (identity-first) and *those with non-visible impairments conditions, or illnesses* (people-first) introduces a more specific categorisation and nomination strategy, distinguishing a particular subgroup within TfL's customer base. The preference between using identity-first language (e.g., *disabled people*) and people-first language (e.g., *people with disabilities*) is still a topic of ongoing discussion among various communities. Some

groups prefer identity-first expressions (e.g., autistic people) to acknowledge disability as an inherent part of identity (Botha et al., 2023). However, there is no universal agreement on which option works best. People-first expressions have been historically promoted to emphasise personhood over condition. Nonetheless, its overuse in institutional discourse has had the unintentional effect of treating disability as something to be concealed or euphemised (Taboas et al., 2023). Example 1 is representative of TfL's approach with these nomination strategies, as it generally combines identity-first (e.g., *disabled people*) and people-first (e.g., *those with non-visible impairments*) expressions. TfL's simultaneous use of both forms may represent an attempt at epistemic neutrality, aiming to avoid privileging one perspective over another. This could reflect an effort to accommodate different preferences while acknowledging the complexity of representing marginalised groups in public discourse. Furthermore, Example 1 discursively identifies an issue faced by disabled people when taking the tube and frames *customers* as the grammatical subject, making them active participants in experiencing difficulty. However, the omission of the implied agent (e.g., transport providers or other passengers) foregrounds the struggles of disabled customers while obscuring who is responsible for causing these issues. This discursive move leaves accountability ambiguous, potentially implying responsibility for other passengers, but without explicitly stating it. It could be argued that transportation providers may deliberately avoid using an authoritative tone toward other customers; however, this perspectivation emphasises the struggles of disabled people while backgrounding TfL's responsibility in managing limited seating during periods of overcrowding. Such mitigation of institutional responsibility is in line with discursive strategies that recognise systemic barriers while avoiding direct attribution of responsibility, a common feature in institutional and corporate communication (see Brinkman et al., 2023).

Example 1 illustrates TfL's efforts to represent disabled people and communicate the challenges they may face when using public transport services. This aims to provide visibility to these groups and raise awareness among all customers about their experiences. At the same time, it also functions as a way to engage directly with disabled audiences, as can be seen from the following example:

- 2) *Feel free to share your experience using public transport with an invisible disability, alongside what you wish **other people** knew? Please share this to raise awareness of the importance*

Example 2 invites individuals with invisible disabilities to share their own experiences. The phrase *alongside what you wish other people knew* encourages these individuals to educate the public first-hand by sharing their own experiences, implying a gap in public awareness. This perspectivation strategy shifts the communicative perspective to the represented group, allowing them to speak for themselves rather than being spoken about by others. Furthermore, in Example 2, the public is represented as a generic entity through the expression *other people*. By not explicitly addressing the responsibility of others (specifically, *other people*) to understand or act on the information, the text backgrounds their agency in this context. As a result, it positions disabled individuals as the primary agents, with the wider public serving a more passive, receptive role. The prompts to actively engage with the post (e.g., *Feel free to*

share your experience; Please share this) aim to provide a virtual space for discussion where the institution positions itself as a facilitator of this exchange.

This discursive strategy, namely allowing the community to speak for itself and disseminate knowledge about its own challenges, reflects a form of mediated perspectivation, whereby TfL constructs a communicative context that foregrounds first-person narratives while maintaining institutional control over the frame and format in which these stories are told. Although the voices of disabled individuals are invited and amplified, it is TfL that decides the terms of engagement: when, on what, and how these voices are shared. In doing so, the organisation implicitly positions itself as a supportive facilitator of marginalised perspectives. This approach is complemented by another discursive strategy which involves directly addressing passengers to train them on how to behave respectfully while using Transport for London services. The combination of these two discursive strategies is well documented by the following example:

- 3) ***Our customer Corry Shaw**, is disabled and lives with chronic pain, she needs a seat when travelling but struggles because **people** don't look up. She asked us to back her campaign to encourage **everyone** to look up to see if **someone** needs your seat more.*

