From URL to IRL

The Impact of Social Media on People of Color, Women, and LGBTQ+ Communities

Online hate and harassment are growing problems 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.[1]

ultraviolet   YouGov   glaad   WOMEN'S MARCH   KAIROS

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

Across the results of the study, we found places where the answers of People of Color (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 violence 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.
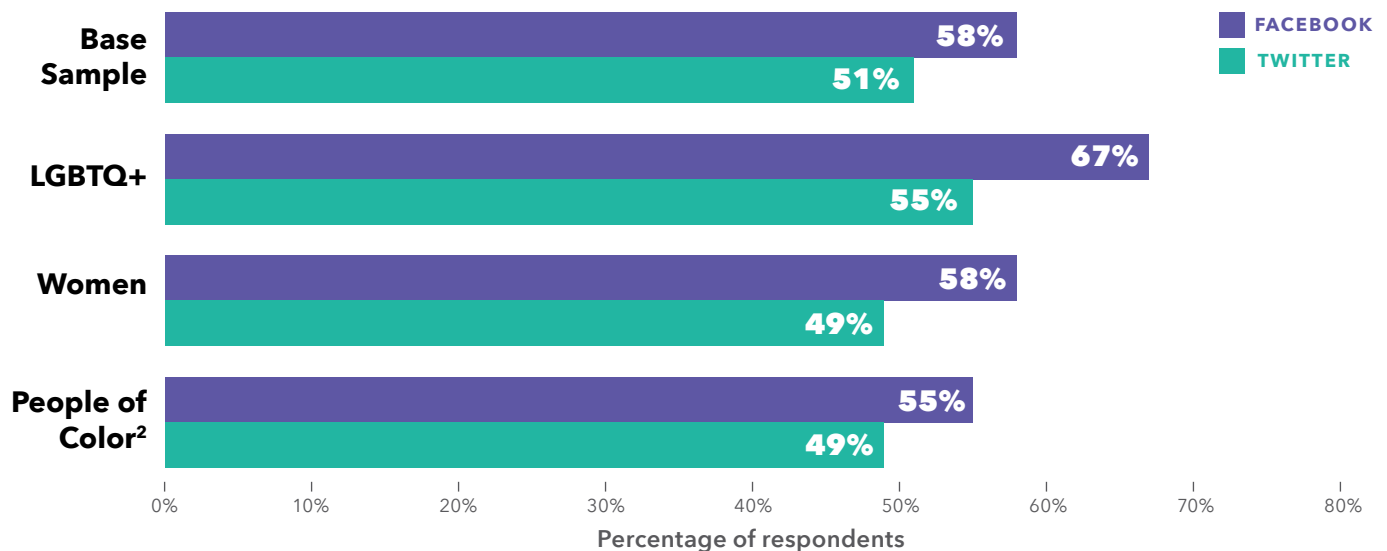
Further highlights of the larger report include:

→ 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 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+ people, POC, and women are more likely to report having been harassed 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 that 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+ people and women report higher rates of harassment than their respective comparison groups.

→ Americans overwhelmingly agree that both disrespectful speech and hate speech are problems in online spaces. When asking the same questions of LGBTQ+, POC, and women respondents--individuals with marginalized identities--the gap 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.

