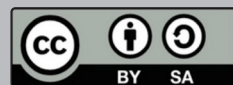


THE DIGITAL CLOSET:

Experiences of Hate Speech in Virtual Environments Among Namibia's LGBT+ Community



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A Report by Christiaan Keulder
For Namibia Diverse Women's Association (NDWA) and NMT Media Foundation

Editors: Linda M. Baumann and Zoé Titus

FOREWORD

Hate speech on social media poses a profound threat to democracy and human dignity, challenging the foundational values of fairness and equality. The NMT Media Foundation, in partnership with the Namibia Diverse Women's Association, embarked on this groundbreaking study, the first of its kind in Africa, to examine the impact of online hate speech targeting the LGBT+ community in Namibia. It explores how spaces intended for free expression have transformed into platforms of significant injustice.

Our unwavering commitment to freedom of expression drives this initiative. Social media serves both as empowering tools and potential sources of harm. Despite their capacity to amplify marginalised voices, these platforms frequently fail to protect users adequately, allowing hate speech to proliferate. This neglect by digital giants creates environments that undermine democratic participation and jeopardise users' mental and emotional health.

This research aims to address these issues and spark a much-needed conversation on regulating online spaces to ensure safety for all. By examining the landscape of online hate speech in Namibia, we highlight its damaging impact on public discourse and individual lives. These findings are not mere statistics; they are a call to action, emphasising the need to intensify our fight against online hate. Protecting freedom of expression involves shielding it from the destructive effects of unchecked hate and bigotry.

We urge policymakers, civil society, and the international community to view this report as both a resource and a guide for creating safer online environments. Our goal is to ensure digital spaces are both free and fair, allowing every individual to engage without fear of harm.

Let's work together to build a digital future founded on rights, respect, and resilience.

Zoé Titus
Executive Director, NMT Media Foundation

From the heart of our community, we recognize that online hate speech is far more than mere words it is a weapon that wounds our collective spirit and undermines our fundamental human dignity.

This groundbreaking study by the NMT Media Foundation and Namibia Diverse Women's Association is a crucial lifeline for our LGBT+ community, illuminating the profound psychological and social trauma inflicted by digital discrimination.

Every hateful comment, every derogatory post, chips away at our sense of belonging and safety.

These aren't just isolated incidents; they're systematic attacks that push our community towards marginalisation, anxiety, and isolation. Young LGBT+ Namibians are particularly vulnerable, facing increased risks of depression, self-harm, and social exclusion when confronted with persistent online vilification.

Our digital spaces, which should be platforms of connection and empowerment, have become battlegrounds of prejudice. Social media algorithms often amplify harmful narratives, creating echo chambers that normalize discrimination and silence our voices.

This study is more than research - it's a mirror reflecting the urgent need for comprehensive digital protection and inclusive online environments.

By documenting these experiences, we're not just collecting data; we're building evidence to challenge systemic discrimination. We're creating a powerful narrative that demands accountability from social media platforms, policymakers, and society at large.

This is our call to action: Transform digital spaces from sites of hate to platforms of hope, understanding, and genuine human connection. Our community's resilience is our strength, and together, we will reclaim our right to exist, express, and thrive - online and offline.

Linda Reanate Magano Baumann
Namibia Diverse Woman's Association



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ACRONYMS OR ABBREVIATIONS

- GLAAD** Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
- LGBT+** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (plus sign to represent the many other sexual orientations and gender identities that exist)
- UN** United Nations

For the purposes of this report, LGBT+ serves as a collective term.

T (transgender) is understood as an umbrella term, encompassing all who transition or redefine their gender in terms of identity and expression.

I (intersex) is excluded because the project does not focus on intersex individuals, and there is no active intersex activism in Namibia.

This perspective provides insight into the project's scope and the nuanced use of terms.

TERMINOLOGY

Androgyny	Not having only clear masculine, or only feminine physical characteristics or appearance. A modern understanding of someone who is androgynous is that they can access their “feminine” qualities at appropriate moments, as well as their more “masculine” characteristics in situations where these are needed.
Asexual	A person not sexually attracted to either men or women. This person has no desire to engage in sexual activity with a partner
Bisexual	A sexual orientation and identity. Bisexual people have an attraction to people of the same and opposite sex on various levels (emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually). Not necessarily at the same time and not necessarily an equal amount of attraction.
Cisgender	Cisgender people are those whose gender identity matches their sex at birth e.g. a cisman is born male and presents himself as masculine and a ciswoman is born female and presents herself as feminine. This has a more positive connotation than “normal” or “non-transgender”.
Cross-dresser	A person who enjoys dressing in clothing typically associated with the other of the 2 socially-sanctioned genders, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as the other gender. The older term “transvestite” is considered derogatory
Drag	The theatrical act of dressing in gendered clothing and/or adopting gendered behaviours as part of a performance (usually clothing and behaviours not typically associated with your own gender identity). Drag can be done for entertainment, as parody or to make a political statement and does indicate the performer’s sexual orientation or gender identity
FTM/Transman	A trans man or female-to-man starts his life with a female body, but his gender identity is male. Always use male pronouns in reference.
Gay	A male, same sex identity and orientation. Attraction between two males on various levels (emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually). The term can also be used to refer to both male and female homosexuals and the homosexual community at large.
Gender	A term used to describe the social status of people as men, women, boys, girls or variously transgendered, including characteristics of masculinity and femininity that are learned or chosen.
Gender non-conforming	A person whose gender identity is not limited to binary concepts of being either a man or a woman and/or whose gender expression is not limited to being either masculine or feminine.
Gender expression	A person’s ways of communicating masculinity or femininity (or both or neither) externally. This is done through physical appearance – including clothing, hair styles and the use of cosmetics – mannerisms, ways of speaking and behavioural patterns when interacting with others.
Gender identity	A person’s internal sense of being a man or a woman or a third or other alternative gender, or a combination of genders.
Heteronormative	A social construct that views all human beings as either male or female, with the associated behaviour and gender roles assigned, both in sex and gender, and that sexual and romantic thoughts and relations are normal only between people of opposite sexes and all other behaviour is viewed as “abnormal”.
Heterosexuality	A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.
Homosexual	Attraction between two people of the same sex on various level (emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually) where the sex of the attracted person is the key to the attraction.

Homophobia	Dislike or prejudice against people because they are lesbian, gay or bisexual or are assumed to be not heterosexual.
Intersex	Born with ambiguous genitalia or sex organs that are not clearly distinguished as female or male.
Legal sex	The sex recorded when a child’s birth is registered. Usually the sex assigned at birth is also used in social interactions.
Lesbian	A female sexual identity and orientation which is an attraction between two females on various levels (emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually).
MTF/Trans woman	A trans woman or male-to-female, starts her life with a male body, but her gender identity is female. Always use female pronouns in reference.
MSM	Men who have sex with men. This sexual practice is irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. An MSM can be heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual or transsexual. This term is more technical and is not necessarily an identity.
Pansexual	A person who is attracted to other persons regardless of their sex; an alternative term to bisexual.
Queer	An umbrella identity used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary
Sex	Sex is biological and is determined in the male body by the presence of a penis, testes, testosterone and male specific genetic make-up. In the female body, sex is determined by the presence of breasts, a vagina, oestrogen, progesterone and female specific genetic make-up.
Sex characteristics	A person’s physical characteristics relating to sex, including genitalia, chromosomes or hormones and also secondary sex characteristics that emerge at puberty.
Sexuality	How people experience and express themselves as sexual beings, within the concepts of biological sex, gender identity and presentation, attractions and practices. Culture and religion have a huge impact on how individuals see themselves as sexual beings, especially within relations of power.
Sex Affirmation Surgery	Commonly referred to as sex reassignment surgery: surgeries to change the sex characteristics of one’s body, including genitals and/or secondary sex characteristics
Sexual identity	The overall sexual self-identity which includes how the person identifies as male, female, masculine, feminine or some combination, and the person’s sexual orientation.
Sexual orientation	Refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted.
Sexual practices	All behaviours that create sexual pleasure, practiced by one or more person, individually or together
Transgender	An umbrella term which is often used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, includes transsexual FTMs, MTFs, transvestites, cross dressers, drag king and queens, gender-queers and many more.
Transsexual	A transgender person in the process of seeking or undergoing some form of medical treatment to bring the body and gender identity into closer alignment. Not all transgender people undergo reassignment surgery.
Transitioning	The process of changing one’s gender presentation to align with one’s internal sense of one’s gender. For transgender people this may sometimes include sexual reassignment surgery, but not always. It could include hormonal therapy.
Transphobia	Dislike of or prejudice against someone because they are, or are assumed to be, transgender.
Transvestite	An individual who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex for a variety of reasons and who has no desire to change or modify their body.
WSW	Women who have Sex with Women. This sexual practice is irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. A WSW can be hetero, bi or homosexual. This term is more technical and is not necessarily an identity.



INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of Namibian legislation pertaining to LGBT+¹ rights, the development and enactment of laws concerning hate speech and discrimination stand as critical areas of concern and debate. As of December 2023, the Prohibition of Unfair Discrimination, Harassment, and Hate Speech Bill, which had been in the draft stage for some time, remained unpassed in the Namibian Parliament. This draft Bill, integral in its intent to address unfair discrimination and hate speech, notably lacks specific provisions against discrimination based on sexual orientation and age. Its focus is primarily on race, sex or gender, and disability, highlighting a significant gap in the legal protection for the broader LGBT+ community.

The necessity for such legislation is underscored by ongoing marginalisation, discrimination, and violence against LGBT+ individuals in Namibia. The climate of hostility has been exacerbated by political and legal responses to the Namibian Supreme Court's ruling in May 2023², which mandated the recognition of same-sex marriages legally performed abroad. This ruling provoked a notable backlash from various segments of Namibian society, including the government itself, which contested the recognition based on alleged incompatibility with Namibian constitutional values, particularly those pertaining to the definition of family.

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision, there have been legislative attempts to reinforce the prohibition of same-sex marriage, vividly illustrating the state's stance against the normalisation of same-sex relationships. Notably, in July 2023, the National Assembly passed Bills aimed explicitly at prohibiting same-sex marriages, with broad support across the political spectrum.³ These legislative moves represent a concerted effort to enshrine heteronormative principles within the legal framework, directly contradicting the Supreme Court's earlier ruling.

The government's stance is further illuminated by its opposition to decriminalising homosexual acts, as articulated by the Attorney-General in response⁴ to challenges against the common law crimes of sodomy and unnatural sexual offences. This opposition is framed within the context of preserving societal morals against what is deemed "immoral and unacceptable" sexual behaviour, despite recommendations from the Law Reform and Development Commission suggesting that such laws are unconstitutional⁵. In June 2024, the High Court ruled in favour of the applicant Friedel Dausab and declared the country's anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional⁶.

¹ Linda explainer on use of LGBT+

² See P L v Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration (HC-MD-CIV MOT-GEN 473 of 2019) [2021] NAHCMD 481 (13 October 2021)

³ For the motivation of the Bill, see Ekandjo, J. (2023) Private Members' Motivation on the Amendment of the Marriage Act, 1961 in the National Assembly. 5 July 2023. Accessed at https://drive.google.com/file/d/12bv2_0vvoPsnhBPgFfGa7Q0mAd865kcr/view?usp=drive_link. The actual Bill can be accessed here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/11X2wZ0NfeGvVzaeA7EGSoDfHn3KTaZlp/view?usp=drive_link

⁴ See, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nUrAy9gbyn0libZJLWo_TrWESS4R55a/view?usp=sharing

⁵ LRDC (2020) Report on the abolishment of the Common Law offences of Sodomy and Unnatural Sexual Offences; Commissioned and Published by the Law Reform and Development Commission; February 2021, Windhoek

⁶ See, Dausab v The Minister of Justice (HC-MD-CIV-MOT-GEN- 2022/00279) [2024] NAHC 331 (21 June 2024)

Namibia's election laws also fail to outlaw hate speech during elections. The only reference to hate speech is Section 5 of the Code of Conduct: *"Speakers at political rallies may not use language which incites violence in any form against any other person or group of persons. Parties will not issue pamphlets, newsletters or posters which contain materials which incite people to violence."*

This complex legal landscape highlights not only the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community in Namibia but also the broader implications for human rights, the rule of law and legal reform in the country. As Namibia grapples with these issues, the tension between progressing toward inclusivity and adhering to conservative societal norms remains palpable, reflecting a critical junction in the nation's approach to equality and non-discrimination and, more importantly, the hitherto prevailing constitutional order and Namibia's democracy.

The pervasive impact of hate speech on the LGBT+ community in Namibia represents a significant issue that manifests across various contexts, influencing both the social dynamics and personal well-being of individuals. Through detailed focus group discussions and an extensive sample survey, members of the LGBT+ community have provided rich insights into their understanding of hate speech, its definition, scope, and the personal ramifications it holds in their lives. Recognising that individuals often face multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989), this study emphasises the importance of analysing these findings through an intersectional lens. This approach aims to extract the nuanced experiences of hate speech influenced by overlapping identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation.

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The pervasive issue of online hate speech and its multifaceted impact on the LGBT+ community necessitates a thorough investigation across several dimensions.

01

Firstly, the prevalence and forms of online hate speech are critical areas of study. This research seeks to quantify how often LGBT+ individuals encounter hate speech and to identify its most common manifestations, including the specific language, imagery, and platforms where it is most prevalent. Understanding the scope and nature of this hate speech is fundamental to developing effective countermeasures.

02

Secondly, the concept of intersectionality is vital in understanding online hate speech. This research angle explores how various aspects of an individual's identity - such as gender, race, and sexual orientation - intersect to influence the type and frequency of hate speech encountered. This aspect of the study aims to highlight the unique challenges faced by the most marginalised within the LGBT+ community, providing insight into the nuanced ways in which hate speech impacts different subgroups.

03

Thirdly, the impact of online hate speech on well-being is a significant concern. This theme focuses on the emotional and psychological effects of such experiences on LGBT+ individuals, including their mental health, sense of community, and personal safety. An integral part of this research involves exploring the coping mechanisms that individuals employ to mitigate the negative impacts of hate speech.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex landscape of online hate speech against Namibia's LGBT+ community, highlighting both the challenges and the potential pathways for creating safer online spaces.

04

The **fourth** critical area of examination is the awareness of, and perceived effectiveness of legal and policy frameworks in protecting LGBT+ individuals from online hate speech. This involves determining whether members of the LGBT+ community in Namibia feel they are effectively safeguarded against online hate.

05

A **fifth** concern, investigating community and individual responses to hate speech, also provides valuable insights into the resilience and strategies of the LGBT+ community and their allies. This research theme examines how individuals respond to hate speech, including reporting mechanisms, engagement in counter-speech, and the choice to withdraw from harmful online environments.

06

Lastly, the efficacy of countermeasures against online hate speech is evaluated to determine how effectively various strategies - employed by individuals, communities, platforms, and governments - address this issue. This includes an examination of the roles of technology, education, and community engagement in reducing and combating hate speech.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex landscape of online hate speech against Namibia's LGBT+ community, highlighting both the challenges and the potential pathways for creating safer online spaces

03 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Defining Hate Speech

Hate speech is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that presents significant challenges to societies striving to uphold values of dignity, equality, and freedom from discrimination. At its core, hate speech involves any public expression that spreads, incites, promotes, or justifies hatred, discrimination, or hostility towards individuals or groups based on protected characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. These conceptual elements are all contained in the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019) which defines hate speech as *“any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”*

Although there are many definitions of hate speech there are a few commonalities in all of these definitions. Perhaps the most common of these is its aim: *“to compromise the dignity of those at whom it is targeted, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of other members of society. [...] It aims to besmirch the basics of their reputation by associating ascriptive characteristics like ethnicity, race, or religion with conduct or attributes that should disqualify someone from being treated as a member of society in good standing* (Waldron 2012, p. 5). Castaño-Pulgarín (et.al., 2021) include the online aspect in their definition of cyberhate: *“[...] this is conceptualised as the use of violent, aggressive or offensive language focused on a specific group of people who share a common property, which can be religion, race, gender or sex or political affiliation through the use of Internet and Social Networks, based on a power imbalance, which can be carried out repeatedly, systematically and uncontrollably, through digital media and often motivated by ideologies.”*

3.2. Civil Negativity vs Hate Speech

Weber et al. (2020) draw distinctions between civil negativity and incivility or hate. In their work, civil negativity refers to *“user comments that express disagreement or opposition in a respectful and civil manner”* - they do not contain aggressive, derogatory, or disrespectful language. Incivility or hate, on the other hand, encompasses *“user comments that are aggressive, derogatory, and disrespectful”*. Severe incivility and hate speech, therefore, involves verbal aggression against individuals or groups based on social categories like gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation. For them, the critical difference between the two concepts is the tone and language used. Civil negativity maintains a respectful tone while expressing criticism, whereas incivility/hate uses offensive and aggressive language to demean or attack individuals or groups.

Hate speech is different from other offensive forms of speech in that it *“must target an individual or group on the basis of so-called ‘protected characteristics’, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and so on”* (Baider et al., 2020, p.172; emphasis added). It is, therefore, different from mere “impoliteness” as impoliteness is not thus restricted (Culpeper, 2021), and it is different from “civil negativity”, which includes negative but civil expressions of disagreement or opposition (Weber et al., 2020).