In Example 3, *Corry Shaw* is presented as an individualised social actor by referencing her with her proper name. This individualised perspective discursively reduces the distance between the social actor represented and the readers of the posts, potentially making her experience of living with chronic pain more relatable. By featuring a member of the community, the post sensitises the public to the challenges faced by disabled individuals, aligning with Transport for London's (TfL) commitments to diversity and inclusion. This portrayal also contributes to the broader strategy of educating the public and increasing the visibility of disabled individuals on TfL's Instagram profile. This strategy seems to be linguistically realised through the phrase *she asked us to back her campaign to encourage everyone to look up*, where a soft and indirect suggestion is made to passengers, subtly advising them to pay attention to people who might need that seat more. Therefore, *Corry Shaw* is framed as an active agent of change, promoting collective action to address passengers' lack of awareness. In contrast, the broader public, presumably other passengers, are backgrounded through the use of vague and generic references to *people* who *don't look up*. This perspective reinforces a community-driven discourse, positioning TfL as a facilitator of Corry Shaw's campaign rather than the central actor. On the one hand, attributing active agency to the community is positive, as it lets the community speak for themselves. On the other hand, TfL is positioned as a mere supporter rather than a leader of change, potentially backgrounding its responsibilities in granting a safe and comfortable journey to everyone and thereby reducing perceptions of transparency. Furthermore, the mitigated suggestion implied in Example 3 might not transparently convey the need for passengers to actually look out for anyone who needs the seat more.

This direct involvement of individuals with disabilities is integrated with more direct posts produced by TfL where the public body tries to directly provide instructions to the passengers on how to behave respectfully, especially referring to priority seats. This is exemplified by

the following excerpts:

- 4) *Remember that not all disabilities are visible and be kind. If you spot **someone** with a please offer me a seat badge or **someone** who may need a seat more than you, offer your seat if you can. [...]*
- 5) *I bet you didn't know that 70-80% of disabilities are invisible?! If **YOU** are **someone** that sits in the priority seat planning to move if **someone like this** (e.g. **older person, mobility aid user, pregnant, parent with a baby, children, visibly injured**) gets on remember that you might not be able to tell just by looking at **someone** that they **NEED** the seat so **PLEASE** keep these priority seats free if you are more able to stand [...]*

Example 4 provides informative content about disabilities, directly addressing the social media users who read the post. The post aims to raise awareness and foster sensitivity toward invisible disabilities through the use of explicit directives (e.g., performed with the imperatives *remember* and *be kind*). Furthermore, the imperative *offer your seat* is strategically hedged by the conditional clause *if you can*, mitigating the force of the directive and acknowledging the varying circumstances of individual readers. This clearer yet polite instruction seems to reflect TfL's commitment to ensuring inclusivity on their trains. Social actors here are nominated through the indefinite pronoun *someone* which is used to refer to individuals wearing the *please offer me a seat badge* and to those who *may need a seat more than others*. This invites TfL users to offer their seats if they see these badges. The directive stance of the caption frames TfL as an educator, playing a more active role in contrasting the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

Similarly, Example 5 addresses invisible disabilities, assuming that the audience may not be fully aware of how prevalent they are. The rhetorical question "*I bet you didn't know*" engages readers by presenting the information in a conversational tone, while the quantification *70-80% of disabilities are invisible* emphasises the scope of the issue, increasing public awareness. Example 5 describes a scenario where a person sitting in a priority seat plans to leave it only when someone with visible disabilities boards. Directives such as *remember* or *keep these priority seats free* remind the audience that not all disabilities are visible, and one cannot always tell if someone needs the seat by just looking at them. The use of the indefinite pronoun *someone* exemplifies this point by listing visible conditions (e.g., *older person, mobility aid user, pregnant*) but also foregrounds the non-visible disabilities as deserving of priority seating. The sentence structure directly addresses the public, particularly those sitting in priority seats, through the direct personal pronoun *YOU* in capital letters which emphasises passengers' responsibility to ensure accessibility for all travellers. Both examples encourage the public to adopt more empathetic and responsible behaviours. Furthermore, the language used underlines the importance of understanding that disability can be invisible and promotes responsible behaviour on TfL services. In terms of perspectivation, TfL is once again discursively placed as an instructor providing informative content, aligning with its principles of diversity and inclusion.