→ 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.
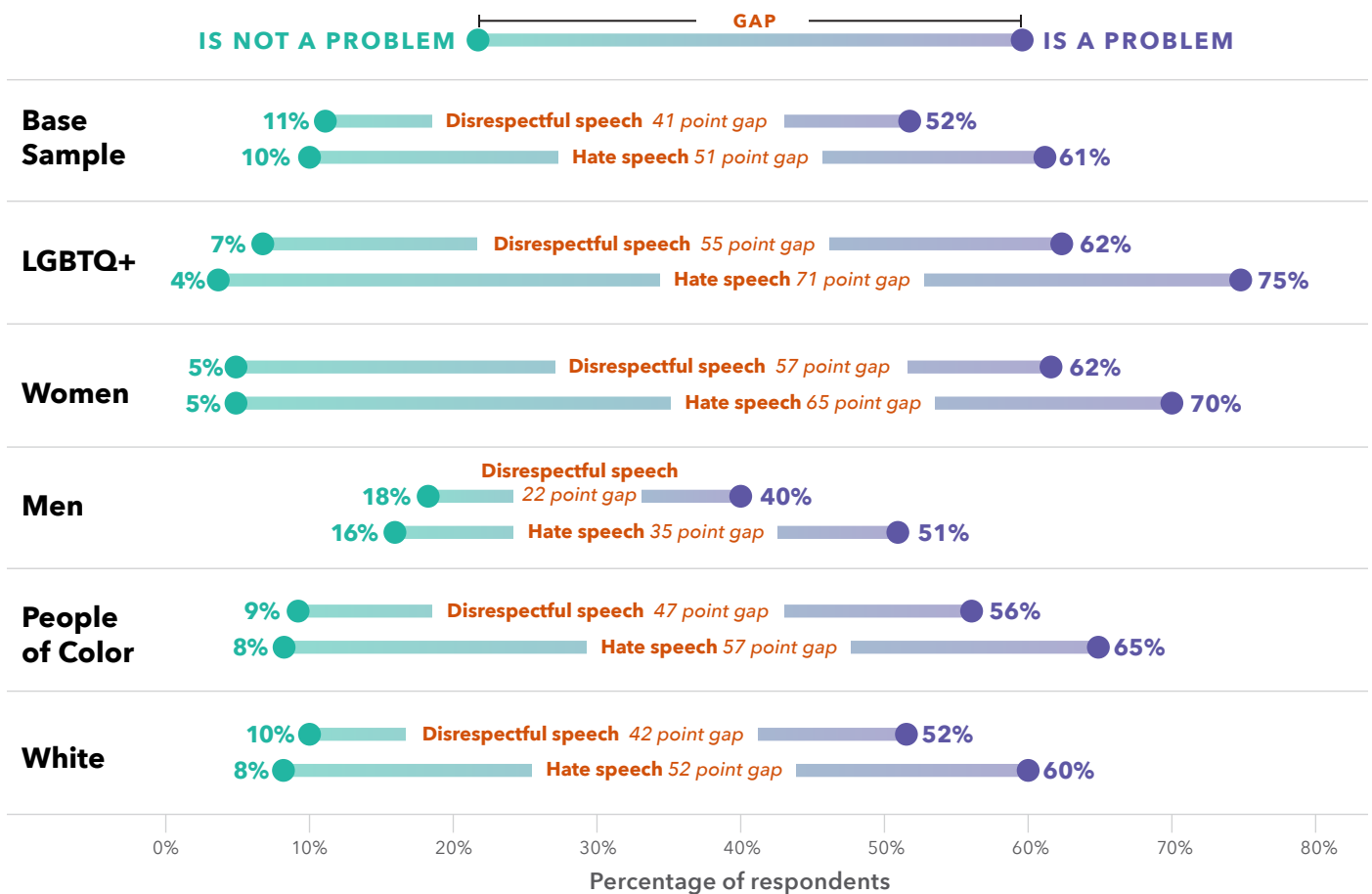
HOW SERIOUS OF AN ISSUE IS FALSE INFORMATION ON EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS? SHOWING RESPONSES FOR "EXTREMELY SERIOUS" AND "VERY SERIOUS".

Legend: FACEBOOK, TWITTER

Base Sample: Facebook 58%, Twitter 51%
LGBTQ+: Facebook 67%, Twitter 55%
Women: Facebook 58%, Twitter 49%
People of Color[2]: Facebook 55%, Twitter 49%

X-axis: Percentage of respondents (0% to 80%)

Experiences of Online Hate and Incivility

→ Discursive incivility--discourse that is rude or unsociable speech or behavior--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.

→ Fully 57 percent of respondents in the base sample have seen a post that calls for actual violence against someone based on their race, gender, sexuality, or any other personal characteristic.

IS DISRESPECTFUL SPEECH OR HATE SPEECH A PROBLEM IN ONLINE SPACES?