3.3. Legal and Social Perspectives

In Namibia, public discourse suggests that the nuances of hate speech should transcend the mere boundaries of offensive language, probing into expressions so vitriolic that they incite discriminatory actions against specific societal groups. Legal standards for classifying speech as hate speech should, therefore, be stringent, demanding that the speech in question must not only undermine the dignity of individuals based on their group identity but must also aim to infringe upon their rights. The Namibian constitution safeguards the dignity of individuals, necessitating a careful balance to ensure that hate speech prohibitions do not unduly encroach on the freedom of expression. Therefore, laws targeting hate speech must be crafted with precision to avoid being overly broad, ensuring they target only the most severe forms of harmful communication.

The differentiation between “hurtful” and “harmful” speech is pivotal in understanding what constitutes hate speech. The South African courts⁷ have delineated that merely being “hurtful” does not suffice to classify speech as hate speech. “Hurtful” speech, which might cause distress or offend, does not necessarily incite hatred or discrimination against a group. This distinction is critical in maintaining the delicate balance between protecting individuals from hate speech and upholding the constitutional right to free expression. The term “hurtful” is too vague and broad, and when used in legal texts, it requires careful separation from “harmful,” which carries implications of more severe, tangible damage, either physical, emotional, or psychological.

In legal terms, “harmful” speech extends beyond causing offense, encompassing actions that inflict significant emotional or psychological harm, thereby undermining the dignity and humanity of targeted groups. For speech to fall under the banner of hate speech, it must not only be demonstrably harmful but also clearly intended to foster hatred and discrimination against a specific group. This intentionality is a crucial component, especially in cases where speech contributes to the sustained subjugation of marginalised groups, reminiscent of past injustices such as those during the apartheid era. Therefore, prohibitions on hate speech are justified only when both harmful intent and the promotion of hatred are unequivocally established, thus protecting vulnerable groups while respecting freedom of speech.

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⁷ See *Qwelane v South African Human Rights Commission and Another* (CCT 13/20) [2021] ZACC 22; 2021 (6) SA 579 (CC); 2022 (2) BCLR 129 (CC) (31 July 2021)

Hateful speech can be expressed in various forms, such as incitement⁸, denigration⁹, offensive language¹⁰, and negative stereotyping¹¹, and poses a serious threat to social harmony and individual well-being, prompting legal and societal measures to mitigate its harmful effects while balancing the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Of these, incitement is often at the core of hate speech studies and has found its way into most legal definitions (Culpepper, 2020).

3.4. The Role of Intersectionality in Hate Speech

Understanding the nuanced experiences of hate speech within the LGBT+ community through an intersectional lens is critical for several reasons (Crenshaw, 1989). First, it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups, recognising that their experiences

of discrimination and hate are often compounded. Secondly, policies crafted with an appreciation for these nuances are more likely to be effective and equitable (Crenshaw, 1991). They can be tailored to address specific vulnerabilities and provide protections that consider the intersecting identities that may exacerbate the impact of hate speech. For example, anti-discrimination policies that only focus on sexual orientation may not fully protect individuals who also face racial or gender-based discrimination.

Our study incorporates intersectional considerations through surveys and interviews that delve into respondents' multiple identities. This approach is designed to capture the complexities of intersectionality, which is crucial for understanding how various forms of discrimination interact and amplify the effects of hate speech (McCall, 2005). This methodological decision is crucial for exploring how various forms of discrimination interact and compound the effects of hate speech, providing a richer, more comprehensive understanding of its impact, and comprehensive interventions and policies.

Online hate includes generalised racist, sexist, religious, anti-immigrant, gender, and sexual orientation-related insults and verbal attacks based on ethnicity, political orientation, or other categorical characteristics.



Online hate includes generalised racist, sexist, religious, anti-immigrant, gender, and sexual orientation-related insults and verbal attacks based on ethnicity, political orientation, or other categorical characteristics. It also includes deliberate harassment of specific individuals in new forms of expression that are indigenous to the internet, ranging from 'trolling' (persistent pestering and goading) to doxxing (publicly documenting someone's personal offline information), degrading or insulting memes and altered images, and revenge porn.

These actions threaten victims' well-being regarding their real-life privacy, safety, and/or sanity. They appear in interactive websites and social media sites such as Facebook (especially in private groups), Twitter, Gab, Parler, 4chan, and 8chan, and in email discussion lists.

⁸ Calls for action that encourages violence.

⁹ Attacks on the capacity, character, or reputation of individuals based on their membership of a protected group.

¹⁰ Hurtful, derogatory, or obscene language targeting protected characteristics.

¹¹ Assigning negative traits to a social group and its members based on protected characteristics.

3.5. Hate Speech as Approval-Seeking Behaviour

Various scholars¹² have proposed social identity theory as a theoretical framework to understand why groups and individuals engage in hate speech. Central to this framework is the proposition that social behaviour is determined by the character and motivations of the person as an individual (interpersonal behaviour) as well as by the person's group membership (i.e., intergroup behaviour). Social identity theory explains why individuals often prefer to see their own social group (in-group) in a positive light and may degrade outside groups (out-groups). This bias is rooted in the desire to enhance the status of one's in-group while downplaying the virtues or overemphasising the flaws of out-groups. Such tendencies can affect decisions and behaviours that shape interpersonal and online interactions.

In many societies, including Namibia, traditional norms and values often define the accepted boundaries of identity, including those related to gender and sexuality. Within this framework, heterosexual identities are typically viewed as the norm (the in-group), while LGBT+ identities may be viewed as deviant or abnormal (the out-group).

In contexts where heteronormativity strongly influences public opinion and policy, the status of heterosexual individuals as the in-group can be reinforced through various means, including legislation, religious teachings, and cultural rituals. This reinforcement not only solidifies the status of the in-group but also actively suppresses the visibility and rights of out-groups (LGBT+ individuals). Members of the in-group might engage in hate speech as a way to assert the superiority of their group's norms and values over those of the LGBT+ community, reinforcing their own social identity in the process.

When societal changes or advocacy efforts increase the visibility or rights of LGBT+ individuals, this can be perceived as a threat by those strongly identifying with traditional in-groups. According to social identity theory, such perceived threats can increase hostility towards the out-group as a defensive mechanism to protect the in-group's status. Hate speech in this context can be an expression of fear and an attempt to reassert the traditional social order.

The most recent expansion of the rights of LGBT+ individuals by the Namibian High Court may also be seen as a moral threat to those who view heteronormativity as morally superior. These perceived threats can provoke reactions aimed at denigrating the LGBT+ community to diminish their perceived status. Such reactions constitute acts of social deviance that can include any behaviour, from minor norm-violating to lawbreaking acts against others. It is, therefore, accurate to consider online hate as an act of deviant communication as it violates shared cultural standards, rules, or norms of social interaction in social group contexts.

In his approval-seeking theory of online hate, Walther (2022) posits that individuals are motivated to express hate online primarily to seek social approval and recognition from like-minded peers. Their desire for social gratifications, such as admiration, praise, and the formation of friendships, drives their behaviour.

This behaviour is called "moral grandstanding". It is facilitated by the social dynamics of online platforms, which provide easy access to an appreciative audience and various forms of social reinforcement, such as comments, likes, and shares. Those who engage in hateful online behaviour primarily "signal their moral values and increase their social standing, and the enjoyment of collective aggression as a form of fun and social interaction." (Walther, 2022, p. 2). These motivations are reinforced by the public nature of social media, which amplifies self-persuasion and the internalisation of prejudices. He argues (Walther, 2020, p. 2) that participants find "fun in mocking,

¹² See the work by Tajfel and Turner (1979), Huddy (2001), Brewer (1979), Brown (2000), Ethier and Deaux (1994) and Tajfel et.al. (1979).

lamprooning, and humiliating others' public statements, often through the creation and sharing of sarcastic, parodic, and ironic memes. The social interaction involved, such as commenting on each other's posts and exchanging online "high fives," adds to the enjoyment. This collaborative activity is seen as a form of play, where the fun lies in the social interaction and the collective experience of deriding others."

3.6. Moral Disengagement

Scholars are also concerned with explaining how perpetrators of hate speech circumvent self-condemnation and distress after committing immoral acts against others. Bandura (1999, 2002) formulated a theory of "moral disengagement" that highlights several strategies for disengaging moral self-sanctions, which enable them to violate moral standards without experiencing negative emotions such as guilt, shame or distress.

Used in this way, "moral disengagement strategies are psychological mechanisms that allow 'good' people to support 'cruel' deeds by making those 'cruel' deeds seem acceptable or moral" (Bandura 2002, p. 103). Moral disengagement can be achieved by deploying any number of at least four strategies:

- a) Reframing harmful behaviour involves making the "pernicious conduct personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes." This reframing can take the form of moral justification, advantageous comparison, or euphemistic labelling, in which harmful actions are reframed using sanitising language.
- b) Displacing responsibility by obscuring or minimising the perpetrator's role in committing the harmful action by claiming it was caused by the demands of an authority or situation rather than their own choice.
- c) Disregarding or misconstruing the negative consequences of the harmful behaviour by ignoring, minimising, avoiding, or disbelieving that the pernicious conduct caused harm.
- d) Dehumanising their victims or blaming victims for bringing harm to themselves and therefore worthy of denigration.

3.7. Online Gendered and Queerphobic Hate Speech

Online hate encompasses a wide array of abusive behaviours, including racist, sexist, religious, anti-immigrant, and other insults that target individuals based on their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or political beliefs.

Gendered hate speech refers to derogatory, offensive, or threatening speech aimed at individuals based on their gender or sex. This type of hate speech often targets women and transgender individuals, but it can affect anyone whose gender expression deviates from societal norms. The reports by NDI (2019) and Reid et al. (2024) provide very vivid and varied examples of gendered hate speech that include sexist remarks, misogynistic comments, threats of sexual violence, and other forms of communication that demean individuals based on their gender identity or expression.

In Africa, gendered hate speech has become openly politicised and gained prevalence during national elections targeting women candidates (Kakande et al., 2021, p. 2). Their study on online violence against women during the 2021 national elections in Uganda found, for example, that men and women experienced online violence differently: "Women are more likely to experience trolling, sexual violence, and body shaming. Men are more likely to experience hate speech and satirical comments".

Gendered hate speech often takes the form of semiotic or symbolic violence that is "less about attacking women directly than it is about shaping public perceptions about the validity of women's political participation more broadly" (Krook, 2020). Semiotic violence aims to either "render women invisible, attempting to "symbolically annihilate" women in the public sphere" or render them "incompetent, emphasising "role incongruity" between being a woman and being a leader".

Several organisations monitor online hate speech.¹³ All show that gendered and queerphobic hate speech is both common and possibly increasing on **all** social media platforms. In fact, the 'Italian Hate Map' project found that women and the LGBTQ+ community are the most insulted groups on what was then Twitter, now **X** (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018).

GLAAD (2024) reports that while online platforms all have policies prohibiting hate and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, and other protected characteristics, there are repeated failures in enforcing these policies. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the enforcement methodology, and the platforms need to be more transparent. Specific issues that affect the LGBTQ+ community specifically include 1) inadequate content moderation and problems with policy development and enforcement; 2) harmful algorithms and lack of algorithmic transparency; 3) insufficient transparency and user controls around data privacy; and 4) an overall lack of transparency and accountability across the industry. GLAAD (2024) also reported that those most at risk include those who are members of multiple communities, including people of colour, women, immigrants, people with disabilities, religious minorities, *et cetera*.

The most recent GLAAD research also found that in addition to inadequately moderated anti-LGBTQ+ content, is the corollary problem of over-moderation of legitimate LGBTQ expression - including wrongful takedowns of LGBTQ accounts and creators, mislabelling of LGBTQ content as "adult," unwarranted demonetisation of LGBTQ material under such policies, shadow-banning, and similar suppression of LGBTQ content. They found Meta's recent policy change limiting algorithmic eligibility of so-called "political content" (partly defined by Meta as: "social topics that affect a group of people and/or society large") to be especially concerning.

One form of hate speech that targets the LGBTQ+ community specifically is the anti-LGBTQ+ practice known as "conversion therapy". These practises, according to Victor Madrigal-Borloz (2021), "[...] exclusively target LGBT+ persons with the specific aim of interfering in their personal integrity and autonomy because their sexual orientation or gender identity do not fall under what is perceived by certain persons as a desirable norm...They are inherently degrading and discriminatory and rooted in the belief that LGBT+ persons are somehow inferior and that they must at any cost modify their orientation or identity to remedy that supposed inferiority." It is based on the belief that a person's sexual orientation or gender identity can and should be changed and has the aim to interfere with their

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¹³ These include Outright International, GLAAD, The Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, and Galop. See <https://globalextrremism.org/>

The rise in gendered and queerphobic hate speech online can be attributed to multiple factors, such as rapidly shifting social and cultural values, increased visibility for the diverse expression of sexual and gender identities by protected minorities, intensified political and cultural polarisation and the growing influence of online platforms and big-tech companies.



integrity and autonomy because their sexual orientation or gender identity does not fall under what is perceived by certain persons as the heteronormativity norm.

The rise in gendered and queerphobic hate speech online can be attributed to multiple factors, such as rapidly shifting social and cultural values, increased visibility for the diverse expression of sexual and gender identities by protected minorities, intensified political and cultural polarisation and the growing influence of online platforms and big-tech companies. The latter offers abusers greater anonymity, creates echo chambers that reinforce and intensify prejudiced views, lacks effective moderation, facilitates rapidly spreading content and campaigns, and specific forms of amplified online harassment such as 'trolling,' where individuals persistently provoke and annoy others, and 'doxxing,' (publishing private personal information about someone online).

User commenting has become a prominent form of lay engagement with journalistic content. Moreover, user

comments have become a topic of public concern because a significant number of comments contain aggressive, derogatory, and disrespectful statements. In extreme cases, such incivility in comment sections culminates in hate speech, encompassing verbal aggression against an individual or a group solely based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other social category affiliations. Insufficient moderation by media outlets and online media platform owners exacerbates the problem.

Dragiewicz et al. (2018) Common online hate expressions include offensive memes, altered images, and revenge porn. These actions can severely impact the privacy, safety, and mental health of the victims and they are prevalent on interactive websites and social media platforms like Facebook (notably within private groups), Twitter, Gab, Parler, 4chan, and 8chan, as well as on email discussion lists.

3.8. The Challenge of Online Content Moderation

Moderating online content, specifically hate speech, presents a formidable challenge due to many factors ranging from the sheer volume of content to the subtleties of human communication.

One of the primary obstacles to effective content moderation is the overwhelming volume of content generated on social media platforms every second. This vast amount of data makes it practically impossible for moderation teams, whether human or algorithmic, to adequately monitor and review each piece of content. As a result, significant instances of hate speech may remain unaddressed, while benign content might be mistakenly flagged or removed.

Both human moderators and algorithms are susceptible to errors that can exacerbate the issue of online hate. Human moderators, despite their ability to understand nuances and context better than algorithms, can overlook

subtle instances of hate speech due to volume overload, fatigue, or subjective bias. Moreover, the emotional toll of screening harmful content can affect their judgment and efficiency.

Conversely, algorithms, while capable of processing vast amounts of data rapidly, often lack the sophistication to accurately interpret the context and subtleties of language that are crucial for identifying hate speech. They are prone to errors such as false positives - wrongly penalising harmless content - and false negatives - failing to detect actual hate speech. These errors are compounded by the algorithms' potential to reinforce existing societal biases, inadvertently promoting content that can be harmful or offensive.

Research by organisations such as GLAAD (2024) has shown that content moderation systems struggle particularly with misogyny and racism. These forms of hate speech often involve nuanced language and context that algorithms find difficult to parse, and human moderators may not consistently identify due to the subjective nature of the task and the lack of linguistic capacity, especially in Africa. Furthermore, the legal and policy frameworks guiding content moderation are often not robust enough to address the evolving nature of online hate speech effectively.

A significant limitation of current content moderation practices is their failure to appreciate intersectionality - how different forms of discrimination overlap and intersect. Many systems are not designed to recognise hate speech that targets multiple identities, such as race and gender, simultaneously, which can lead to inadequate protection for the most vulnerable users. Additionally, both human moderators and algorithms frequently lack access to the full context in which a statement is made. This deficiency can lead to misinterpretation of the intent and meaning behind user posts, resulting in erroneous moderation decisions.

Another critical concern is the lack of transparency and accountability in content moderation practices. The proprietary nature of the algorithms and platforms' secretive strategies mean that researchers and the public are often in the dark about how content decisions are made. Access to information and data is nearly impossible, especially in the Global South, where this opacity makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of moderation systems.



METHODOLOGY

This project, which focused on the experiences of hate speech among the LGBT+ community in Namibia, employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques, to gather a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This methodological choice is instrumental in capturing the breadth and depth of experiences within the community, therefore allowing for an analysis of both the prevalence and the nuances of hate speech as encountered by its members.

