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Online Victimisation Experiences of Transgender Individuals: A Content Analysis of Social Media Posts and Comments

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Abstract

The convergence of technology and rise of digital platforms have created spaces for many to share their experiences and interact with others; however, they also expose users to online victimisation. Transgender individuals, in particular, remain highly vulnerable to such harm due to their gender identity, which perpetuates stigma and contributes to exclusion and psychological harm. This study explores the online victimisation of transgender individuals across three social media platforms - Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly known as Twitter) - from 2020 to 2025. The study utilised publicly available posts and comments to identify recurring forms of victimisation targeting transgender individuals, specifically: name-calling, death and physical threats, and discriminatory rhetoric. The findings highlight the persistent risks faced by transgender individuals in digital spaces and underscore the need for enhanced safety measures, including stronger platform accountability, stricter policy enforcement, and legal consequences for perpetrators.

Keywords: *Transgender, Social Media, Facebook, Tiktok, X, Transphobia, Online Victimisation, Cyberbullying*

Introduction

The proliferation of technology has facilitated global connectivity and streamlined the sharing of information. Regrettably, this advancement has also created an avenue for bullies to exploit the online space by engaging in harassment, abuse, and threats. Online victimisation (also known as cyberbullying) knows no national borders, and anyone who uses online platforms can be a victim (McNeal et al., 2018). People identifying as transgender within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) community are not immune to cyberbullying. Discrimination and bullying based on gender identity or expression and sexual orientation have long been prevalent issues. However, with the increase of technology and social media, bullying has extended its reach to the online realm, leading to the victimisation of LGBTQI+ (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). As internet usage and social media platforms continue to grow, Hinduja and Patchin (2020) assert that online violence against LGBTQ+ individuals has become more visible. Sexual minority individuals are particularly vulnerable in the online environment, making them more susceptible to cyberbullying (Wiederhold, 2014). This vulnerability stems directly from social identities that are shaped by societal constructs and subject to prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination (Luo et al., 2025).

Cyberbullying has various forms of definitions; however, one of the definitions is that it is “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al., 2008, p.376). It also refers to electronic or online bullying facilitated through means such as email, instant messaging, chat rooms, websites, online gaming sites, or the transmission of digital messages or images to mobile phones (Kowalski et al., 2007, p.1). This study acknowledges that anyone can be a victim of cyberbullying; however, its focus is solely on people identifying as transgender. Due to their gender identity, individuals who identify as transgender face online victimisation. While research is growing in the area of cyberbullying against LGBTQ+ individuals (Mkhize et al., 2020; Ojeda et al., 2024; Pérez-Albéniz et al., 2025), only a few studies have been conducted that focus on cyberbullying of people identifying as transgender (Nagata et al., 2025). This study, therefore, aims to explore the victimisation of people identifying as transgender on these social media platforms.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation of Transgender Identity

To understand the concept of transgender, it is important to define the concepts of sex and gender. Sex refers to biological and physiological systems involving the X and Y chromosomes, sex hormones, and sexual (including genital and reproductive) differentiation (Hyde et al., 2019). While sex and gender are almost synonymous (Skjelsboek & Smith, 2001), gender is a socially constructed concept that encompasses the traits, roles, behaviours, and expectations linked to being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other (World Health Organisation, n.d.). It is not biologically given, nor is it a binary variable (Lindqvist et al., 2021; Bhatt et al., 2022), but is socially constructed and may vary from society to society. The use of binary response options frequently overlooks gender diversity, resulting in standard measures that fail to adequately capture identities extending beyond the traditional categories of woman and man (Lindqvist et al., 2021). Sex and gender are distinct, albeit often intertwined, constructs. This distinction is exemplified by transgender people, whose gender identity and/or expression do not coincide with the sex they were assigned at birth (Currah, 2022). “Transgender” serves as an umbrella term to refer to the full range and diversity of identities within transgender communities because it is currently the most widely used and recognised term (Green et al., 2018, p.56). It refers to people whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not “match”) the biological sex they were assigned at birth (Green et al., 2018, p.56).