GAP

IS NOT A PROBLEM ●————————————● IS A PROBLEM

Base Sample
- 11% Disrespectful speech *41 point gap* 52%
- 10% Hate speech *51 point gap* 61%

LGBTQ+
- 7% Disrespectful speech *55 point gap* 62%
- 4% Hate speech *71 point gap* 75%

Women
- 5% Disrespectful speech *57 point gap* 62%
- 5% Hate speech *65 point gap* 70%

Men
- 18% Disrespectful speech *22 point gap* 40%
- 16% Hate speech *35 point gap* 51%

People of Color
- 9% Disrespectful speech *47 point gap* 56%
- 8% Hate speech *57 point gap* 65%

White
- 10% Disrespectful speech *42 point gap* 52%
- 8% Hate speech *52 point gap* 60%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%

Percentage of respondents

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

    → For instance, while 88 percent of respondents in the LGBTQ+ sample report having seen a post that insults or attacks LGBTQ+ individuals, only 64 percent of respondents in the base sample do the same – a significant 24 percentage point gap. A similar pattern is evident among POC and women, even when the gaps are slightly less statistically clear than with the LGBTQ+ comparison.

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

→ About one in five Americans report encountering hate and 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.

HAVE YOU SEEN A POST THAT INSULTS OR ATTACKS...

LGBTQ+ Individuals?

LGBTQ+	88%
Base sample	64%

24 point gap

People of Color?

People of Color	73%
White	68%

5 point gap

Women?

Women	70%
Men	66%

4 point gap

10% 30% 50% 70% 90%
Percentage of respondents

HAVE YOU SEEN A CALL TO VIOLENCE?

LGBTQ+ Respondents

LGBTQ+	73%
Base sample	57%

16 point gap

POC Respondents

People of Color	62%
White	54%

8 point gap

Women Respondents

Women	53%
Men	58%

5 point gap

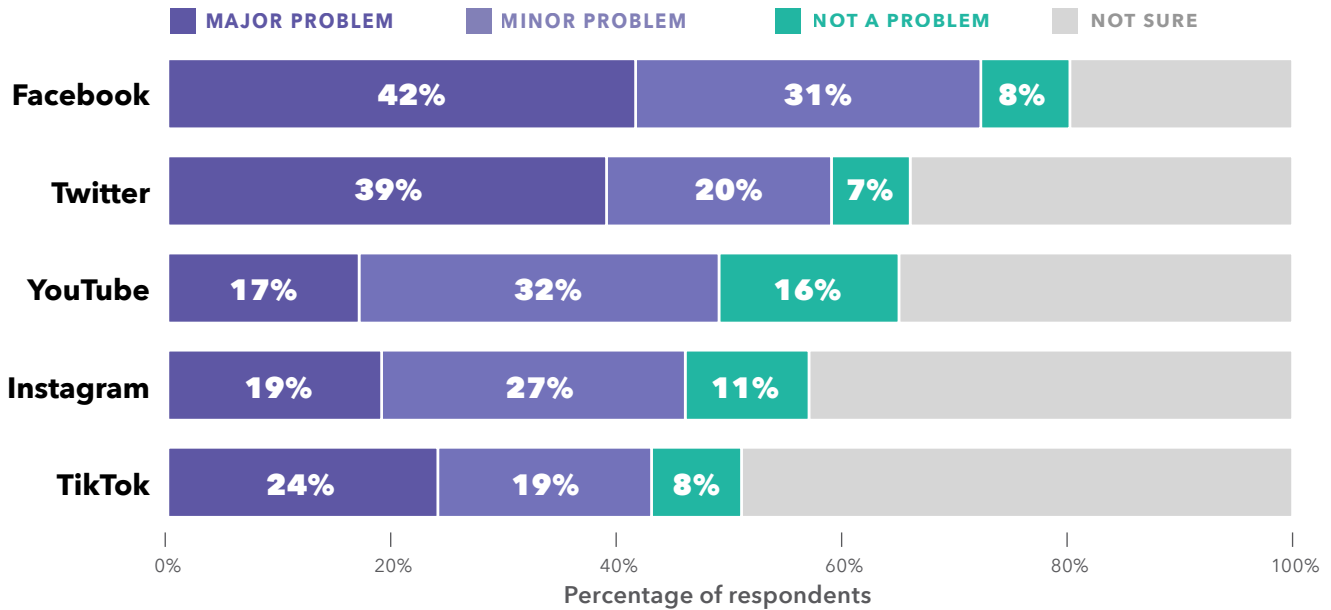10% 30% 50% 70%
Percentage of respondents

> I feel very frustrated. I know I'm not the only one with these issues, and there really needs to be something done about this. I don't even feel safe being myself in a lot of spaces. That's the reason I left Facebook, due to continuous harassment and transphobic jokes, etc.
>
> — Survey respondent

→ 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.