The study was conducted through a survey and focus groups. The survey included 762 interviews across five locations (Windhoek, Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Keetmanshoop and Omaruru), offering a quantitative measure of the prevalence and types of hate speech experienced. Two focus groups were held to complement the survey - one in Windhoek and another (online) with respondents from along the coast. These qualitative sessions provided deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of the community regarding hate speech.

A pivotal aspect of the methodology was the involvement of community members as data collectors. This not only empowered the community by actively involving them in the research process but also helped in alleviating the sensitivity and risks associated with the topic. The use of community members likely increased the respondents' comfort level, potentially leading to more honest and open responses.

Given the sensitive nature of the study, a snowball sampling method was utilised. This method is particularly effective in reaching populations that are difficult to sample when researchers rely on community members to identify further participants. This approach was essential, given the potential risks of exposure and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals in a societal context where they may face significant stigma and hostility.

Formal permission was obtained from all interviewees, and indemnity forms were signed, ensuring that participants were fully aware of the research's scope and their involvement in it. Importantly, no personal data were recorded, and anonymity was strictly maintained to protect participants' identities. This approach not only adhered to ethical research standards but also helped build trust between the researchers and the participants.

During the focus groups, participants were given the option to use pseudonyms, reinforcing the commitment to confidentiality. This measure was crucial in fostering an environment where participants felt safe sharing personal and potentially sensitive experiences. The decision by many participants to forego pseudonyms suggests a level of

comfort and trust within the group, indicative of the effectiveness of the chosen methodologies in creating a safe space for discussion. However, all references to focus group data in the report are anonymised.

The mixed-methods approach used in this study offers several benefits. Firstly, it provides a broad quantitative understanding through surveys while allowing for a detailed exploration of individual experiences through qualitative focus groups. This methodological synergy enables a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand, capturing both the statistical trends and the personal stories behind the numbers.

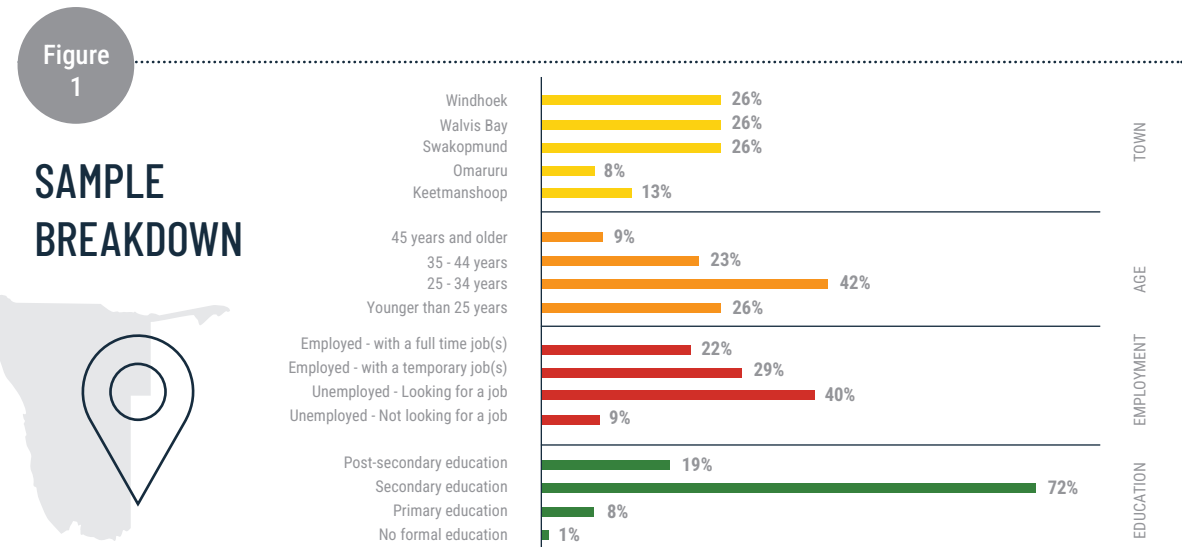
Secondly, the use of qualitative data helps contextualise and interpret the quantitative findings, offering insights that might be overlooked in a purely statistical analysis. For instance, while the survey can indicate the prevalence of hate speech, the focus groups can delve into the psychological and social dynamics that underpin these experiences. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach, combined with the careful ethical considerations and community involvement in the data collection process, significantly enhances the study's validity and depth. The methodology not only respects the community's vulnerability but also actively involves them in the research, potentially increasing the impact and relevance of the findings within the community and beyond.

05 FINDINGS

5.1. Socio-biographic profiles

The majority of the respondents, approximately 72%, have completed secondary education, highlighting a significant level of essential educational attainment among the participants (Figure 1). A smaller segment, 19%, reported having post-secondary education, which indicates a level of tertiary educational involvement that could influence their perspectives and experiences regarding hate speech. On the lower end of the spectrum, 8% of the participants have only attained primary education, and a marginal 1% reported having no formal education.

The employment data reveals a significant variance in employment status among the participants. The largest group, 40%, indicated they are unemployed and actively looking for a job, which could suggest a level of economic vulnerability. Those employed with temporary jobs comprise 29% of the sample, possibly reflecting the precarious nature of employment among some community members. A further 22% are employed in full-time jobs, indicating stable employment. Meanwhile, 9% of the respondents are unemployed and not seeking employment, which might reflect a range of personal, economic, or health-related factors.



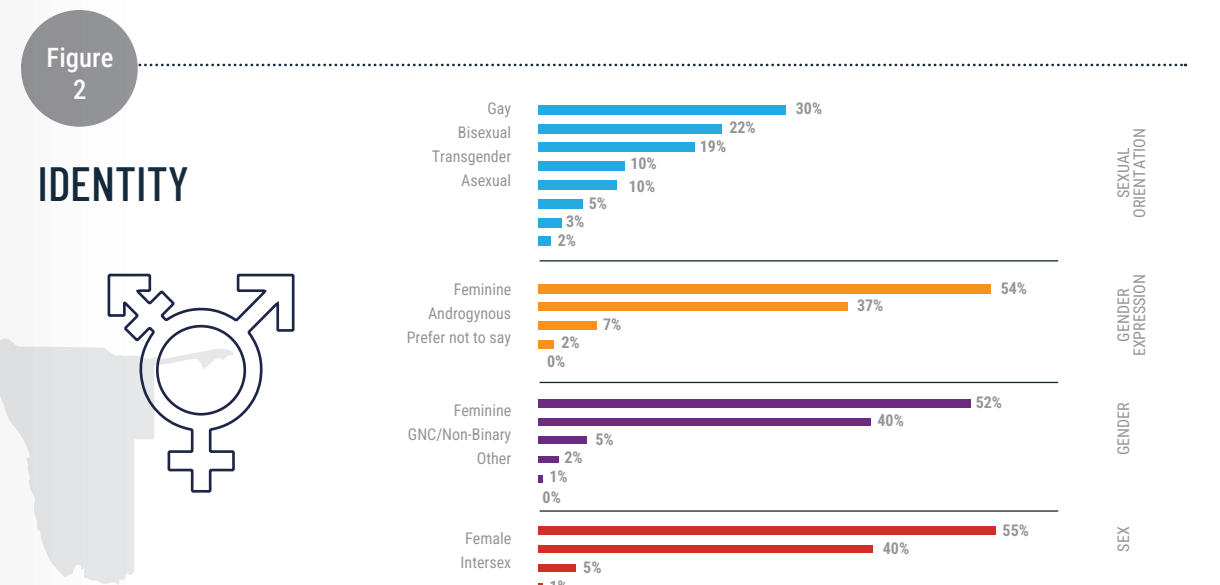
Age-wise, the group is relatively young, with 68% of respondents falling below the age of 35 years. Specifically, the largest age group, 42%, is between 25 to 34 years, followed by those younger than 25 years at 26%. The 35 to 44 age group represents 23%, and those 45 years and older are the smallest group, making up only 9% of the sample. This younger demographic is particularly relevant in discussions of social media use and experiences of online behaviour, including hate speech.

Swakopmund, Walvis Bay, and Windhoek, the capital city, each account for 26% of the respondents, indicating a strong urban representation in the survey. Keetmanshoop and Omaruru have smaller representations at 13% and 8%, respectively.

5.2. Identity

The data in Figure 2 presents a diverse spectrum of identities within the LGBT+ community in Namibia, reflecting the complexity and variance in how individuals identify in terms of sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

In terms of sexual identity, the majority of respondents identify as male (55%), followed by female (40%). A small fraction, 1%, identify as intersex, indicating those who may be born with physical sex markers that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies. Notably, 5% of the respondents prefer not to specify their sex, pointing towards a possible reluctance to fit into conventional sex categories or a privacy concern in disclosing this information.



Gender identity among the respondents is predominantly feminine (52%) and masculine (40%), suggesting a significant alignment with traditional gender expressions. However, the presence of gender fluid (2%), gender non-conforming/non-binary (GNC/Non-Binary, 5%), and other (1%) identities illustrates the acknowledgement of non-traditional gender experiences within the sample. These categories represent individuals who do not necessarily identify within the binary gender constructs, with gender-fluid individuals experiencing a range of gender identities at different times.

Gender expression in this group shows a similar pattern to gender identity, with a significant portion identifying as feminine (54%) and masculine (37%). Additionally, 7% of the respondents identify their gender expression as androgynous, which involves blending or alternating between masculine and feminine characteristics, challenging the traditional gender norms. The category 'other' (2%) includes those whose gender expression might not conform to any conventional classification, further highlighting the diversity within the community.

The sexual orientation data in Figure 2 reveals a broad range of identities. The largest single category is unspecified other (30%), indicating a significant portion of the community either does not fit into traditional labels or pre-

fers not to label their sexuality. Gay individuals make up 22% of the sample, followed by lesbians at 19%. Bisexuals represent 10%, underscoring the fluidity of sexual attraction towards more than one gender. Smaller percentages identify as asexual (2%), pansexual (3%), and transgender (5%), each denoting distinct sexual identities. The asexual group indicates a lack of sexual attraction to others, pansexuals potentially express attraction regardless of sex or gender, and transgender individuals have a gender identity that does not align with their sex assigned at birth.

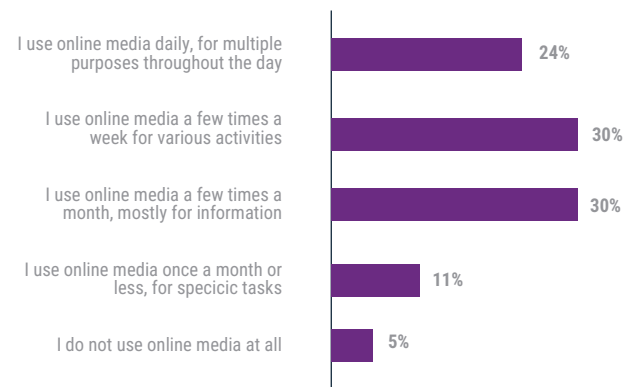
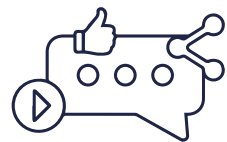
5.3. Online Media Usage

Figure 3 below reveals diverse patterns in the frequency of online media use among the LGBT+ community in Namibia. A small portion of the community (5%) reports not using online media at all, indicating a gap in digital access or preference. Conversely, 11% of respondents use online media sporadically, about once a month or less, primarily for specific tasks that may require online engagement.

A significant portion of the community, amounting to 30%, uses online media a few times a month, mostly for gathering information. This suggests a targeted approach to media use, possibly for staying informed about community news, connecting with family and friends, or finding resources related to LGBT+ issues. Another 30% of respondents use online media a few times a week, utilising it for various activities ranging from social interaction to entertainment and educational purposes. This level of usage indicates a more integrated role of online media in their daily lives.

Figure 3

FREQUENCY OF USING ONLINE MEDIA



Lastly, 24% of the community members use online media daily, engaging with content multiple times throughout the day for a variety of purposes, including communication, work, entertainment, and social networking.

The results in Figure 4 reveal various platforms utilised for multiple purposes ranging from social interaction to content consumption and advocacy. Facebook is at the forefront of these platforms, with 79% of respondents indicating usage. This high rate underscores Facebook's extensive reach and significance as a tool for community connection, information dissemination, and support within the LGBT+ community.

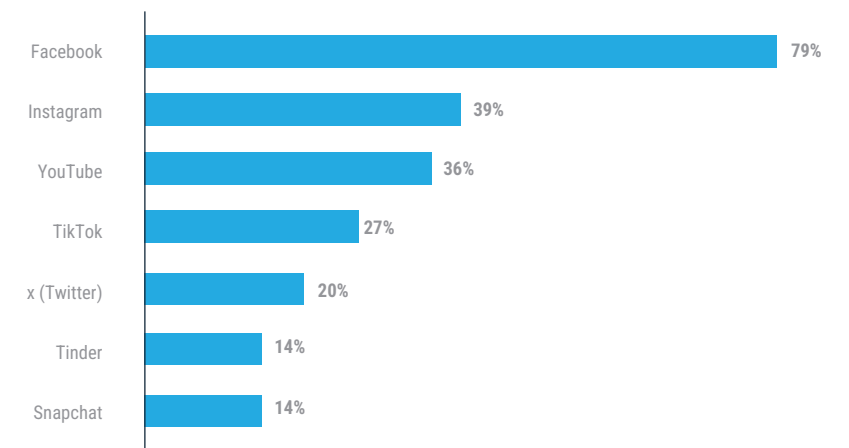
Instagram follows as the second most utilised platform, engaged by 39% of the participants. The visual-centric nature of Instagram likely appeals to users interested in personal expression and visual storytelling, which are

important aspects of community building and identity affirmation. Close behind is YouTube, used by 36% of those surveyed. YouTube's popularity among the respondents can be attributed to its rich video content, which provides a mix of entertainment, educational materials, and a platform for voicing community issues and experiences.

TikTok, a platform known for its brief and engaging video content, is used by 27% of the participants, indicating its growing relevance, particularly among younger members of the community who are drawn to its dynamic and creative expression format. X (formerly Twitter), noted for its real-time communication capability, sees about 20% usage among the respondents.

Figure 4

ONLINE PLATFORMS USED



The survey also highlights the use of platforms like Tinder and Snapchat, each with a 14% user base among the participants. Tinder's role as a dating app points to its importance in facilitating social and romantic connections within the LGBT+ community. Snapchat, known for its ephemeral messaging feature, appeals to users for private and informal interactions, reflecting its use for more personal and discreet communications.

5.4. Understanding Hate Speech

Hate speech is a multifaceted concept that is understood by the LGBT+ community in Namibia as encompassing any communication, whether verbal, written, visual, or gestural, that inflicts harm, degrades, dehumanises, or discriminates against individuals based on inherent characteristics such as gender identity, sexual orientation, race, or other markers of identity. In the discourse of the focus group participants, hate speech is broadly characterised by its intent to harm and its effect on individuals' dignity and psychological well-being. This understanding aligns with definitions offered elsewhere (see Section 2.1 above).

Lastly, 24% of the community members use online media daily, engaging with content multiple times throughout the day for a variety of purposes, including communication, work, entertainment, and social networking.



The distinction between hate speech and freedom of speech was explored as a pivotal theme in the focus group discussions to help understand community perspectives on when they think the threshold between the two forms of expression is crossed. Freedom of speech is recognised as a fundamental human right, essential for expressing personal beliefs and ideas. However, as highlighted by one participant, *“freedom of speech... is usually just rooted in a person’s personal values and beliefs... Once it crosses over to being derogatory, defamatory, or insulting, and once it causes harm, I think that is when hate enters the chat”* (Group 1). This delineation underscores the threshold where expression intended or likely to cause harm transitions from protected speech to hate speech. Another respondent, a trans man, explained that hate speech is harmful and belittling, targeting someone’s sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to make them feel *“less human”*, takes away their dignity and makes them feel *“worthless”* and makes someone feel as if there is something *“wrong with me”* (Group 1).

Focus group respondents identified the fundamental differences between freedom of speech or expression as a basic right and hate speech, where the latter intends to cause hurt or harm to someone or members of a group based on specific characteristics such as race or sexual orientation and identity, meaning that members can and do distinguish between cases of acceptable critique or civil negativity and incivility or hate (see Weber, 2020). One respondent (Group 1) argued that *“[I]n satire, there’s also a limit, because for example, if you’re going to start attacking a person, and literally there is a disdain towards that person, then that’s something else. But for example, if it’s satire, and it’s just a joke, it’s something different. But when it literally starts attacking the person’s dignity, either the person feels offended, the person starts being ostracised or violated, cancelled, or, as they call it, blackballed by the other people, then it’s a problem.”* Another respondent from the same group also pointed to the importance of harmful intent: *“I think when it comes to freedom of speech, that’s usually just rooted in a person’s personal values and beliefs. And the intent is usually not to harm, and it’s not derogatory, and it’s not insulting [...] I think once it crosses over to being derogatory, to being defamatory, or insulting, and once it causes harm, I think that is when hate enters the chat. And I think that one can always tell the difference in the two, because that sense of intent is there, the context is also kind of given, and it’s provided, and it’s there too”*.