A broad understanding of the word ‘transgender’ could, for example, include transgender men and women, drag performers, cross-dressers, and - to the extent that sexual attraction to members of the opposite sex is an element of normative gendered behaviour (Herek, 1986) - anyone who does not identify as heterosexual (Buck, 2016). The focus of this study is on transgender individuals who engage with online platforms, either to share content or because they are vulnerable to online victimisation due to their gender identity.

Social Media and Discrimination

Social media comprises various forms, which include social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, content communities, and microblogging. The BetterHelp Editorial Team (2022) states that social media bullying

can take place digitally with the utilisation of methods such as texting, online applications, online games, chatrooms, and social media platforms. This can occur on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and other sites. The focus of this article is on social networks known as Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. These social media platforms are commonly used by adults under the age of 30 (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). LGBTQI+ people use social media platforms for various reasons, including sharing their coming out stories, raising awareness and support for the community, and promoting their own stories (Kolbe 2018; Leung, 2021). According to Leung (2021), LGBTQI+ individuals on social media face cyberbullying when their followers or people who engage with their content leave hate comments or execute disrespectful actions.

Traditional vs Cyber Bullying of Transgender People

Cyberbullying perpetration correlates highly with traditional bullying perpetration (Kowalski et al., 2014). Unlike previous generations, where bullying had a more limited scope in terms of time, location, and audience, cyberbullying involves the circulation of messages and photos in cyberspace, which become part of the public domain and may remain on the internet permanently. This exposes victims to the potential reoccurrence of trauma long after the initial message or post (Shakir et al., 2019). Transgender individuals not only face victimisation in person but also have become vulnerable to online victimisation due to the increased use of social media. Due to their gender identity and expression, transgender individuals experience both traditional and online bullying. However, what sets cyberbullying apart from traditional bullying in the context of transgender individuals is the anonymity maintained by perpetrators and the persistence of incidents on the internet without being erased (Parents Articles, Teachers Articles, Teenagers Articles, 2016). Consequently, engaging with the internet or social media platforms can cause victims to continually relive their victimisation.

The recognition and understanding of the lives, experiences, struggles, and related issues concerning individuals of sexual minorities have been on the rise in the past thirty years (Saha et al., 2019). Silva (2021) reported that a GLAAD evaluation in May 2021 identified Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube as the top five platforms where LGBTQ+ users face safety concerns. While most literature is conducted on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, plus

(LGBQTI+) communities, it is reported that transgender and gender-diverse individuals are significantly more likely to experience cyberbullying (Evelyn, 2022). The Anti-Defamation League (ADL, 2021) surveyed 2251 respondents and revealed that 64% of LGBTQ+ individuals have encountered online harassment, which is disproportionately higher compared to other identity groups. The study also indicated that LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience severe forms of harassment, including the electronic distribution of degrading images, the dissemination of false or private information, stalking, and physical threats. Researchers have pointed out that cyberbullying takes various forms, such as humiliation, harassment, intimidation, manipulation, or control directed towards targeted victims (Chrisholm, 2014; Millar, 2018; Kunnapu et al., 2018:39; Çakar-Mengü & Mengü, 2023; Kizza, 2024). GLAAD revealed that 40% of all LGBTQI+ adults and 49% of transgender and nonbinary individuals do not feel welcomed or safe on social media (Ellis, 2022). These findings highlight significant concerns regarding the protection of transgender individuals in online spaces, as well as the broader LGBTQ+ communities.

Social Identity Theory

This study uses the Social Identity Theory, introduced by Tajfel (1978) and further developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which considers how group membership is incorporated into self-concept and how this affects the views of other members and non-members of our groups, as well as members of rival groups (Neighbors et al., 2013). Social Identity Theory explains how individuals define themselves based on their group memberships, such as nationality, religion, or social class (McLeod, 2023). The society has a social construct which is referred to as “the gender binary”, which is the idea that there are two genders: man and woman, and nothing in between (Bond and Capra-Thomas, 2020). Alongside self-categorisation, individuals evaluate the groups they feel they belong to (in-groups) and groups they do not consider themselves a member of (out-groups) (Trepte et al., 2017). The theory argues that identification with a group means being aware of that identity, valuing what the group represents, and feeling emotional attachment to the group (Guan and So, 2022).