HOW MUCH OF A PROBLEM IS REGULAR PEOPLE BEING HARASSED OR BULLIED ON ONLINE PLATFORMS?

MAJOR PROBLEM **MINOR PROBLEM** **NOT A PROBLEM** **NOT SURE**

| Platform	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Not a Problem
Facebook	42%	31%	8%
Twitter	39%	20%	7%
YouTube	17%	32%	16%
Instagram	19%	27%	11%
TikTok	24%	19%	8%

Percentage of respondents

> " 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.
>
> — Survey respondent

→ Witnessing others be harassed online is a widespread experience among Americans overall, but LGBTQ+ respondents report seeing the same behaviors--like for example seeing others be called offensive names--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.

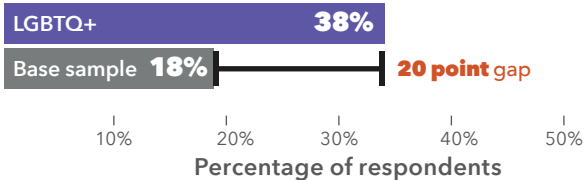## HAVE YOU SEEN OTHERS BEING CALLED OFFENSIVE NAMES ON ONLINE PLATFORMS?

LGBTQ+ — 74%

Base Sample — 56%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Percentage of respondents
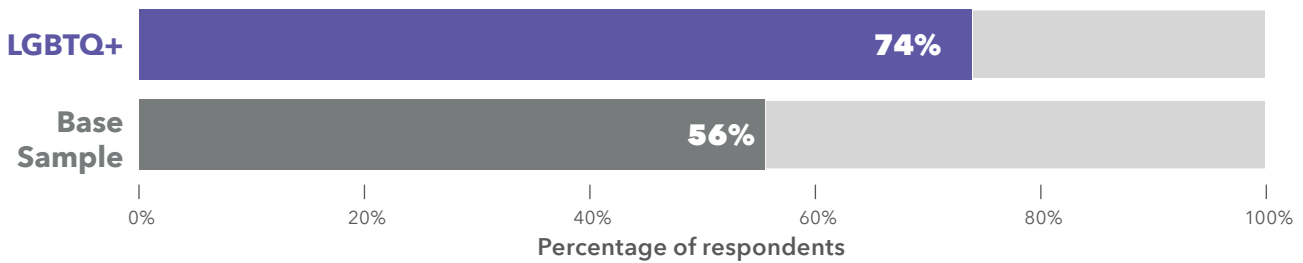
→ People aren't harmed only from direct harassment; they also feel personally attacked when they witness public figures who have a shared identity being attacked (e.g. when an LGBTQ+ person sees an LGBTQ+ celebrity being targeted with anti-LGBTQ+ hate). This means, substantively speaking, that the problem of online harassment is not only one that affects the victims of harassment themselves, but the witnesses of this harassment.

DO YOU FEEL PERSONALLY ATTACKED IF A PUBLIC FIGURE IS HARASSED IN ONLINE SPACES?

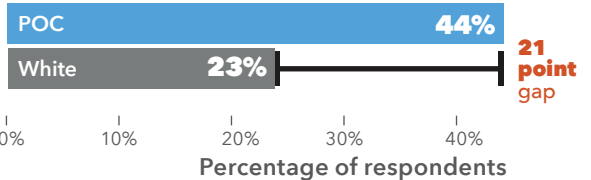### Public figure who is LGBTQ+ is harassed

LGBTQ+ — 60%
Base sample — 24%
36 point gap

Public figure who is non-binary is harassed

LGBTQ+ — 38%
Base sample — 18%
20 point gap

10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

Percentage of respondents

Public figure who is a woman is harassed

Women — 46%
Men — 21%
25 point gap

Public figure who is a POC is harassed
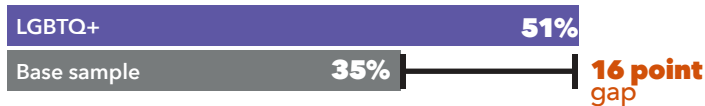
POC — 44%
White — 23%
21 point gap