In Examples 4 and 5, TfL fosters a culture of inclusivity that supports diverse identities and fosters social responsibility among its passengers. This approach is not restricted to disability,

but it includes other dimensions of diversity as well (i.e. gender). For instance, as regards representations of women and predication strategies, TfL publishes posts that celebrate women's contributions to society, as in the following example:

- 6) *This International Women's Day, we've installed new green women traffic light signals in more than 20 locations across London, to recognise the achievements and significant contribution **women** make to all aspects of society*

Example 6 shows a caption which foregrounds women's agency and position in society through the installation of *green women traffic light signals* as a symbolic gesture to increase their visibility in public spaces. Women are represented as active agents in society and their achievements are framed as *significant contributions*. However, this acknowledgement is somewhat generalised in the sense that the broad reference to *women* places them as a homogenised and generic group and their contribution to society is left vague. This generic representation may overlook the diversity of women's experiences (e.g., race, class, disability), presenting them as a homogeneous group rather than recognising the intersectionality of their identities. However, the data also presents representations of women as individualised entities, as exemplified by the following caption:

- 7) *Three photos of **Eva Carver** who worked as a Metropolitan Railway guard during #wwI at Hammersmith Underground station. At the time this was seen as a "**man's** job," though **women like Eva** were hired from 1917 to replace **men** who had joined up to fight in the war.*

In Example 7, the social actor *Eva Carver* is portrayed through individualisation—she is named with her proper full name, and her role as a Metropolitan Railway guard is emphasised, which personalises the historical context and provides a personal perspective to the broader narrative of women's contributions during World War I. The expression *women like Eva* further exemplifies the broader social group of women who took on roles traditionally reserved for men, especially during the war when many men were enlisted to fight. By using the possessive *man's* to describe the job of a Metropolitan Railway guard, TfL stresses the gendered nature of the occupation at that time. In this context, *Eva Carver* is represented both as an individual actor with her own specific historical role and as part of a larger, collective movement of women stepping into non-traditional roles during WW1. The representation of *Eva Carver* humanises the history of women in the workforce during the war, presenting her as both a pioneer within her profession and a participant in the broader societal changes of the time.

Building on the discussion of gender representation, the lexicalisations of social actors from the LGBTQ+ community in the dataset are tied to both gender and sexual orientation. Just as the representation of women and other social actors, posts related to the LGBTQ+ community aim to provide visibility to the individuals and groups being represented, as in the following example:

- 8) *Every story matters. So we wanted to shine a spotlight on **a few people in the LGBTQ+ community** to share their story. Can you spot where their photo is taken? Comment if*

you know! [...]

Example 8 shows a discursive strategy similar to the ones analysed for disabled people (e.g., Examples 2 and 3), where TfL invites members of the community to share their own stories. Example 8 represents social actors by selectively including *a few people in the LGBTQ+ community*, emphasising their individual stories. Quite interestingly, the so called ‘stories’ do not follow the structure of traditional narratives but present a list of names and brief descriptions of individuals from the LGBTQ+ community. This representation consists of their names, accompanied by their preferred pronouns, professional roles, and social commitments (e.g., *They/them, Drag artist, musician, author; He/Him, Activist, podcaster, LGBTQ+ archivist, Director at The Love Tank; They/them, Former transport worker and an activist working to achieve LGBT and HIV Justice for all*, etc.). In this case, TfL wants to *shine a spotlight* on these individuals and once again, places itself as a neutral facilitator of diversity promotion, letting the individual identities represented in the post speak for themselves. Furthermore, audience engagement is enhanced by promoting interactions with the post through the question *Can you spot...?* and the directive with conditional clause *comment if you know*. However, unlike other cases where user engagement was encouraged to foster discussion, these prompts seem primarily engagement-driven, aiming solely to increase interaction with the post rather than educate passengers.

The representation of the LGBTQ+ community is also complemented by other dimensions of diversity, showing a certain attention being paid to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Let us consider the following extract from a caption published for the Pride in London 2020:

- 9) *For the L's, the G's, the B's and the T's. Plus the **Allies** and the **Andros, Agenders and Aporas**. [...] For every **race**. Every **refugee**. Every **fluid identity**. For the **Masculine**. For the **Feminine**. The **men** and the **womxn**. **Ladies** born as **boys**. And the **girls** who chose to change. [...]*

Example 9 extends collectivisation by grouping social actors under broad identity categories related to gender, sexuality, and social status. The spelling of LGBT at the beginning of Example 9 (*For the L's, the G's, the B's, and the T's*) reinforces the in-group identification. This identification is extended to various other social actors (e.g., *Allies, Andros, Agenders, and Aporas*), including lesser-known gender identities and ensuring intersectional inclusivity. The intersectional approach of the post is also reflected in collective references to other social actors (e.g., *race, refugee, fluid identity*) which are characterised by other types of dimensions e.g., ethnicity, social status, and gender fluidity. This highlights an awareness of intersecting identities, acknowledging that marginalisation can be compounded by multiple factors. The phrases *Ladies born as boys* and *the girls who chose to change* recognise transgender identities, but this binary representation may increase a rigid transition narrative. In contrast, the use of nouns such as *womxn* intentionally includes trans and non-binary individuals, though the use of these terms is not consistent in the corpus, as it only occurs once. Here TfL positions itself as an external supporter and facilitator of the community without playing an active role in the representation.