According to the theory, there are three stages in which people classify themselves and others. These stages are social categorisation, social comparison and social identity (Guan and So, 2022). Social categorisation also depersonalises people's self-perception as well as their

perception of others in terms of in-group and out-group prototypes (Guan and So, 2022). Once individuals categorise themselves as members of a particular group, they adopt the identity of that group. This means they begin to see themselves in terms of group characteristics and adopt its norms, values, and behaviours (McLeod, 2023). After categorising and identifying with a group, individuals compare their group to others. This comparison is often biased in favour of one's own group, leading to in-group favouritism (McLeod, 2023). The society tends to view individuals who do not conform to the binary gender roles as the “other”. Transgender people are often perceived by the larger society as an “outgroup” because their gender identity does not conform to the binary gender norms, which frequently leads to their discrimination or victimisation.

Laws on Cyberbullying

While cyberbullying is a global issue that can affect anyone in any part of the world, existing legal frameworks remain insufficient. Although some countries have introduced regulations addressing cyberbullying, there is still no comprehensive law that adequately protects individuals, particularly in cases involving transphobia. Some jurisdictions have laws defining transphobia, typically under hate speech and anti-discriminatory laws. For instance, South Africa has the Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020, which criminalises unlawful activities such as the disclosure of personal data and fraud and electronic messages that incite violence, and the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011, which allows victims to apply for a protection order against harassment. The United Kingdom also has the Malicious Communications Act 1988 prohibits the sending of an electronic communication which conveys a threat (Sallavaci, 2018). However, there is no direct law on cyberbullying (Ghandour et al., 2021). Despite the persistent challenge of cyberbullying, current laws are inadequate to address the problems presented by the contemporary technological landscape (Prateeksha, 2022). As a result, people continue to be at risk of online victimisation. Transgender individuals continue to feel unsafe in online spaces and may find it difficult to report victimisation.

Research Questions

1. What forms of victimisation do transgender individuals experience on social media platforms?

2. What type of responses do transgender individuals encounter when sharing personal content on social media platforms?
3. How do transgender individuals respond to cyberbullying?

Methods

This paper explores social media posts and comments directed at bullying transgender individuals. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected and analysed from three social media platforms, namely, Facebook, TikTok, and X. When using social media data, qualitative researchers study narratives, content and context of social media posts, including the tone of comments and use of emojis to understand the “why” and “how” behind the behaviours of social media users (Stewart, n.d). A qualitative method was utilised in this study as it allowed the researcher to examine existing data and consider ways to learn more about the lived experiences of transgender individuals (Salmons, 2022). The researcher used a random sampling strategy in selecting social media content that met specific inclusion criteria by utilising hashtags, keywords, or topics relating to people identifying as transgender. This method aimed to ensure that the sample represented a diverse range of posts related to this topic.

The researcher conducted public searches for transgender-related content from 2020 to 2025. The rationale for selecting this period is that during this period, there was a peak in the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown (Dixon, 2022). Although information quantifying the increase in social media use among transgender people since 2020 is lacking, this period was selected based on reports that the Coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic led to a general surge in internet use (Pandey et al. 2020). The implementation of policies that recognise only “two genders, male and female”, while excluding transgender identities (Simmons-Duffin, 2024; Rummler and Sosin, 2025; Brocklehurst, 2025), also contributed to the increased engagement on social media platforms around transgender issues, which in turn has created space for the online bullying of transgender individuals. Hence, the study selected posts from this period. The researcher selected publicly available content that did not require membership or permission; posts and comments that were selected directly related to transgender/transphobia from 2020 to 2025; and three social media platforms, that is, Facebook, TikTok, and X. The researcher selected the three platforms to explore rich data and because it is reported that they are some of the most used social media platforms

(Dixon, 2025; Martin, 2025). The selection focused on English comments, and where comments were not in English, they were translated; personal information of users was hidden for ethical purposes. The words and hashtags used in the search for data included “transgender”, “transphobia”, “transphobic”, “transwoman”, “transman”, “FTM” (female to male), and “MTF” (male to female).

