URL TO IRL: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POC, WOMEN, AND LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES

Background

Online harassment is a growing issue in America today. At the same time, not all harassment is equal--**individuals with marginalized gender and racial identities tend to experience online harassment and hate speech at increased levels.** To better understand online harassment across race, gender, and sexuality, UltraViolet, GLAAD, Kairos, and Women's March commissioned YouGov to study these interrelated phenomena using a national survey of social media users in the United States.

 Four distinct samples comprise the study:
(1)   a nationally representative sample of social media users comprised of 1235 respondents (the "Base Sample"),
(2) an oversample (OS) of self-identified people of color who are social media users (n = 403),
(3) an oversample (OS) of self-identified LGBTQ+ respondents who are social media users (n=404), and
(4) an oversample of self-identified women who are social media users (n = 438).

This study focuses on three broad comparisons in order to obtain clear and substantive insights about the online experience:
 • LGBTQ+ oversample that gets compared to the entire base sample
 • All self-identified POC respondents (from OS + base sample) are compared to white respondents in the base sample
 • All self-identified women respondents (from OS + base sample) to men respondents in the base sample.

Unique Experiences of POC, Women, and LGBTQ+ Communities on Social Media

Across the results of the study, we found places where the answers of POC, women, and LGBTQ+ respondents differed and stood out from their respective comparison groups. These findings illuminate the unique ways that these specific marginalized groups experience social media. These differences in experiences are further supported by some findings from the general population. For example, fully 57 percent of respondents in the base sample have seen a post that calls for actual <u>violence</u> against someone based on their race, gender, sexuality, or any other personal characteristic, suggesting that threats against these marginalized groups are not uncommon. Further, nearly one in three Americans overall, women, and POC respondents said that social media platforms are doing a poor job at addressing online harassment on their sites, while almost two in five LGBTQ+ respondents said the same.
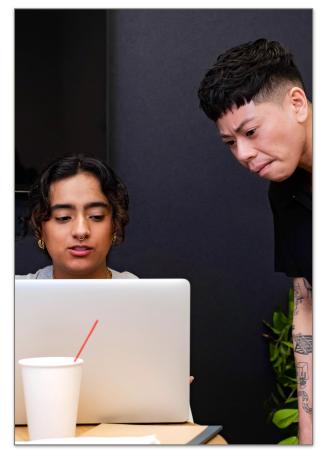

Vicarious harassment can translate to feelings of being affected by seeing others with one's own identity attacked in online spaces. This means, substantively speaking, that the problem of online harassment is not only one that affects the *victims* of harassment themselves, but the *witnesses* of this harassment.

Additional highlights of the larger report include:

• LGBTQ+ respondents feel that the internet gives them a space to be themselves and allows them to have an effective voice, but women and POC do not

Personal identity appears to play an important role in how one experiences harassment

exhibit the same patterns when compared to their respective comparison groups.

•Personal identity appears to play an important role in how one experiences harassment. LGBTQ+ folks, POC, and women are more likely to report harassment based on characteristics, such as sexuality, national origin, or appearance, that are associated with their identity.

•Respondents who belong to a marginalized community tend to notice attacks against their community more than non-marginalized groups notice against their specific community

•Vicarious harassment can translate to feelings of being affected by seeing others with one's own identity attacked in online spaces. This means, substantively speaking, that the problem of online harassment is not only one that affects the victims of harassment themselves, but the witnesses of this harassment.

- **LGBTQ+ folks and women report higher rates of harassment than their respective comparison groups.**
- Americans overwhelmingly agree that both disrespectful speech and hate speech are a problem in online spaces. When asking the same questions of LGBTQ+, POC, and women respondents—individuals with marginalized identities—the gap between those who say it is a problem and those who disagree grows even larger.
- LGBTQ+ people were more likely than the general population to report witnessing harassment of others – including seeing others called offensive names, embarrassed, and physically threatened.
- LGBTQ+ people are more likely than the general population to report encountering harassment in online spaces either very frequently or frequently, even when it's not occurring against them personally.

Experiences with False Information

- Respondents think that false information is a problem in online spaces and would like to hold platforms accountable for their role in promoting false information.
- A majority of Americans report that they frequently run into false information, especially about politics, COVID-19, and public officials.
- Most respondents believe that false information leaves the public confused about the basic facts and impacts trust in the government and in one another, showing that the deleterious impacts of misinformation could have both immediate and downstream effects.

> **❝ I quit all social media platforms except YouTube. I often felt depressed, and those incidents triggered PTSD. It was often very upsetting.”**
>
> *- RESPONDENT*

- **Respondents see false information as an issue across multiple platforms, with Facebook and Twitter being seen as the most problematic.**
- **A very strong majority believe that platforms should be held accountable** for various types of false information in their sites – about 9 out of 10 women and LGBTQ+ respondents agree with platform accountability when it comes to false information, while 8 out of 10 people of color do the same.

Experiences of Online Hate and Incivility

- Uncivil and hate speech are both generally regarded as problematic in online spaces. Large proportions of respondents report having witnessed specific disrespectful or hateful speech online.
  - When asking the same question of LGBTQ+, POC, and women respondents--individuals with marginalized identities--the gap between those who say it is a problem and those who disagree grows even larger.
- **Fully 57 percent of respondents in the base sample have seen a post that calls for actual <u>violence</u> against someone based on their race, gender, sexuality, or any other personal characteristic.**
- Respondents who belong to a marginalized community tend to notice attacks against their community more than non-marginalized groups notice against that specific community.

Respondents are critical of how platforms have addressed hate speech on their sites:

- About one in five Americans report encountering harassment in online spaces either very frequently or frequently, while about one in three LGBTQ+ respondents report the same.
- Strong majorities of respondents say that society thinks it is socially unacceptable to harass respondents based on a host of individual characteristics. However, about a third of Americans say that it is socially acceptable to harass people online based on political opinions, views about current events, and COVID-19.
- A plurality of respondents in the base sample think that online harassment is a major problem on Facebook and Twitter, a finding that mirrors the previous findings on false information and hate speech.
- Nearly one in three Americans overall, women, and POC respondents said that social media platforms are doing a poor job at addressing online harassment on their sites, while almost two in five LGBTQ+ respondents said the same.
- Witnessing others be harassed online is a widespread experience among Americans overall, but LGBTQ+ respondents report seeing the same behaviors at increased rates. However, when asked to reflect about this, either pluralities or majorities of Americans across groups believe that harassment is more widespread than not.
  - Witnessing harassment online is widespread among Americans overall but LGBTQ+ respondents report seeing the same behaviors at increased rates.
- While a majority of Americans in the base sample have not been subject to harassment themselves, LGBTQ+ folks and women report higher rates of harassment than their respective comparison groups. This means that personal identity appears to play an important role in how one experiences harassment. This is further reflected by data showing LGBTQ+ people, women, and POC experience harassment based on characteristics associated with their identity.

> **" The man was harassing me on Twitter years ago, back when I was 15 or so. He kept stalking me and was very intense. He wouldn't leave me alone. I blocked, reported, nothing worked. I ended up having to repeatedly block and report him for days before he finally gave up."**
>
> *- RESPONDENT*

Solutions

- Repercussions and platform accountability performs the best across both the base sample and demographic oversamples, followed by platform-specific policies like improving content moderation or enforcing or creating new policies, and trailed by entirely banning hateful language, violence, and disinformation from online platforms.
- Upon completing the survey, respondents were more supportive of government regulation of platforms than they were at the start of the survey. This is particularly the case among POC, women, and LGBTQ+ respondents.