Various posts can be found as part of the educational attempts of TfL's Instagram profile to

sensitise passengers to be active bystanders. This is part of the active bystander campaign initiated by Transport for London in 2021 which aimed to train Londoners to be active against hate crime (Note 4). This has linguistically emerged through the analysis of the concordance lines of the lemma *Londoner*.

10) We asked **Londoners** what they would do if they witnessed a hate crime on public transport! If you feel it's safe to do so, you can be an active **bystander** by

Distracting with a question

Making a note of the details and reporting it

Checking if the person targeted is okay

In Example 10, social actors are represented as generic entities with the use of the noun *Londoners*, creating a sense of shared civic responsibility while personally engaging the audience through the use of the personal pronoun *you*. The post attributes readers to the role of an *active bystander*, encouraging intervention through a series of clear, actionable steps (distracting, documenting, and checking on the victim), while the conditional clause *if you feel it's safe to do so* and the dynamic use of the modal *can* mitigate pressure. The victim is foregrounded as *the person targeted*, while the perpetrator of the hate crime is backgrounded, in line with institutional discourses that prioritise support and community care over confrontation or punishment. In this perspectivation strategy, TfL takes the role of the educator by providing suggestions to passengers. However, the responsibility of contrasting hate crime in TfL's services seems to be placed only on passengers, backgrounding TfL's own responsibility to ensure a comfortable journey for everyone.

In summary, the qualitative analysis has revealed that Transport for London primarily promotes diversity and inclusion through content that represents diversity and provides information intended to guide passengers toward respectful and responsible conduct. This is linguistically achieved through representations of social actors as active entities in the discourse, often making them speak for themselves, with Transport for London playing the role of facilitator or supporter in the discourse. This type of indirect promotion can be effective in handling all passengers without blaming anyone. Still, TfL does not place itself as a leader in the promotion of diversity, but rather as a marginal supporter.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of how social actors are represented in Transport for London's Instagram posts has revealed several discursive strategies employed by the organisation to promote diversity and inclusion through its social media channels. As regards the first research question on the ways in which social actors are represented in TfL's Instagram profile, Transport for London actively presents diverse groups of social actors and partly ensures intersectional representations, key aspects in the promotion of diversity and inclusion (Crenshaw, 1989; Qian, 2025). Specifically, the analysis of the frequency list shows a possible deliberate effort to promote inclusivity through various lexicalisations of social actors. For instance, the data indicate nomination strategies which favour generic and collective categorisations of social

actors (e.g., the frequent use of terms such as *people* or *customers*), showing a strong inclination toward gender-neutral rather than gender-marked language (Baker, 2010). Furthermore, always in terms of lexical choices, it is worth highlighting that TfL effectively balances the use of people-first and identity-first expressions, signalling an attempt to embrace the communities' preferences regarding linguistic choices (see Botha et al., 2023; Taboas et al., 2023).

From a discursive perspective, the way social actors are represented in the dataset reveals common patterns. When a post focuses on a specific dimension of diversity (e.g., disability, gender, etc.), other passengers – implicitly framed as responsible for the challenges faced by the focus group – are backgrounded. In contrast, members of a specific dimension of diversity are emphasised and represented either through collective or individual identities. These actors are repeatedly portrayed as individuals or groups of individuals through the use of proper names, employing a perspectivation strategy which stresses the individuality of the actors represented. Although collectivised representations (Van Leeuwen, 2008) can occasionally homogenise the individuals represented, TfL diversifies the linguistic representations of social actors on its Instagram profile, resulting in a relatively balanced portrayal. However, it is worth noticing that, at least from a lexical perspective, TfL prioritises the representation of certain dimensions of diversity (e.g., disability, gender, LGBTQ+ identities), while others (e.g., ethnicity or social status) are backgrounded. This observation is limited to lexical choices only, and a multimodal analysis is needed in the future to validate this statement in visual content as well.