Context plays a crucial role in delineating hate speech from other forms of communication. The most recent High Court ruling that Namibia’s anti-sodomy laws are unconstitutional created some backlash from specific social groups and followers of the Government’s position that the law should be retained. The participants noted that the environment in which the speech occurs influences its interpretation and impact. A respondent in the second group drew attention to the importance of context and specifically current conditions in the country: *“[T]he way I understand hate speech is when hurtful words are directed to a person by other people because of their sexuality or maybe their sexual preference. But most of the time, hate speech is also not just directed towards the LGBTIQ community; it’s also directed to other people. But then it affects us more because of what is going on in the country. There’s a lot of hate speech directly directed towards the LGBTIQ+ community.”*

The digital landscape is particularly complex due to its anonymity and broad reach, which can amplify the impact of hate speech. One participant noted, *“Because we have to remember that what you write online, there’s a person behind that’s writing this stuff. So, hate speech to me would be anything that would demean or devalue another human being, a group, or an organisation”* (Group 1). This statement recognises that online interactions, while seemingly distant or detached, involve real individuals who experience real consequences from digital expressions of hate.

5.5. Exposure to Hate Speech

Members of the LGBTQ+ community are often at risk, not just as the targets of hate speech, but of losing their lives or experiencing grievous bodily harm.¹⁴ The community has a great diversity of experiences, as highlighted by the focus group participants.

At least one respondent (Group 1) points to a possible correlation between being targeted by hate speech and the manner in which individuals present and express their identity: *“So, I think I’m on Facebook, I’m on X, I’m on Instagram, and I’m on TikTok. And if I’m being very, very honest, I would say that I have personally not experienced hate speech directly. I have experienced it on a community level, where these groups form, and there’s that mob mentality, but I do know people who have experienced it, and I’ve got friends, based on their expression and identity, who have experienced it on a very high level, on their social media, where people actually come at them or tag them. And I think that the reason that happens is because there’s definitely levels to these things, and I think you mentioned that whole intersectionality thing. I think, number one, is, I’m a little bit more palatable to straight people, because I’m straight presenting. I think the more, and it’s not even, like, on purpose, it’s not even a safety thing, it’s just, it’s who I am. This is, authentically, this is myself. So, in any space, I’m not viewed as other, because of the way that I present. Whereas, I’ll take, for example, and I hope she doesn’t take offense, like [name removed], where she steps into a space, and you can almost, just by presentation, people are like, oh, it’s a Eshenge¹⁵, you know?”*

Another respondent from Group 2 drew attention to victim-blaming as a form of hate speech. *“If, for example, a trans woman is raped, people are not going to look at the issue to address the issue and address it as a national issue. They would rather address the victim. And I think when such a story is published about a trans woman who is raped, then it becomes something that enforces hate. People would hate trans women or use derogatory language or dehumanise them. And I think that is the medium where people truly expresses their hate towards communities, specifically trans women. I’m just using specifically trans women. I know others also experience that if you look lately, many trans women have gone through this extended hate that was physical but also brutal.”*

The discussions also highlighted that hate speech is not confined to digital spaces but pervades everyday physical interactions. One respondent (Group 2) shared that physical actions may often be completely unexpected and random, making them challenging to anticipate and, thus, even more dangerous. *“[M]y experience was that someone literally, and I sat in a bar, and this person just looked at me and then poured alcohol on me and said they don’t like trans women. And that in itself was a violent attack that churns from hate. And I feel hate speech is not necessarily, even if someone expresses, expresses, or even if hate speech manifests itself verbally, it equally manifests itself in a physical form”*.

“[M]y experience was that someone literally, and I sat in a bar, and this person just looked at me and then poured alcohol on me and said they don’t like trans women. And that in itself was a violent attack that churns from hate. And I feel hate speech is not necessarily, even if someone expresses, expresses, or even if hate speech manifests itself verbally, it equally manifests itself in a physical form”

¹⁴ On May 5, 2024, the Namibian Newspaper published a front-page report, “Hate Kills”, dedicated to six members of the LGBTQ+ community who were killed since the start of 2024:

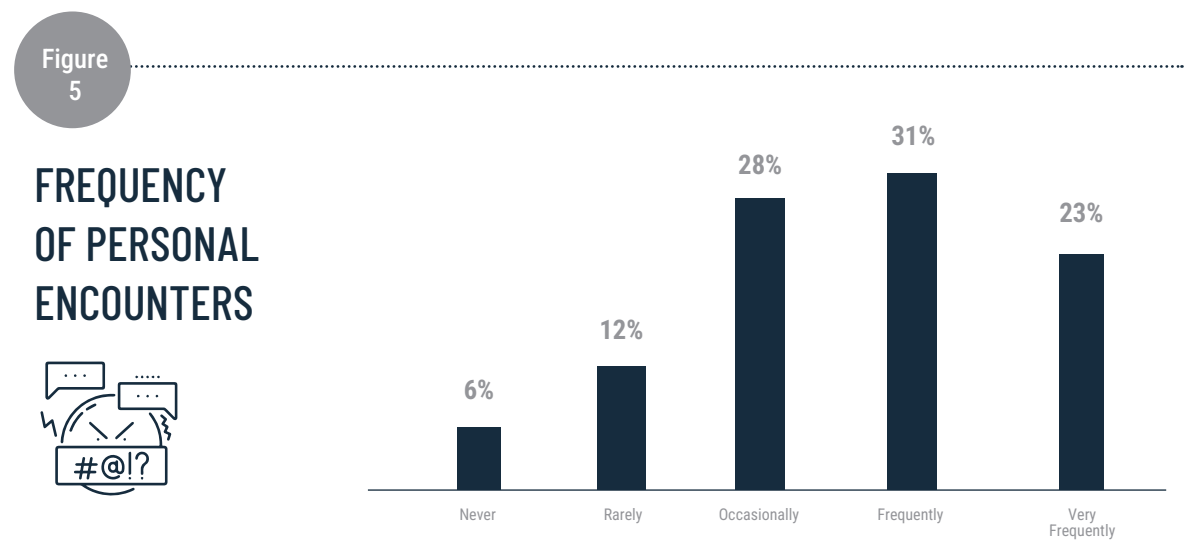
¹⁵ Mainly used by Ovambo people to refer to a feminine man but now more used as a slur for LGBT+ as an umbrella term.

The focus group discussions emphasised that hate speech against LGBT+ individuals in Namibia manifests in diverse contexts, ranging from subtle microaggressions to overt acts of violence. The participants' narratives reveal a complex interplay of cultural, religious, and social factors that contribute to the prevalence and acceptance of hate speech. For instance, one respondent, a trans man, explained that religious and cultural settings significantly influence the acceptance and propagation of hate speech. *"I'm not that much active on the social media thing, as I said, on Facebook, but I have never been directly attacked on social media. But in the community, yes. I'm a Lutheran. In churches, sometimes one can notice the way my dress code will tell. And then you will see how they are as you are going to the podium or come back from the altar, you will see how they are starting gossiping and pulling each other and all those things. I'm that type of person, I ignore them. I'm there for the church and I'm just getting the information I wanted and then I go. But there was a time back then, two or three months back, that my house was literally being stoned. And my dog was slaughtered. It was on the face and on the leg. I don't know whether it was a punga or something. And then I decided, okay, I will not report this thing, I'll just lock my gate in the evenings. I enter in my house and switch on all the lights. I just go back in the house like around six. I'm staying alone. I have a child of eight years old, he's calling me "pappa" and sometimes he told me, pappa you must not come to school because my other friends are calling you mamma-pappa, because you look like a man sometimes. So, he doesn't want me to come to school, and I understand that. But at workplace, they are open. I'm working at the hospital, so they are open. Most of the colleagues call me "uncle". And then they respect me and I feel more comfortable at my workplace than where I'm staying"*.

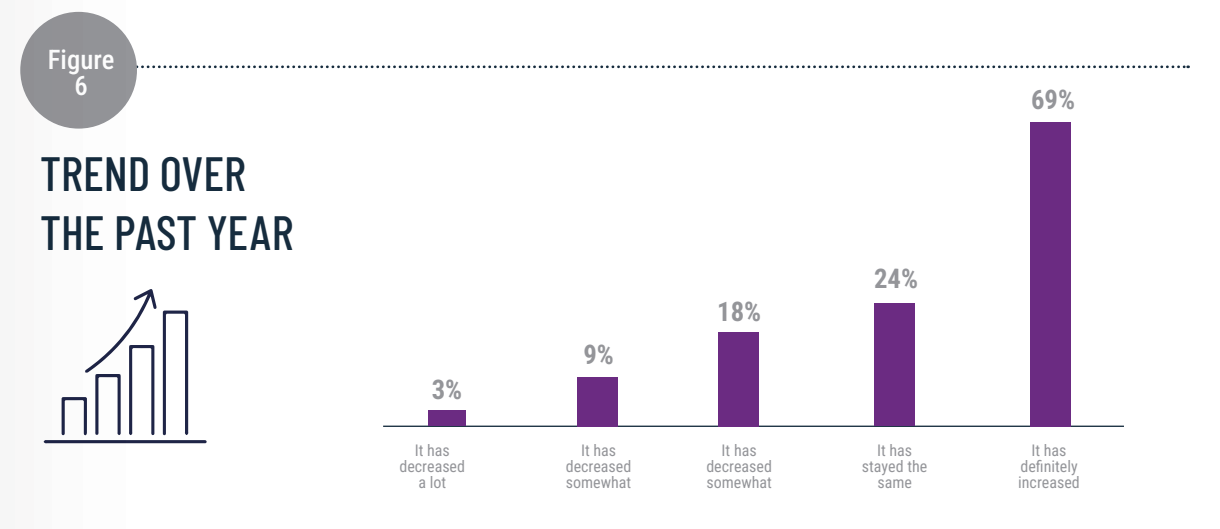
According to the survey results in Figure 5, only a small fraction, approximately 6%, of individuals reported never encountering online hate speech, indicating that such experiences are exceptionally uncommon. This minimal percentage underscores the pervasive nature of online hate speech aimed at the LGBT+ community.

Further analysis reveals that 12% of participants rarely experience hate speech, which suggests that incidents are infrequent, but they are not absent. On a more frequent scale, 28% of respondents indicated that they encounter hate speech occasionally, pointing to a pattern where such experiences occur sporadically but are notable enough to be of concern.

More alarmingly, the survey shows that a significant majority of the community faces these issues more regularly. Approximately 31% of respondents experience online hate speech frequently, and another 23% face it "very frequently". Combined, these figures suggest that over half of the LGBT+ individuals surveyed are regularly subjected to hate speech online. This regularity indicates a significant and troubling trend that affects a substantial portion of the community.



Overall, the data illustrates that a vast majority, 82% of LGBT+ individuals, have experienced online hate speech at some point, varying from rare to very frequent encounters. This widespread prevalence highlights the substantial challenges faced by the community in navigating online spaces, where hate speech is not only present but pervasive.



Analysis of the findings in Figure 6 reveals that a mere 3% of respondents perceive a significant decrease in online hate speech, while 9% noticed a slight decline. Together, these figures suggest that only a small fraction of the community, 12%, has witnessed any reduction in hate speech.

Figure 6 also indicates a disturbing trend towards the increase of such experiences. A substantial 45% of participants report a significant increase in online hate speech, underscoring a severe escalation. An additional 24% observed a moderate increase. Cumulatively, nearly 70% of the surveyed individuals experienced an increase in online hate speech, highlighting a worrying trend that suggests deteriorating conditions in online spaces for LGBT+ individuals.

Furthermore, 18% of respondents feel that the situation has remained unchanged over the past year. This stability, however, is not necessarily positive, as it may indicate ongoing exposure to hate speech without any improvement.

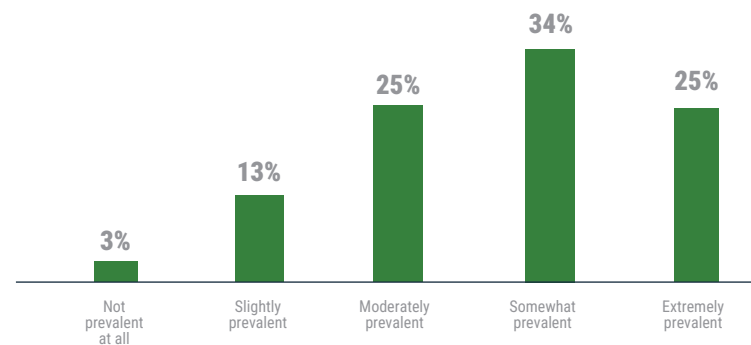
This data collectively suggests that the environment for LGBT+ individuals in digital arenas is not only hostile but has intensified over the past year. The significant rise in reported incidents of hate speech could be attributed to various factors, including heightened social tensions, political shifts, or more individuals feeling emboldened to express hate speech online following the High Court's ruling that the country's anti-sodomy laws are unconstitutional.

In examining the prevalence of hate speech against the LGBT+ community in online environments, the concept of "prevalence" is crucial for understanding the frequency and commonality of such negative interactions.

In examining the prevalence of hate speech against the LGBT+ community in online environments, the concept of “prevalence” is crucial for understanding the frequency and commonality of such negative interactions. Prevalence assesses the extent to which LGBT+ individuals encounter hate speech, providing a measure of how widespread these experiences are within digital spaces.

Figure 7

PREVALENCE OF HATE SPEECH AGAINST LGBT+ COMMUNITY

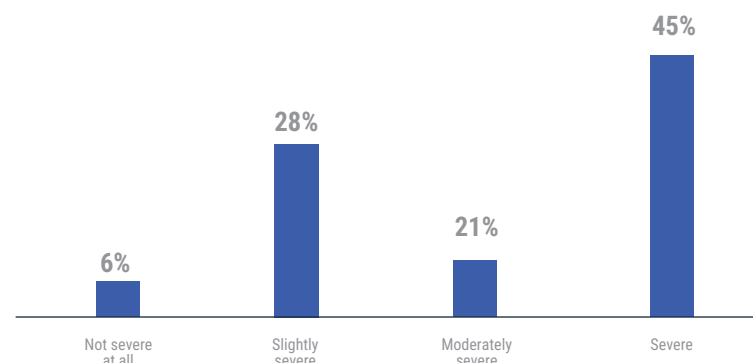


The data in Figure 7 reveals a concerning landscape where hate speech against the LGBT+ community is alarmingly common. Only a tiny fraction of respondents, 3%, believe that hate speech is not prevalent at all, indicating a near-universal acknowledgement of hate speech as an existing issue. An additional 13% of the community perceives hate speech as slightly prevalent, suggesting that while encounters are relatively uncommon, they still occur and impact community members.

Moving up the frequency scale, 25% of participants describe hate speech as moderately prevalent. This implies regular encounters with hate speech, affecting a significant portion of the community. The largest group of respondents, accounting for 34%, finds hate speech to be somewhat prevalent, indicating that a substantial number of community members frequently face such negative experiences. Furthermore, another 25% report that hate

Figure 8

SEVERITY OF HATE SPEECH ONLINE



speech is highly prevalent, illustrating that for a quarter of the community, these are not isolated incidents but a regular and dominant part of their online interactions. The aggregation of these responses underscores a troubling reality: 84% of respondents experience hate speech as at least moderately prevalent.

Figure 8 shows that a small minority, 6%, perceive the severity of online hate speech as not severe at all. This could indicate either a lower sensitivity to the content encountered online or less frequent exposure to severe cases of hate speech. Conversely, a more significant portion of the community, 28%, considers the hate speech they encounter online to be slightly severe, implying that while the impact is noticeable, it is not overwhelmingly distressing. Moving towards the middle of the spectrum, 21% of respondents classify the severity of their experiences with hate speech as moderately severe. This suggests a more pronounced negative impact on their day-to-day interactions online. Adjacently, 20% feel the severity is somewhat severe, indicating a concern that is significant yet not the most extreme.

At the higher end of the spectrum, a substantial 25% of individuals report the severity of online hate speech as extremely severe. This group likely experiences profound distress and a severe impact on their mental health and well-being, pointing to the intense hostility and aggression they face in digital spaces.