0% 10% 20% 30% 40%
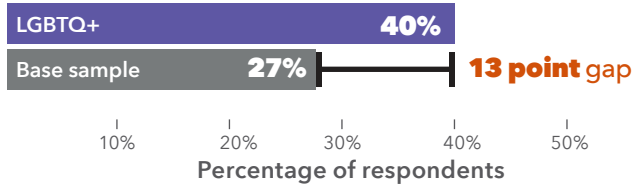
Percentage of respondents

→ 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+, women, and POC experience harassment based on characteristics associated with their identity.

HAVE YOU PERSONALLY BEEN HARASSED IN ONLINE SPACES?

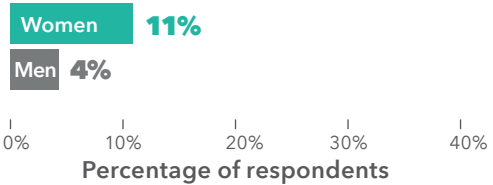### Have you been called an offensive name?

LGBTQ+	51%
Base sample	35%

16 point gap

Has someone tried to embarass you?

LGBTQ+	40%
Base sample	27%

13 point gap

Percentage of respondents

Have you been sexually harassed?

LGBTQ+	23%
Base sample	8%

Have you been sexually harassed?

Women	11%
Men	4%

Percentage of respondents

IF YOU HAVE BEEN HARASSED IN ONLINE SPACES, WHAT WAS IT FOR?

Was the harassment due to sexual orientation?

LGBTQ+	52%
Base sample	14%

38 point gap

Was the harassment due to physical appearance?

LGBTQ+	40%
Base sample	20%

20 point gap

Was the harassment due to gender identity?

LGBTQ+	31%
Base sample	12%

19 point gap

Percentage of respondents
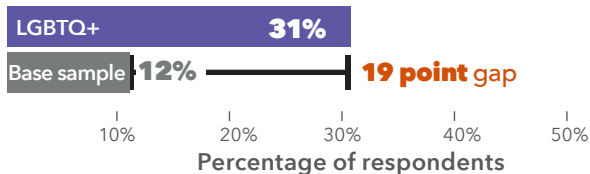
Was the harassment race-based?

POC	38%
White	15%

23 point gap

Was the harassment due to physical appearance?

POC	28%
White	19%

9 point gap
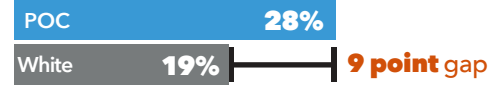
Was the harassment about your national origin?

POC	19%
White	7%

12 point gap

Percentage of respondents
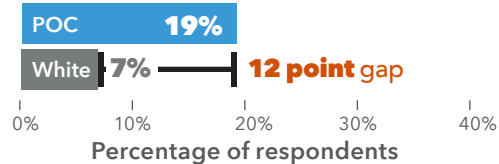
Solutions

→ 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 grew more supportive of government regulation of platforms than they were at the very start of the survey. This is particularly the case among POC, women, and LGBTQ+ respondents.

  → At the start of the survey, 48 percent of respondents in the base sample said that social media companies should be regulated more than they currently are.

  → After answering the survey, 56 percent of respondents in the base sample said that social media companies should be more regulated, a net increase of 8 percentage points.

  → A similar 8 percentage point increase in support for regulation happened in the LGBTQ+ oversamples, while women had a 7 percentage point increase and POC respondents had a 10 percentage point increase in their support for government regulation of social media companies.

  → In short, **the survey itself moved respondents to agree with increasing regulation, going from a plurality agreeing with this position to a majority agreeing with it after the survey** (and this movement is consistently observed across the four samples).

> My online experiences have made me doubt many things about myself, friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances, and the world/society in general. Seeing people's online behavior, most of the time unfettered and uncontrolled, can really impact someone's mental health when so many people are trying to see the world as a good, safe place to live with good, decent people.
>
> — Survey respondent

Notes:

1. 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 of self-identified people of color who are social media users (n = 403),
    (3) an oversample 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

2. Making additional data comparisons may not be statistically significant. Please contact info@weareultraviolet.org with questions about the data.