Regarding the second research question, TfL makes use of various discursive strategies and includes different dimensions of diversity, particularly disabled people, women, and the LGBTQ+ community and reflects a strategic engagement with social issues. As already covered in the previous paragraph, TfL employs a nomination strategy that alternates between generic terms (e.g., *customers*, *someone*, *people*) and collectivised representations (e.g., *disabled people* or *those with non-visible impairments*) to ensure marginalised groups are visible. The representation of these social groups in TfL's profile provides them with visibility. However, mere representation is not enough to effectively promote diversity and inclusion (see Bush, 2025). Accordingly, TfL engages in other discursive strategies to fulfil this aim. One perspectivation strategy used is individual storytelling, where members of specific social groups share their personal experiences. This strategy is extensively used for representing disability, where TfL not only shares individual stories but also encourages disabled individuals to actively share their own narratives in the comment sections. By doing so, TfL fosters a virtual space for dialogue and engagement, positioning itself as a moderator while attributing agency to disabled people. This can be viewed as a form of predication, where positive traits, such as active participation, are attributed to people with disabilities. Storytelling strategies are used for gender-related representations as well, including women and the LGBTQ+ community. Another discursive strategy involves promoting educational content. In these posts, TfL provides instructions on how to use its services respectfully. The educational purpose of these posts is created both by members of the represented social groups and by TfL itself, which positions itself not only as a facilitator of dialogue but also as an active

educator. This approach serves as a mitigation strategy through the use of soft suggestions and directives, reducing the pressure on passengers while still trying to guide them to act respectfully on trains.

As regards the third research question, TfL's communication strategies have significant implications for perceived transparency and trust. The direct sharing of information about the represented social groups and TfL's initiatives to fight against hate crime (e.g., the active bystander campaign) can foster a sense of openness, which, according to Ball (2009), enhances perceptions of transparency. This is in line with other studies that found that the inherent participatory features of social media, if used to share companies' initiatives and provide clear information, can foster external perceptions of transparency (see Song & Lee, 2016). Clearly, the accuracy and details of the information provided are limited, a feature which can reduce the effectiveness of transparent communication (see Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). However, this may be due to the textual genre of social media, where users do not necessarily respond well to long texts and complex sentences (Dreyer & Ziebarth, 2014, p. 531). Another key aspect related to transparency in the dataset is TfL's pragmatic approach to engaging the public with educational content. This is achieved by inviting specific groups of social actors to share their personal stories with other Instagram users, creating a virtual space for public dialogue. Additionally, TfL positions itself in dual roles: as a facilitator of direct engagement, promoting diversity and inclusion, and as a direct advocate, creating informative content that suggests respectful behaviours to passengers when using its services. In this last case, the use of soft language (e.g., hedging and conditional clauses) when giving instructions to passengers, though understandable, might obscure the clarity of the communicative purpose of the content and could result in less transparent recommendations (see Butler, 2016).

The linguistic analysis has revealed that TfL's social media discourse constructs a narrative of inclusivity, encouraging both recognition of marginalised voices and collective responsibility for fostering an equitable public transport environment. However, the results of this study are limited to verbal content. In the future, this research could be expanded by analysing how verbal and visual content interact, possibly including the users' replies to the posts as well, especially when engagement with the content is promoted. Furthermore, the study is restricted to discourse representations and does not assess the real-world impact of these discursive strategies, particularly whether they lead to tangible changes in passenger behaviour or systemic improvements in transport accessibility. Future research should combine an interdisciplinary approach to comprehensively evaluate TfL's actual efforts towards diversity and inclusion.

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Notes

Note 1. Data regarding cultural diversity were collected from <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest>, 22 September 2023; Data regarding tourism were collected from <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/tourism-trends-and-strategies/tourism-statistics>, 22 September 2023.

Note 2. Data regarding TfL's commitments against hate crime available at <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2021/june/tfl-takes-a-stand-against-hate-crime-and-abu>, 22 September 2023; Data regarding hate crime in London Transport Network available at <https://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/research>, 22 February 2025.

Note 3. Data were collected from <https://www.instagram.com/transportforlondon/>, 22 September 2023.

Note 4. Data retrieved from <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2024/october/tfl-invites-londoners-to-participate-in-active-bystander-training>, 21 February 2025.

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