5.6. Intersecting Hate Speech

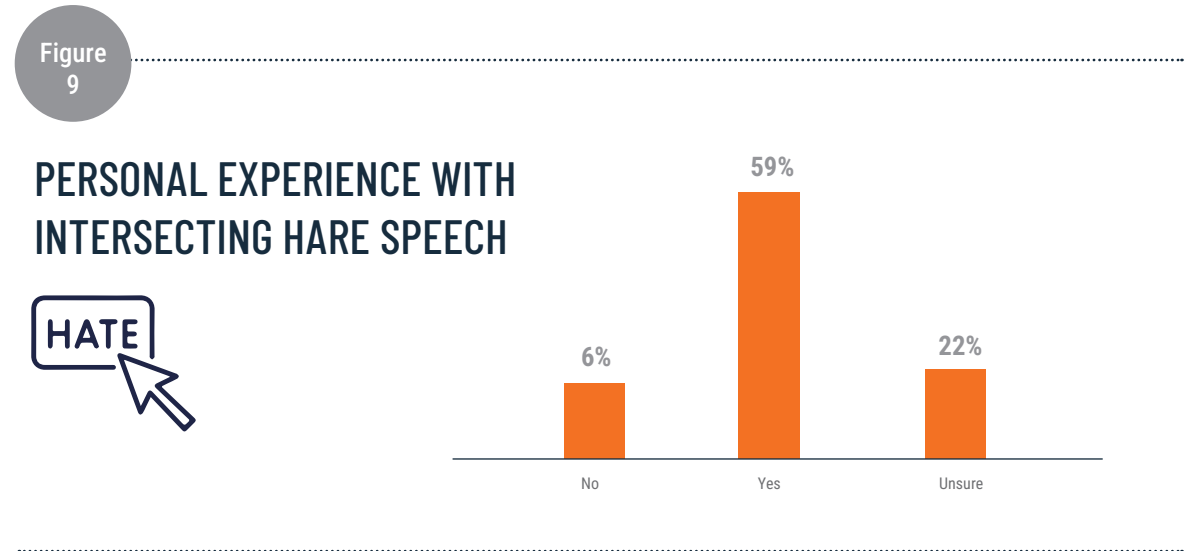
In the examination of hate speech experiences among LGBT+ individuals, an essential dimension emerges concerning intersecting forms of discrimination. Online platforms frequently emerge as arenas for hate speech, with anonymity and widespread reach exacerbating the issue. In the words of one respondent (Group 2): *“[I]’m speaking from my own experience as a trans woman, not necessarily only as a trans, but also as a sex worker myself. You know, on social media, Facebook, I must tell you, many users have used derogatory comments on my, you know, not necessarily on the posts, but DM, they call it DM. But also, harmful stereotypes against trans women and you being trans, but a black woman who is a sex worker equally, it was so racist, it was intertwined with racism, but also with sexism therein. That was just distasteful. However, the other experience I had is the anonymous accounts that people have and that people express hate without fear of repercussion because they are anonymous, nothing can be done, and they get away with this violation or social ill.”*

This underscores the complexity of hate speech dynamics. For instance, one respondent in Group 1 points out the intersectionality of discrimination, where multiple identities - such as disability, age, and LGBT+ status - compound the effects of hate speech and lead to harassment: *“Hate speech and harassment, [...], these are things that actually go together as well. So, when does my question is, when does hate speech become harassment? Because for me, harassment would be a continuous spewing of hate speech towards a certain community or a selected person or individual. [...] Take, for example, in the heterosexual community, you’re already ostracised, so there are multiple forms of discrimination. So, you’re not just discriminated on one aspect of your humanness or human rights. For example, you’re disabled. You’re LGBTI. That’s another form. Oh, and your age. That’s multiple forms of discrimination. So basically, you would be harassed. If you can’t discriminate against the one status, they use the other one. But it’s all interlinked.”* (Speaker 1). This intersectionality intensifies the experience of hate speech, making it a multifaceted issue that intersects with various forms of societal discrimination and exclusion.

The survey data in Figure 9 reveal that a significant majority, 59% of the respondents, affirmatively report encountering intersecting discrimination, which points to a complex layering of biases that these individuals face. This form of discrimination is not only limited to their sexual orientation or gender identity but intersects with other personal attributes such as race, disability, age, or socio-economic status, thereby compounding their vulnerability to hate speech.

The notion of intersecting discrimination underscores the multifaceted nature of hate speech, where individuals may be targeted not just for one aspect of their identity but for multiple, overlapping reasons. This complexity is reflected in the 20% of respondents who were unsure about their experiences of intersecting discrimination, indicating a possible lack of awareness or confusion about what constitutes intersecting biases or the complexities involved in identifying such instances when they occur.

Meanwhile, the 22% of respondents who did not report experiencing intersecting discrimination suggest a segment of the community may be exposed to more straightforward forms of hate speech, possibly targeted solely based on either their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, this does not necessarily imply a lesser degree of severity in the hate speech encountered but highlights the diversity of experiences within the LGBT+ community regarding discrimination.



The findings underscore the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity in understanding and addressing hate speech. They suggest that anti-hate speech efforts must not only address overt expressions of homophobia or transphobia but also consider other forms of discrimination that may intersect with these prejudices.

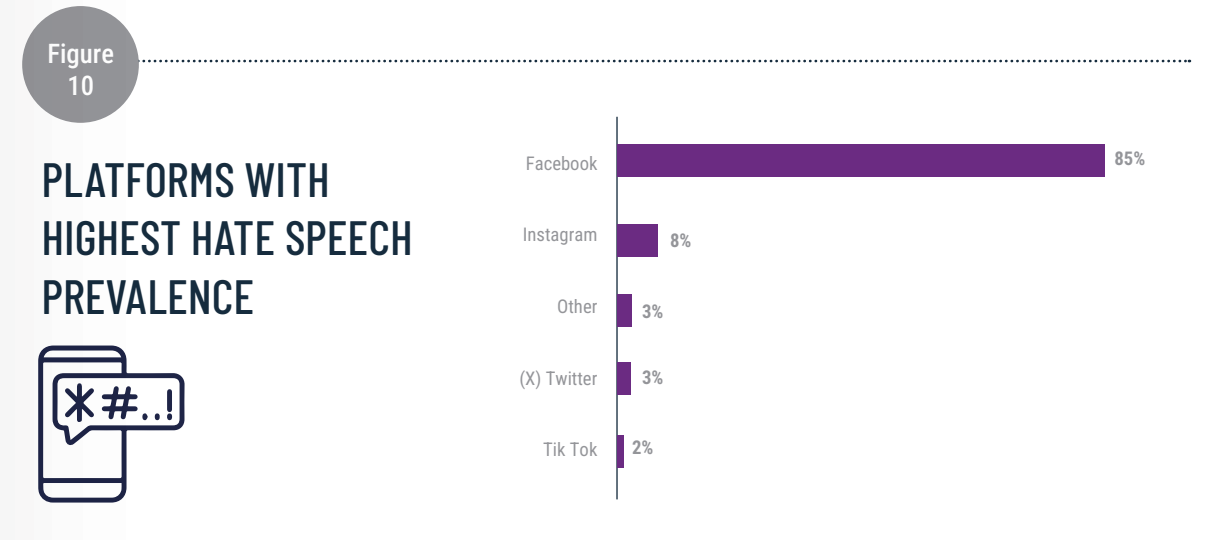
5.7. Hate Speech and Social Media Platforms

Although the GLAAD study showed that all popular social media platforms are rife with hate speech, the focus group discussions specifically identified Facebook as the platform with the highest frequency of hate speech, especially in the comment sections. **X (Twitter)** was also seen as particularly hostile.

One of the respondents in Group 2 identified the problem: *“You know, I also concur with the previous speakers that Facebook is more prominent with online hate speech, but I think the reason is that there is a lack of accountability and oversight in that particular platform. But also the enforcement of their regulations. They are very slow in regards to enforcing their regulations when hate speech occurs on Facebook. And the prevention measures are limited. I think that’s my understanding or my own opinion that Facebook has a limitation in regards to measuring or having adequate or comprehensive prevention measures to really mitigate hate speech online.”*

Another respondent, this time from Group 1, had the following to say about **X (Twitter)**: *“For me, I think Twitter is the most unbearable place to be of a minority because it is very unfiltered and it’s because maybe the new owner [...] you do not control what comes to you unless you block it or you mute certain things because with other social medias, you only invite something once you search it. For example, Facebook for example, Instagram. You only invite something to your for you page when you search it.”*

The data in Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of perceived online hate speech prevalence across various social media platforms. Facebook is overwhelmingly identified as the primary arena where such negative interactions are encountered. A very large majority (85%) of respondents perceive Facebook as the site with the highest prevalence of hate speech targeting the LGBT+ community in Namibia. This pronounced concentration suggests that Facebook’s extensive user base and interactive features, such as groups and public pages, may inadvertently foster environments where hate speech can increase.



While considerably less implicated, Instagram is still seen by 8% of respondents as a platform where hate speech occurs. This might reflect the nature of interactions on Instagram, which, although primarily visual, can still host harmful comments and targeted messages in captions and comment sections.

A minor segment of the community - 3% for Twitter and 2% for TikTok - notes that Twitter and TikTok are platforms where hate speech is encountered. The relatively low percentages could be indicative of their less extensive adoption within the community or possibly their inherent content dissemination mechanisms, which may not facilitate prolonged discussions or interactions where hate speech commonly festers.

Despite the challenges, the resilience and adaptability of the LGBT+ community were evident in their responses to online hate speech. Discussions on improving media literacy and developing training programs to educate community members reflect proactive strategies to combat online hate. Both the focus group and survey data show that while the digital realm offers a platform for expression and community building, it also presents a significant venue for hate speech. Participants discussed the dual nature of online platforms, where the control over exposure to hate speech varies significantly. One speaker noted that managing online interactions through selective engagement on social platforms can mitigate exposure to hate speech, suggesting that the virtual environment offers at least some level of controllability not available in physical spaces. Yet, respondents’ personal experiences underscore the severe impacts of online hate speech, which often merges with tribalism, sexism and disability, creating a compounded layer of discrimination that is both harmful and persistent.

5.8. Hate Speech in Legacy Media

The presence of hate speech in traditional media - comprising newspapers, radio, and television - remains a significant concern for the LGBT+ community in Namibia.

Participants expressed concerns about the portrayal of LGBT+ issues in traditional media, noting that some newspapers and radio stations perpetuate discriminatory narratives. One participant pointed out the problematic coverage by one of the largest newspapers, highlighting the salacious and sometimes slanderous nature of the reporting. This type of media coverage not only misrepresents the LGBT+ community but also fuels public stigma and discrimination.

One respondent in Group 1 identified the online comments section of newspapers to be a significant platform for hate speech, mainly because such sections are unmoderated. *"It's the same with, you know, and this is now across the board, that when it comes to ableism the media houses literally do not censor their online comments when it comes to ableism, discrimination against persons with disabilities, they don't censor that. And when there's a report on somebody with a mental illness it's very, very derogatory, just the way they report it and also their perception that they put out there that a disability has to be physical. You have to see that disability to know that it is there."* Another respondent identified open-line radio shows as another platform with unsolicited and unmoderated queerphobic content.

One respondent in Group 2 argued that media outlets use derogatory words (perhaps unintentionally) that trigger hate speech - *"I think my opinion, again, traditional media can sometimes, and I'm using the word sometimes being cognisant that it's not frequent, yeah, promote hate speech through various mechanisms. And I think one of them is the use of language. The choice of language that they report in and how messages are received by the audience plays a critical role in regards to, you know, perpetuating hate towards the community. But also the terms that people use, for example, if they use in Oshiwambo, for example, they would use "Eshengi", that in itself is a word that triggers people to perpetuate hate, and I think it's all about language, it's all about terms, but it's also about how the media is putting across the message because when you put across the message, there is power in messages and the power that people receive from that message is the power they use to enforce hate towards a community or towards an individual or towards a group of people. But I must say it does not frequently happen. There are some traditional media that would then write there and then address that this is not allowable or this language is not acceptable at this particular media outlet or at this particular radio station"*.

While mechanisms such as the media code of ethics and the media ombudsman exist to address grievances regarding unethical media practices, participants expressed scepticism about their effectiveness. The lack of visible enforcement and successful resolution of complaints leads to a reluctance to use these avenues. One respondent maintained that *"I haven't heard of a case... where people have been like, hate speech happened, went to the media ombudsman, it was reported, and it was handled and dealt with"* (Group 1), indicating a gap between the availability of remedial mechanisms and their perceived utility by the community.

On a more positive note, respondents pointed out that some radio platforms do offer opportunities for community engagement and discussion on broader social issues, including those affecting the LGBT+ community. One such station provides a forum where individuals can share their experiences and contribute to conversations on hate speech and other pertinent topics. This inclusive approach by some media outlets offers at least glimmer of hope for better representation and support for marginalised voices.

5.9. The Nature of Hate Speech

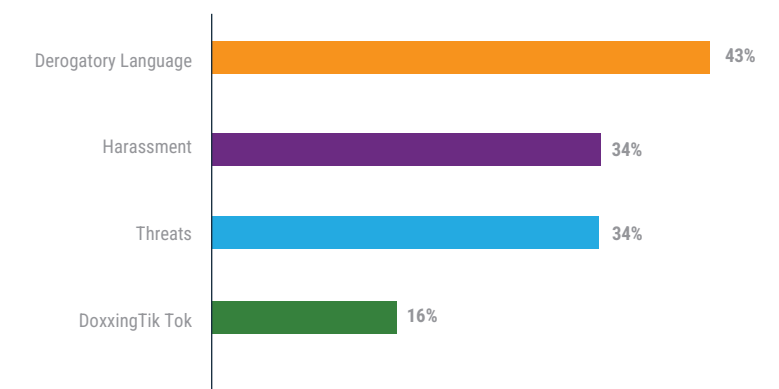
As was mentioned in Section 4.4, focus group participants broadly define hate speech as any communicative act - verbal, written, or symbolic - that aims to degrade, intimidate, or harm individuals based on their identity markers, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or disability. This understanding is crucial as it highlights the intersectionality within the community, where individuals may face compounded layers of discrimination. The distinction between hate speech and freedom of speech is emphasised by the community's narrative, illustrating that while the expression of dislike or disagreement is a part of free speech or *civil negativity*, as Weber (2020) calls it, it crosses into hate speech or incivility when it fosters harm or discrimination against an individual or group, often manifesting through derogatory language, threats, or incitements to violence.

Focus group participants also articulated that hate speech operates on a continuum that can escalate into harassment. This progression is particularly noted in environments already rife with discrimination, where individuals who embody multiple minority statuses face heightened vulnerability. The transition from hate speech to harassment is marked by the persistence and intensity of the speech acts, moving from isolated comments to sustained attacks, which profoundly affect the targeted individuals' sense of safety and belonging.

The survey results in Figure 11 illustrate that derogatory language is the most prevalent form of hate speech experienced, reported by 43% of respondents. This type includes slurs and insults that directly attack or belittle individuals based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or association with the LGBT+ community. The commonality of such language underscores the routine verbal violence individuals face, contributing to a hostile environment and perpetuating the stigmatisation of LGBT+ identities.

Figure 11

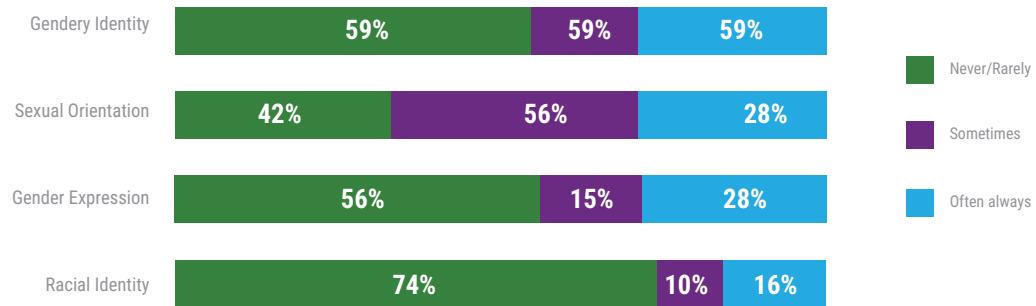
TYPES OF HATE SPEECH ENCOUNTERED PAST YEAR



Additionally, 34% of respondents each reported experiencing threats and harassment. These forms of hate speech represent more targeted and aggressive actions. Threats include communications that aim to inflict harm or fear, suggesting an intent to translate hateful ideologies into physical or psychological harm. Harassment involves sustained or repetitive, abusive behaviours that intimidate or torment the individual, often escalating from mere words to ongoing persecution.

Figure 12

ASPECTS OF IDENTITY TARGETED BY HATE SPEECH



Doxxing was encountered by 16% of participants over the last year. This practice involves publishing private or identifying information about an individual without their consent, usually with malicious intent. This type of hate speech exposes individuals to increased risks, extending the impact of online abuse into the physical realm and potentially leading to real-world violence and further victimisation.

5.10. Aspects of Identity Targeted by Hate Speech

The survey data reveals a significant insight into the prevalence of hate speech as it pertains to various aspects of identity among respondents. The analysis in Figure 12 indicates that different identity categories experience varied levels of targeted hate speech, reflecting both the frequency and intensity of such experiences.

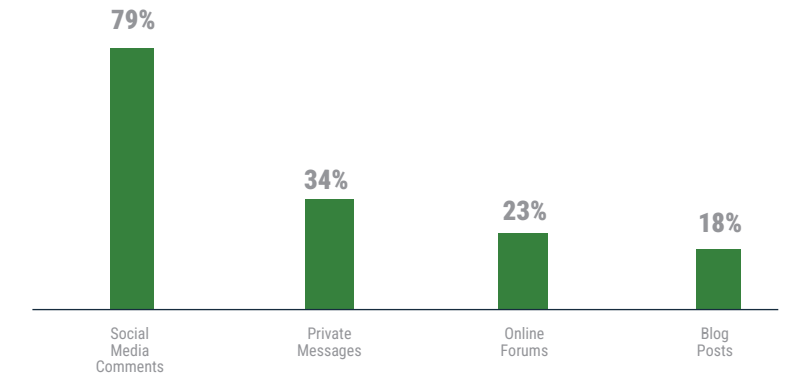
Racial Identity emerges as the least frequently targeted identity attribute for hate speech, with a substantial 74% of respondents indicating they rarely or never experience hate speech based on race. Only 16% report often or always facing racial hate speech, suggesting that while race may be a factor, it is less predominant in the context of hate speech for this group compared to other identity factors.

Gender Expression and Gender Identity both show significant vulnerability to hate speech. Approximately 56% of respondents report that they rarely or never experience hate speech based on gender expression, but 28% face it often or always, indicating a notable presence of gender expression-related hate speech. Similarly, gender identity sees a comparative frequency, with 29% of individuals frequently encountering hate speech, underscoring the particular vulnerability of transgender and non-binary individuals within the community.

Sexual Orientation stands out as the most frequently targeted aspect for hate speech. Less than half of the respondents (42%) rarely or never experience hate speech based on their sexual orientation, while a significant 28% encounter it frequently. Additionally, more than half of the participants (56%) report sometimes facing hate speech due to their sexual orientation, pointing to its prevalence as a common basis for hate speech attacks.

Figure 13

CHANNELS FOR DELIVERING HATE SPEECH



5.11. Channels for Delivery of Hate speech

Figure 13 shows that an overwhelming majority of 79% of incidents involving hate speech occur within the comments sections of social media platforms. This finding highlights the primary role that social media plays in the dissemination of hate speech, serving as a significant battleground where such interactions often take place in public, yet relatively unchecked environments.

Private messages account for 34% of the venues for hate speech, indicating that a significant portion of this type of abuse occurs in more concealed settings. This mode of communication allows offenders to target individuals directly, making it a particularly insidious form of harassment that can escape public scrutiny and often leaves the victims dealing with the consequences in isolation.

Figure 13 also reveals that online forums are identified as another significant channel, with 23% of hate speech incidents occurring within these spaces. These platforms, designed for more detailed discussions and community interactions around specific interests, can become echo chambers that facilitate the spread of discriminatory ideologies under the guise of open dialogue.

Finally, blog posts are noted as the least common channel, with 18% of hate speech cases reported in this context. Although they represent the smallest percentage, the impact within this medium can still be considerable, given the potential reach and permanence of the content published in blogs.

These statistics not only reflect where hate speech is most likely to occur but also suggest where interventions might be most needed. The high incidence of hate speech in social media comments suggests a need for platforms to strengthen moderation processes and for users to engage in more responsible sharing and interaction.

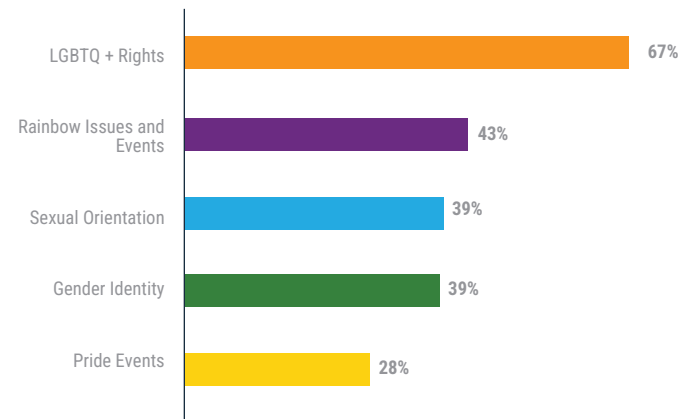
5.12. Triggers for Online Hate Speech

The survey data in Figure 14 revealing the topics that most frequently trigger hate speech provides critical insights into the specific issues that catalyse discriminatory rhetoric against the LGBT+ community. With LGBT+ rights at the forefront, cited by 67% of respondents, it is clear that discussions surrounding the fundamental rights and legal

recognitions of LGBT+ individuals are particularly contentious. This high percentage suggests that any discourse on rights and equal protections under law not only engages but also provokes strong opposition, likely stemming from deeply ingrained societal, cultural, and possibly religious beliefs.

Figure 14

TOPICS THAT TRIGGER HATE SPEECH



Gender identity and sexual orientation, both at 39%, are equally provocative topics. These figures underscore the ongoing struggles faced by individuals in asserting their identity and orientation within societal frameworks that may still harbour rigid, binary views of gender and sexuality. The equal percentage points to a broad spectrum of hate speech that targets these core aspects of personal identity, reflecting widespread misunderstandings and prejudices that persist despite growing visibility and advocacy.

Figure 14 also identifies "Rainbow" issues and events, which encompass a broader range of LGBT+ cultural and community topics, trigger hate speech in 43% of cases. This indicates that public and community expressions of LGBT+ culture and solidarity, beyond the more formal settings of rights discourse, also become flashpoints for hate speech. Events that celebrate diversity and promote LGBT+ visibility, while fostering community strength,

simultaneously attract backlash that can manifest in aggressive online and offline environments.

Pride events, though less frequently cited at 28%, still represent a significant trigger for hate speech. As highly visible manifestations of LGBT+ presence and pride, these events often challenge prevailing social norms and provoke reactions from those who oppose such expressions of community identity and demands for equality.

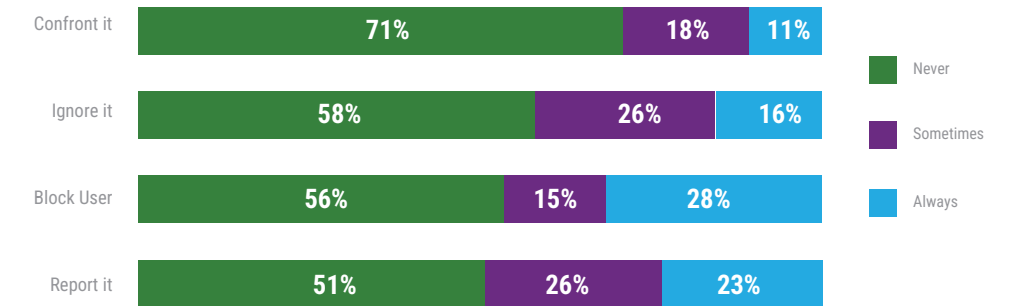
Pride events, though less frequently cited at 28%, still represent a significant trigger for hate speech.

5.13. Personal Responses to Hate Speech

Figure 15 presents responses from LGBT+ community members on their typical reactions to encountering online hate speech. The findings suggest a diverse array of strategies employed by individuals when confronted with such negative experiences online. The response category "Report it" shows

Figure 15

PERSONAL RESPONSES TO HATE SPEECH



that a majority, 51% of respondents, actively take a stand against online hate by reporting it to the platform or relevant authorities. This suggests a proactive engagement where community members take formal steps to notify platforms of abusive content. However, there are notable portions, 26% and 23%, who less frequently report incidents, indicating variability in reporting behaviour or perhaps a lack of confidence in the reporting systems' effectiveness.

"Block User" is another significant response with 40% of respondents often using this method to prevent further abuse. This response underscores a personal boundary-setting practice where individuals protect themselves from ongoing harassment. Interestingly, 29% sometimes and 32% rarely use this option, suggesting that while blocking is a common defensive action, it may not always be the preferred or first line of response due to various reasons such as curiosity about the harasser's behaviour or the impact of the blocking on social network dynamics.

"Ignore it" reveals that 58% of respondents frequently choose to overlook hate speech, which might reflect a coping mechanism to maintain mental well-being or indicate a perception of ineffectiveness in other forms of response. The decreased frequency of ignoring in 26% and even less in 16% of respondents highlights a gradual shift possibly towards more confrontational or proactive strategies as community awareness and support systems strengthen.

Lastly, "Confront it" is the most chosen reaction with 71% engaging directly with the perpetrators of hate speech. This high percentage signifies a robust stance against hate speech, where individuals are prepared to challenge the behaviour directly. The lower frequencies, 18% and 11%, for less frequent confrontations could indicate the emotional and psychological costs involved in direct engagement, leading some members to reserve confrontation for more severe or personal attacks.

5.14. Impact of Hate Speech

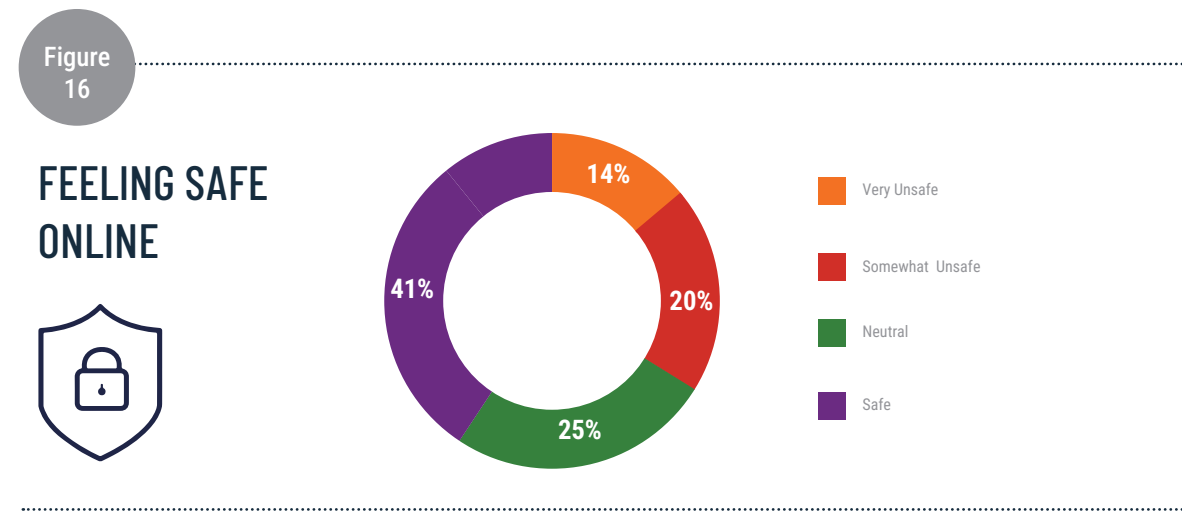
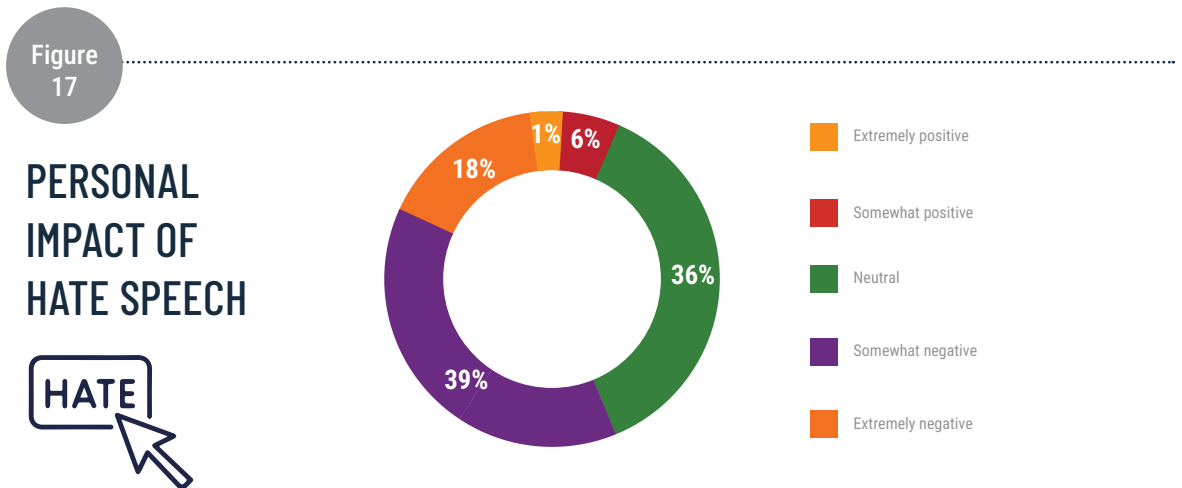


Figure 16 shows that at one end of the spectrum, 14% of the respondents feel “very unsafe” while online, indicating a significant level of distress and concern about their personal safety. This feeling of vulnerability could stem from direct experiences of hate speech, harassment, or other forms of online aggression. An additional 20% of respondents report feeling “somewhat unsafe,” suggesting that while not experiencing acute danger, there is still an underlying unease about potential threats.

In contrast, a small segment of the community, 11%, feels “very safe” online, suggesting that these individuals likely have positive experiences and effective coping mechanisms in place, or perhaps benefit from supportive networks that buffer against negative encounters. Meanwhile, the largest proportion of respondents, 30%, describe their feelings as “somewhat safe,” which implies a cautious optimism tempered by an awareness of the potential risks present in online interactions. The “neutral” category, accounting for 25% of responses, reflects those who neither feel particularly safe nor unsafe. This could indicate a level of resignation or detachment from the potential risks, possibly due to less frequent engagement in online activities or communities where such issues are prevalent. The personal experiences shared by the participants paint a vivid picture of the everyday realities of facing hate speech. These accounts range from public confrontations to online harassment and highlights the thin line between verbal abuse and physical violence. Focus group participants discussed the emotional and psychological



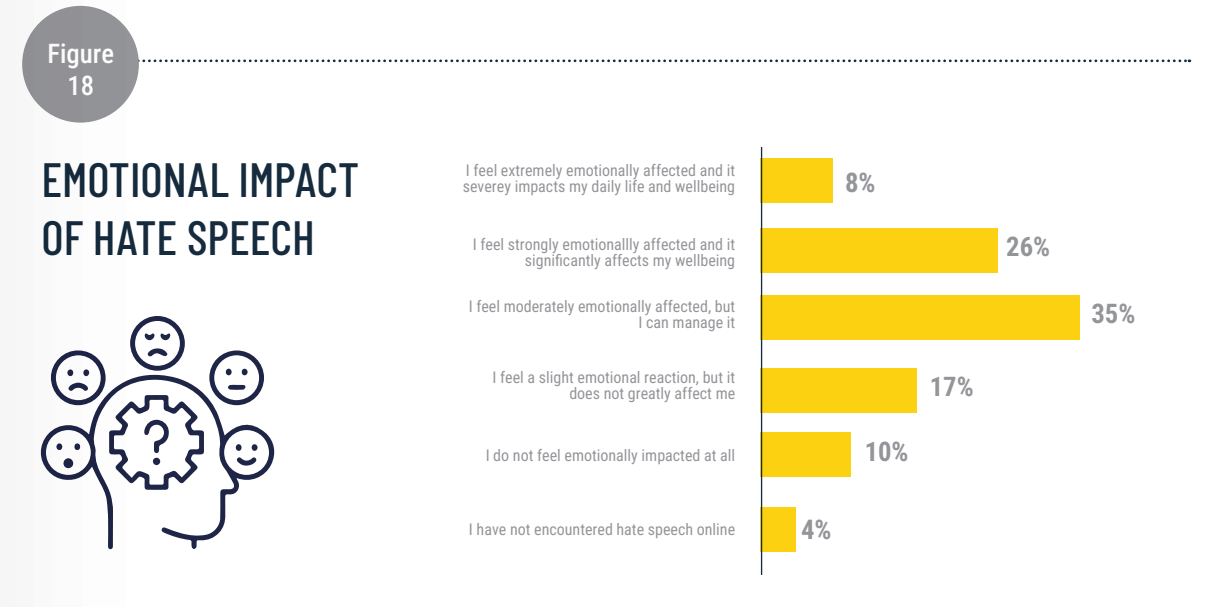
toll of being targeted online, where anonymity emboldens aggressors, making social media a battleground for identity attacks. Furthermore, the intersectional experiences of hate speech, as discussed by participants, also reveal how different aspects of an individual’s identity can attract specific forms of hate speech. For instance, being LGBT+ and disabled or of a certain age can layer the experiences of discrimination, each intersecting identity magnifying the impact of hate speech and contributing to a more profound sense of alienation and danger.

5.15. Impact of Hate Speech

Figure 17 shows a small fraction of the community, totaling 7%, reports some level of positive impact from hate speech encounters - 1% describe their experiences as “extremely positive” and 6% as “somewhat positive.” This counterintuitive finding may suggest that some individuals find empowerment or motivation in responding to or overcoming hate speech. It could also reflect instances where community solidarity and support are mobilised in reaction to hate speech, thereby providing a form of positive outcome for those involved.

The majority of respondents, however, report a negative impact, with 39% feeling “somewhat negative” and 18% “extremely negative” effects. These responses highlight the distressing and often harmful consequences of hate speech, which can include emotional distress, increased feelings of vulnerability, and a diminished sense of safety online. The combined 57% of individuals reporting negative impacts illustrates a clear need for addressing hate speech aggressively to mitigate its harmful effects.

Meanwhile, a significant 36% of respondents view the impact of hate speech on their lives as “neutral.” This response may indicate a desensitisation to hate speech or possibly an effective coping mechanism that diminishes its perceived personal impact. It may also suggest that while hate speech is recognised, it does not always translate into a direct or immediate emotional response.



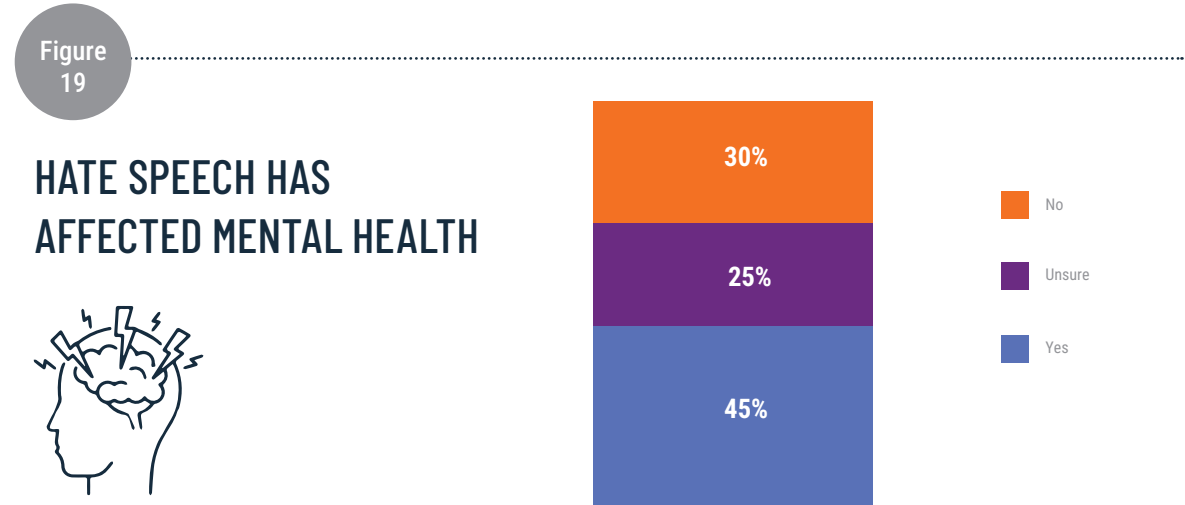
The analysis of the impact of online hate speech on individuals reveals a broad spectrum of emotional responses among the respondents. The data in Figure 18 indicates that a small fraction, specifically 4%, reported that they have not encountered hate speech online. This minority represents those who may have not been exposed to or recognised experiences as hate speech within their online interactions.

Conversely, 10% of the respondents expressed that they do not feel any emotional impact from hate speech. This group might possess either a high threshold for such online interactions or perhaps employs effective coping mechanisms that shield them emotionally.

A further 17% of participants acknowledge only a slight emotional reaction to hate speech, which does not significantly affect their well-being. This response suggests a level of resilience or detachment from the content, allowing these individuals to remain relatively unaffected by hostile online environments.

The largest portion of the dataset, 35%, indicates a moderate emotional effect from hate speech, albeit one that they can manage. This significant percentage of respondents' likely experiences distress or discomfort but retains enough coping capacity to manage the impact without profound disruption to their daily lives.

More concerningly, 26% of respondents feel strongly emotionally affected by online hate speech, noting that it significantly affects their well-being. This substantial proportion highlights the severe emotional toll that such experiences can exact, potentially leading to prolonged psychological distress.



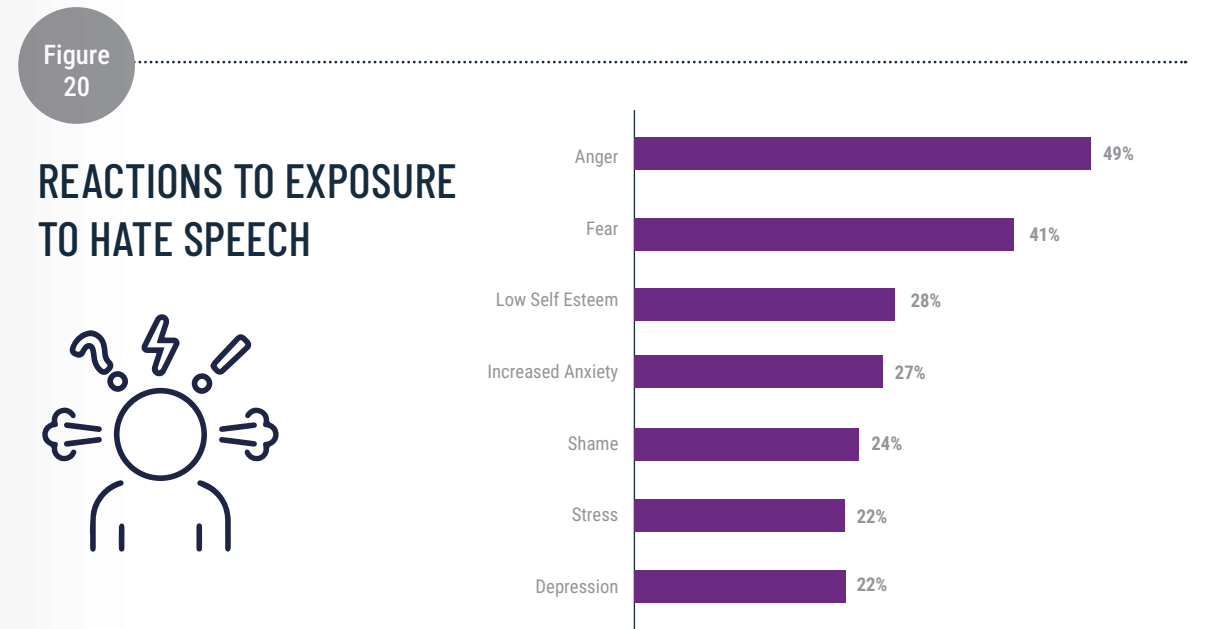
Lastly, 8% of the sample experiences extreme emotional reactions to online hate speech, stating that it severely impacts their daily life and overall well-being. This severe level of impact points to the potential for hate speech to induce significant mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and other stress-related disorders, profoundly affecting individuals' ability to function normally.

In assessing the impact of online hate speech on mental health, survey responses in Figure 19 reveal significant and varied effects on individuals within the LGBT+ community. The data reflects that 45% of respondents affirm that hate speech has adversely affected their mental health. This considerable portion of the sample underscores the profound psychological distress that hate speech can instigate, potentially leading to mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and chronic stress.

On the other hand, 30% of participants report no impact on their mental health due to hate speech. This group either may not have been significantly exposed to hate speech or possibly possesses robust coping mechanisms that effectively shield them from the emotional repercussions typically associated with such negative online interactions.

The remaining 25% of respondents are unsure about the effect of hate speech on their mental health. This uncertainty could stem from difficulties in directly attributing specific mental health outcomes to online hate speech or a lack of awareness about the subtle long-term psychological impacts. It also indicates a potential area for further education and resources to help individuals identify and understand the effects of online harassment on their psychological well-being.

Figure 20 below highlights that the emotional responses of individuals to exposure to online hate speech manifest in a spectrum of psychological effects that are serious and troubling. The survey data elucidates the prevalent emotional repercussions experienced by the LGBT+ community, underscoring the profound and varied impact hate speech exerts on individuals' mental health and emotional well-being.



The most commonly reported response to hate speech is anger, cited by 49% of respondents. This strong emotional reaction reflects the immediate and intense displeasure that hate speech can provoke, often resulting in a fervent desire to respond or retaliate against the source of such aggression. Anger, while a natural response to perceived injustice or disrespect, can exacerbate stress and affect interpersonal relations and overall mental health if not managed properly.

Fear is another significant outcome, experienced by 41% of those surveyed. The pervasive nature of hate speech, particularly when it threatens physical or emotional safety, can instill a lasting sense of fear, affecting individuals' ability to engage freely and confidently in online and offline spaces. This can lead to social withdrawal and isolation, further compounding the risks of long-term psychological distress.

Low self-esteem is reported by 28% of respondents, pointing to the damaging effect hate speech has on individuals' self-perception and worth. When people are repeatedly subjected to derogatory and demeaning messages, it can diminish their self-esteem, potentially leading to depression and anxiety.

Increased anxiety is noted by 27% of participants, illustrating the chronic tension and worry that hate speech can invoke. The anticipation of or ongoing exposure to such negative interactions can lead to heightened anxiety, which can impair daily functioning and overall quality of life.

The feelings of shame, experienced by 24% of respondents, highlight the internalisation of stigma associated with hate speech. Shame can be particularly corrosive as it not only affects one's self-esteem but also one's social identity, reinforcing feelings of otherness and exclusion.

Both depression and stress are reported by 22% of individuals. These conditions are often interrelated, with each potentially exacerbating the other. Depression can envelop individuals when they feel powerless to change their situation or escape the continual barrage of hate, while stress arises from the constant vigilance and emotional toll required to navigate environments peppered with hostility.

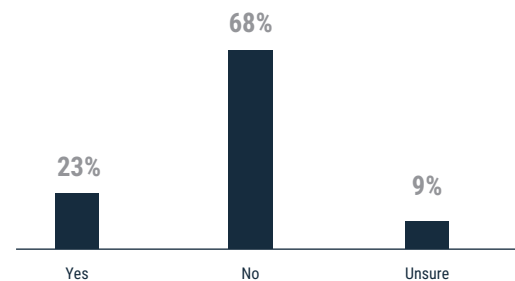
16. Online Protection

Generally, awareness of online protection forums and platforms offering protection for victims of online hate speech are low. During the focus groups, one respondent identified Outright International¹⁶ - an international organisation that runs various global feminist and trans support programs. But, Figure 21 below shows that a significant majority, 68%, reported that they are not aware of any online support mechanisms available to assist the victims of online hate speech. This high percentage underscores a substantial gap in the communication and availability of resources aimed at assisting victims of online abuse. Only a small fraction, 9%, affirmed their awareness of such support resources, indicating that while these mechanisms exist, they are not widely recognised or utilised by the community at large.

Additionally, 23% of respondents were unsure about the existence of support resources, which further emphasises the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding the support structures for dealing with online hate speech. This uncertainty could contribute to a lack of action and reporting when individuals encounter hate speech online.

Figure 21

AWARENESS OF ONLINE PROTECTION



The survey on online hate speech among LGBT+ community members included additional two questions that shed light on two crucial aspects of digital interactions: the awareness of mechanisms to report such speech on social media platforms and the actual reporting of hate speech.

Figure 22 reveals a high level of awareness about the mechanisms available for reporting hate speech on social media, with 73% of participants acknowledging their knowledge of these tools. This awareness is critical as it

¹⁶ <https://outrightinternational.org>

empowers users to take action against hate speech and suggests that educational efforts or information dissemination about reporting tools by social media platforms and advocacy groups have reached a substantial audience.

Figure 22

REPORTING HATE SPEECH ONLINE

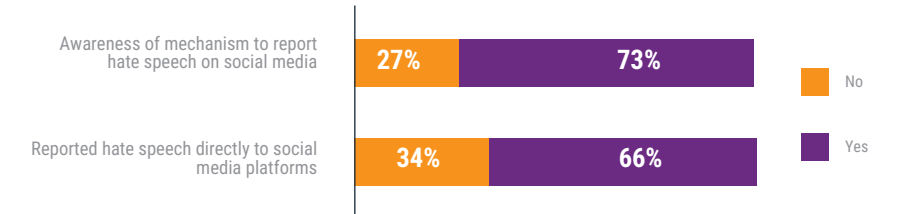
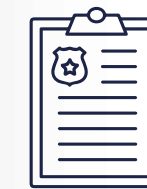


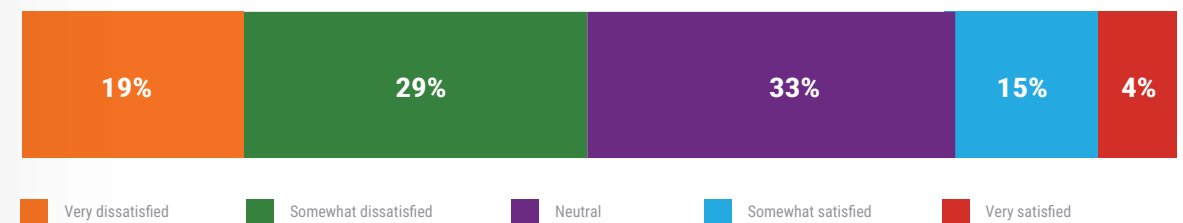
Figure 22 also shows that a significant portion of respondents, 66%, reported having directly reported hate speech to social media platforms. This indicates a proactive stance among many community members in addressing hate speech where it occurs, utilising the tools provided by platforms to flag inappropriate content.

Yet, despite this high awareness and a proactive approach by a majority, there remains a significant minority - 34% of respondents - who have not reported hate speech. This group might represent a segment of the community that is either unsure of how to report, sceptical of the effectiveness of reporting, or possibly resigned to the prevalence of hate speech in online environments. Additionally, the fact that 27% of respondents are not aware of how to report hate speech highlights a gap in communication and education efforts that need addressing to ensure all users know how to protect themselves and others in digital spaces.

In evaluating the satisfaction levels of respondents who reported hate speech on social media platforms, the results in Figure 23 reveal a predominant dissatisfaction among respondents. A significant 49% of the respondents indicated a negative reception to the response mechanisms of social media platforms, with 19% reporting that

Figure 23

SATISFACTION WITH RESPONSES TO REPORTING HATE SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA



they were very dissatisfied and an additional 30% expressing that they were somewhat dissatisfied with the platforms' handling of their complaints. This highlights a considerable gap in the effectiveness of current moderation systems to address and resolve instances of reported hate speech to the satisfaction of users.

On the other hand, a substantial proportion of the respondents, amounting to 33%, remained neutral. This neutrality could suggest a variety of interpretations, including indifference to the outcomes, scepticism about the efficacy of reporting mechanisms, or a lack of direct expectation from the process itself.

Those who felt positively about their experiences represent a minority, with only 19% expressing some level of satisfaction; 15% were somewhat satisfied, and a mere 4% were very satisfied. This starkly low level of satisfaction underscores the critical need for improvement in how social media platforms manage hate speech reports. The data reflects a significant challenge in ensuring effective, timely, and impactful responses to hate speech, crucial for maintaining trust and safety within digital communities.

5.17. Coping Strategies and Support

The focus group discussions explored how individuals manage their exposure to online hate speech. Media literacy was emphasised as a critical skill in navigating online risks. The emotional and psychological impacts of hate speech are vividly portrayed through personal stories shared by the focus group participants and these stories showcase the everyday casual yet profound prejudice that LGBT+ individuals face, which not only affects their social interactions but also their personal sense of security and belonging.

The focus group discussions also revealed that within the LGBT+ community, the response to hate speech varies. While some find support and solidarity, others experience internal community discrimination, where, as some participants pointed out, even within marginalized groups, hierarchies and prejudices can lead to further instances of hate speech. Navigating social identities are complex and require comprehensive understanding and support systems both within marginalised communities and outside them.

Community dynamics play a significant role in both exacerbating and mitigating the impact of hate speech. Some participants noted support within certain family or professional environments, which provides a buffer against the harsher aspects of public discrimination. However, others highlighted the hostility faced in various community spaces, from religious settings to public eateries, where their presence provokes derogatory comments or even physical threats.

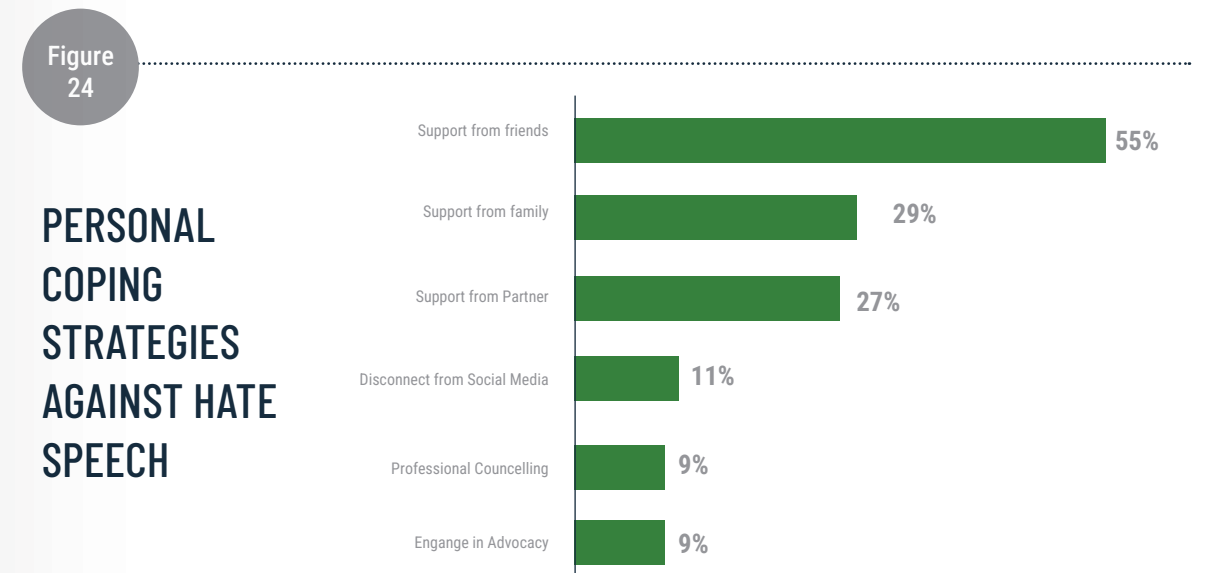
Family and community acceptance plays a significant role in mitigating the impact of hate speech. One trans man in Group 1 reported that eventough he experiences support at his workplace and from some family members, he still faces significant challenges within his broader community. This support is contrasted with instances of familial and community rejection or discrimination, highlighting the varying degrees of safety and acceptance experienced by LGBT+ individuals depending on their immediate social environments.

The focus group discussions also revealed a significant gap in support for victims of both online and offline hateful speech and actions, particularly in terms of financial resources, access to technology and practical assistance. *"I speak for trans men. Most of the trans men, especially the ones in Windhoek, do not have access, do not have smartphones because most of them are not working, most of them are thrown out of their houses and that makes them very vulnerable in the sense of because they cannot get a job because of their sexual gender identity, they don't have homes and they're not able to afford phones and stuff like that. So, most of the hate speech for trans men is offline and it's very much directly, because for trans men in the community we are being threatened be-*

cause we are, they see us as a threat to the next woman because it's some sort of a competition. So, there's not really much of a support system for trans men to be able to be assisted in terms of safety and resources to help them maybe take care of themselves. And again, when a trans man is threatened and he wants to report the case to the police, because of the domestic violence act, we are not recognised and if we are not politically or by law recognised, we are not being respected automatically. So, it's very much of a challenge for us also to report these cases. There is a lot of cases that is happening that we, when we as trans men come together and talk about these things." Another respondent in the same group (Group 2) stated that trans women experience similar problems with regard to access to help and support. These views underscore the critical need for more comprehensive support systems beyond immediate psychological help to include long-term safety and security measures for vulnerable individuals.

In the context of coping with hate speech, members of the LGBT+ community often rely on a variety of support mechanisms. According to the survey findings in Figure 24, a significant majority of individuals (55%) reported that they predominantly receive support from friends. This preference for friends over other sources of support, such as family (29%) and partners (27%), underscores the multifaceted nature of social support within the LGBT+ community, reflecting both the necessity and preferences shaped by unique socio-cultural experiences.

Friends often serve as the primary support network for LGBT+ individuals facing hate speech due to shared experiences and an intrinsic understanding of the challenges specific to the community. Such friendships, frequently termed as 'chosen families,' offer empathetic support and a safe emotional space that may not be available within traditional family structures, especially if family members are not supportive or aware of the individual's sexual or gender identity. The immediacy and accessibility of support from friends, particularly in digital environments where hate speech often occurs, is crucial for immediate reassurances and coping strategies.



The findings in Figure 24 also reveal that fewer individuals resort to formal support mechanisms such as professional counselling, reported by only 9% of the respondents, and engaging in advocacy, which is also limited to 9%. This could reflect a potential gap in accessible professional mental health services that are attuned to the needs of the LGBT+ community or a hesitance to seek formal help due to stigma or fear of discrimination. The lower reliance on these formal support systems highlights the critical role informal social support networks play in the emotional well-being of LGBT+ individuals.

Additionally, 11% of respondents reported that they cope by disconnecting from social media, which indicates a proactive but isolating approach to managing exposure to hate speech. This method, while effective in reducing direct exposure to harmful content, underscores the challenge of navigating public spaces that are often hostile towards LGBT+ identities.

The predominance of support from friends over family and partners is indicative of the broader community dynamics where friends are not only allies but integral to the psychological resilience of LGBT+ individuals. Friends within the community or allies often have a better understanding of the specific nuances of hate speech as it affects LGBT+ individuals. They are typically more equipped to offer relevant advice, emotional comfort, and solidarity, making them invaluable in combating the feelings of isolation and vulnerability that hate speech can induce.

5.18. Combatting Hate Speech

One practical approach to mitigating hate speech noted in the discussions involves community organisations attempting to curb escalation by intervening in online threads or providing information on where to seek psychological help. However, these interventions are often minimal and do not address the root causes or offer long-term solutions to the victims of hate speech (“the bare minimal, I’ve seen as an organisation will step in, try and curb the thing” - Speaker 2).

The importance of data collection was highlighted, particularly for trans men, as a tool for securing funding and designing targeted interventions to address the specific needs of this subgroup. The lack of comprehensive data on the experiences of trans individuals with hate speech contributes to the difficulty in formulating effective responses and securing necessary resources (“Collecting of data is quite very important for us” - Speaker 4).

Moreover, the discussions revealed that there is a lack of awareness and understanding within the broader community about what constitutes online hate speech and how to deal with it. This lack of awareness hinders effective community response and leaves individuals vulnerable to ongoing abuse. Educational efforts on recognising and responding to online hate speech are seen as essential steps toward empowering community members and enhancing their resilience against such attacks.

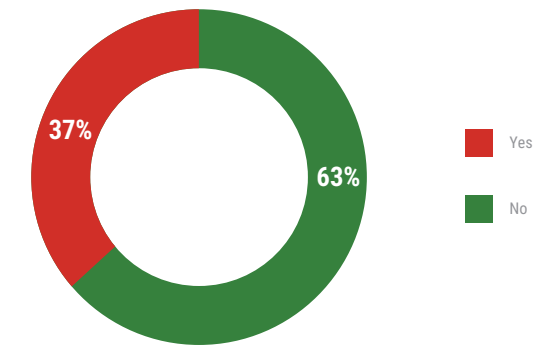
According to the data in Figure 25, a majority of the respondents, accounting for 63%, indicate that they do not participate in online LGBT+ communities for support and advocacy. Conversely, a substantial minority, 37% of respondents, affirm their active participation in such online communities.

This divergence in participation rates may reflect several underlying factors. The relatively lower engagement in online LGBT+ communities could be attributed to concerns about privacy, the fear of exposure or harassment, or possibly the lack of access to safe and affirming online spaces. It also suggests that while online communities are vital for some members of the LGBT+ community, providing essential support and a platform for advocacy, they are not universally utilised by all within the community.

For those who do engage, the 37% reflects the importance of these spaces in offering a sense of belonging, peer support, and a forum for collective action and voice. These online platforms may serve as critical resources for social interaction, emotional support, and political engagement, particularly for individuals who may otherwise feel isolated or marginalised within their immediate physical environments.

Figure 25

PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE LGTBQ+ COMMUNITIES



Some international organisations like Outright International offer resources such as online counselling and educational booklets on handling online hate speech. However, local initiatives appear to be lacking, with some efforts like those by Wings to Transcend Namibia still in the planning stages. This indicates a significant need for local resources and initiatives tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by the Namibian LGBT+ community.

The following activities were distilled from open responses aimed at fostering resilience and solidarity within the LGTBQ+ community online.

- 1. Advocacy and Policy Engagement:** This includes actions aimed at advocating for digital rights, enhancing legal protections, and promoting trans equality in law and policy. Advocacy efforts are crucial for creating systemic changes that protect LGBT+ individuals from online hate crime and harassment. Engaging with policymakers and stakeholders to push for stronger hate speech laws and inclusive policies also falls under this category.
- 2. Education and Awareness:** Activities here focus on raising awareness about the LGBT+ community, debunking myths, addressing misconceptions, and providing educational resources. This cluster aims to increase public understanding and acceptance of LGBT+ individuals through online campaigns, workshops, and media literacy programs.
- 3. Community Building and Support:** This encompasses creating safe online spaces, support groups, and fostering community involvement. It involves the establishment of platforms where LGBT+ individuals can freely discuss and express themselves, share experiences, and receive peer support. Organising virtual pride events and celebrating LGBT+ achievements also help strengthen community ties.
- 4. Counteracting Hate Speech:** Direct actions to combat hate speech online, such as content moderation, reporting mechanisms, and user empowerment through reporting tools. This category includes employing trained moderators, developing algorithms to detect hate speech, and creating clear guidelines for community behaviour online.
- 5. Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Providing support for the mental health of community members through professional counseling, support from friends, family, and partners, and promoting mental health awareness. Initiatives might include setting up counseling services, hosting workshops on self-care, and fostering discussions on the emotional impacts of hate speech.

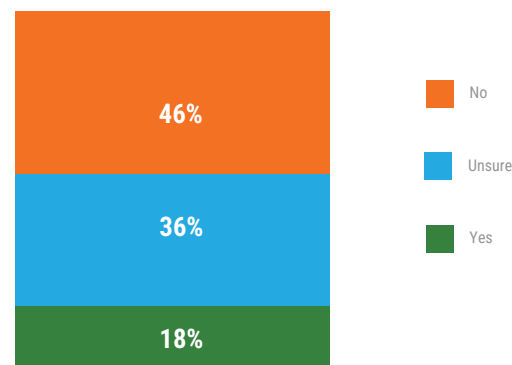
- 6. Legal Support and Rights Protection:** Advocating for the enforcement of existing laws against hate speech and engaging in legal advocacy to protect and advance LGBT+ rights. This could involve partnerships with legal organisations to offer support to victims of hate speech and lobbying for legislative changes.
- 7. Media and Communication Strategies:** Utilising media to promote positive LGBT+ representation and counter negative stereotypes. This includes partnerships with media outlets to ensure fair and accurate portrayal of LGBT+ individuals and issues, and using social media platforms to amplify LGBT+ voices and stories.
- 8. Digital and Social Media Engagement:** Encouraging active participation in digital spaces through the creation of content that educates and informs about LGBT+ rights, as well as engaging with online influencers to promote positive messages about the community.
- 9. Skills and Resource Development:** Offering training and resources that empower LGBT+ individuals to navigate online environments safely, such as digital literacy, online safety training, and the development of personal resilience strategies.
- 10. Intercommunity and Ally Engagement:** Building alliances with other marginalised groups to address hate speech collectively and foster broader community solidarity. This includes collaborative efforts with non-LGBT+ organisations, shared advocacy initiatives, and cross-community dialogues.

5.19. The Legal and Policy Environment

The survey data on the awareness of legal protection against hate speech in Namibia presents a concerning scenario. Figure 26 shows a significant portion of respondents, 46%, reported having no awareness of legal protections against hate speech. This indicates a substantial gap in public knowledge and understanding, which could hinder the effectiveness of legal frameworks designed to combat such speech. Additionally, 36% of respondents

Figure 26

AWARENESS OF LEGAL PROTECTION AGAINST HATE SPEECH

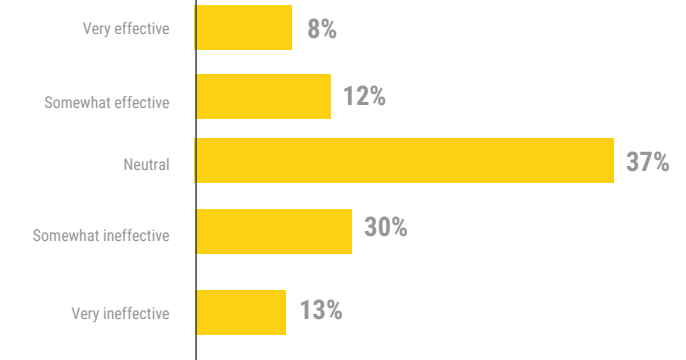


were unsure about the existence of such protections, further underscoring the lack of clear communication and education regarding hate speech legislation. Only a small minority, 18%, affirmed their awareness of legal protections, suggesting that outreach and educational efforts need substantial enhancement to ensure that individuals understand their rights and the resources available to combat hate speech effectively.

The survey data regarding the effectiveness of existing anti-hate speech laws and policies in Namibia (Figure 27) suggests a prevailing sentiment of ineffectiveness and skepticism among the respondents. A notable 43% of the participants perceive these laws as ineffective, with 13% deeming them very ineffective and 30% somewhat ineffective. This indicates a significant lack of confidence in the current legal framework's ability to address and mitigate hate speech effectively.

Figure 27

EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING LEGISLATION



Furthermore, the largest proportion of responses, at 37%, remains neutral. This neutrality may reflect either a lack of familiarity with the specifics of the laws, their enforcement, or uncertainty about their impact. Only a combined 20% of respondents view the laws as effective, with just 8% rating them as very effective and 12% as somewhat effective.

At a minimum, these findings underscore a critical gap between the legislative intentions and public perception of their efficacy. It highlights the need for more robust enforcement, better public education on the content and purpose of these laws, and potentially, a reassessment of the legal strategies employed to combat hate speech to align more closely with the needs and expectations of the community.

Respondents were also asked in an open-ended question what their recommendations would be for legal and policy responses to address online hate speech targeting the LGBT+ community. What follows here are ten plausible clusters or categories of actions and strategies extracted from their responses.

1. Policy Development and Enforcement: This involves the creation of robust, clear, and enforceable policies that specifically target hate speech. It includes drafting and revising legislation, adopting multi-stakeholder approaches that involve government, civil society, and tech companies, and implementing strict policies at local, national, and international levels to curb online hate speech.

2. Legal Measures and Resources: Focusing on strengthening the legal framework to combat hate speech, including the allocation of resources for legal aid, establishing laws that punish individuals engaged in hate speech, and providing access to legal support for victims. This also covers advocating for international treaties and ensuring that policies are based on empirical evidence.

This neutrality may reflect either a lack of familiarity with the specifics of the laws, their enforcement, or uncertainty about their impact.

3. Education and Awareness: Educational initiatives aim to raise awareness about the nature and impact of hate speech. This includes public campaigns, workshops, and school programs designed to educate various demographics about legal rights, the impact of hate speech, and respectful online communication.

4. Community Support and Victim Assistance: Establishing support mechanisms for victims of hate speech, such as counseling services, support groups, and hotlines. This also involves creating peer support networks and facilitating access to mental health resources.

5. Capacity Building: Enhancing the capabilities of individuals and organisations to address hate speech through training and capacity-building programs. This might involve educating law enforcement, content moderators, and legal professionals on handling hate speech effectively.

6. Platform Accountability and Moderation: Encouraging social media platforms and ISPs to take active roles in moderating content, blocking users who engage in hate speech, and developing technologies that improve the detection and removal of such content. This includes fostering platform transparency and accountability.

7. Stakeholder Collaboration: Promoting cooperation among various stakeholders, including tech companies, non-profits, government agencies, and international bodies, to create unified strategies against online hate speech. This could involve shared databases for tracking incidents and cooperative enforcement efforts.

8. Inclusivity and Intersectionality: Addressing hate speech through an intersectional lens that considers various identities and experiences within the LGBT+ community. Actions here include crafting policies that respect and protect diverse groups and encouraging inclusivity in online spaces.

9. Data and Research: Conducting research to understand the causes, effects, and trends of online hate speech. This includes analysing data to inform policy, conducting impact assessments, and utilising findings to shape effective interventions.

10. Public Engagement and Advocacy: Mobilising public support against hate speech through advocacy, public statements, and engaging influencers to spread positive messages. This also includes efforts to change public opinion and encourage civic engagement in combating online hate speech.



06 CONCLUSIONS

This study, the first of its kind in Namibia, used a mixed-methods approach to collect data focusing on the LGBT+ community experiences with online environments and hate speech. It found that social media plays a crucial role in the lives of LGBT+ individuals, serving both as a platform for expression and as a ground for potential hostility. The data reveals that Facebook is the predominant platform used by this community, followed by Instagram and YouTube, highlighting the extensive reach and impact of these platforms in daily interactions.

Awareness of legal protections against hate speech is alarmingly low, with only 18% of respondents affirming their knowledge of such protections, and a significant majority either unaware or uncertain. This lack of awareness correlates with the personal experiences of hate speech reported by participants, where a substantial proportion encounter hate speech online, underlining the pervasive nature of this issue.

The survey findings, furthermore, underscore an intersectional dimension to online hate speech, where discrimination is not only based on sexual orientation or gender identity but also intersects with other personal attributes such as race and gender expression. This intersectionality suggests that responses to hate speech need to be nuanced and inclusive of various identities.

Trends in online hate speech suggest a troubling increase, with a considerable percentage of respondents observing that it has worsened over the past year. The severity of the experiences varies, with many describing the hate speech as frequently severe and damaging. Common responses to hate speech include reporting the incidents to social media platforms and confronting the harasser, yet these actions often do not lead to satisfactory resolution, reflected in the general dissatisfaction with current anti-hate speech measures.



Awareness of legal protections against hate speech is alarmingly low, with only 18% of respondents affirming their knowledge of such protections, and a significant majority either unaware or uncertain.

The types of hate speech most frequently encountered include derogatory language and direct threats, predominantly found in social media comments and private messages. This points to the need for stronger moderation and reporting mechanisms within these platforms. Trigger topics for hate speech are closely tied to visibility and activism related to LGBT+ rights, with discussions around gender identity and sexual orientation being particularly provocative.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of existing anti-hate speech laws and policies are largely negative, with a majority of respondents finding them ineffective or only somewhat effective. This highlights a critical gap between the legal framework's intent and its implementation on the ground.

In response to these challenges, survey participants have articulated a need for a multifaceted approach to improve the online environment for LGBT+ individuals. Suggested measures include enhancing legal and policy frameworks to make them more inclusive and enforceable, improving the responsiveness of social media platforms through better moderation practices, and increasing awareness and education about LGBT+ rights and online safety.

To bolster the safety and dignity of LGBT+ individuals online, there is a compelling call for concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including policymakers, social media companies, and civil society organisations, to foster a digital landscape that is respectful and inclusive. Engaging in public awareness campaigns, developing clearer policies on hate speech, and implementing robust support systems for affected individuals are pivotal steps towards mitigating the harms of online hate speech and ensuring a safer online presence for all members of the LGBT+ community.



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