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher reviewed 1117 posts and comments, including videos, memes, and replies, across all three social media platforms, considering this sample sufficient to capture the experiences of people identifying as transgender and provide context on the transphobia within these online spaces. The data collected consisted of publicly available posts, and to maintain ethical standards, the researcher ensured the anonymity of social media users by concealing their names. The author found 1117 posts and comments to be sufficient to explore the phenomenon. The researcher sourced data from international platforms, considering the interconnected nature of social media and the worldwide sharing of posts and comments. Due to the nature of the study, the demographics of users or posters were not available. The study included posts and comments from social media users, but there were no direct participants in this study. The posts and comments included only those that focus on transgender content, including responses to a post by a transgender individual. This study utilised a passive content analysis, which means that the researcher was not directly involved in the discussion on any post or comments (Eysenbach & Till, 2001; Franz et al., 2019). The focus of this study is to explore the negative experiences of people identifying as transgender through posts and comments on social media platforms.

Using a content analysis, the researcher randomly selected 1117 posts and comments of online users engaging in transgender content. The researcher used the following steps to analyse data (Cho & Lee, 2014): the researcher focused on content posted by transgender users and the interaction of comments on those posts and accounts that are created to post transgender-related content. When reading comments, 1117 comments were seen as sufficient to explore the phenomenon. The researcher created categories to classify the unit of analysis, including insults, name-calling, threats, and discriminatory comments.

Ethical Considerations

Given the study's design, direct participant involvement was not required. The researcher utilised a passive analysis by only focusing on posts and comments without interacting with participants. Although the study lacked direct participants, the names of users associated with the shared posts and comments were omitted from the content to protect their privacy and mitigate potential harm. The data collected consists of publicly available posts. Posts and comments were only utilised to understand the experiences of people identifying as transgender on social media. The researcher ensured anonymity by only including publicly available posts. Posts from private groups were not included in this study. Furthermore, the researcher ensured to avoid any bias by looking objectively at the interactions related to people identifying as transgender. Because of the study design, informed consent was not required, as the researcher was not directly involved in any discussion with online users.

Results

The study selected a total number of 1117 posts and comments, from 2020 to 2025, which include hate comments and posts against people identifying as transgender, harassment of people identifying as transgender, and name-calling. While there were some positive comments from other social media users' content, many posts consisted of hate comments, including calling being transgender "unreal", "a delusion", "against God", and "worse than animals". People identifying as transgender experience a range of discrimination and abuse, both in person and online (Evelyn et al., 2022). However, this study focused on the online space. After analysing posts and comments, the study developed five themes: the type of victimisation faced by people identifying as transgender on social media, justification of victimisation by perpetrators, transgender women face greater discrimination, use of fake accounts to perpetrate transphobic cyberbullying, and responses of transgender individuals to transphobic cyberbullying. Although the social media comments analysed were publicly available, the study anonymised and withheld the identities of the users who made those comments. In the case of the written comments, the researcher hid the information of the users, and sensitive posts that could potentially cause more harm were paraphrased. The following codes were used as references to posts shared.

- X (Twitter) = TWp (for post) TWc (for comment)
- Facebook post – FBp (for post) FBc (for comment)
- TikTok video – TTv (for video) TTc (for comment)

Type of Victimisation Faced By People Identifying As Transgender on Social Media

The study found that people identifying as transgender face various forms of victimisation on social media, including direct victimisation such as insults, threats, name-calling and discrimination. Transgender people are targets of hate perpetrated through posts, videos, memes, and comments. Some users on these platforms shared content that posed direct threats to people identifying as transgender, employing phrases like “go kill yourself,” expressing sentiments that they should “die” since they were considered “a mistake”, and suggesting that they should end their own life because, according to their belief, “God does not make a mistake, but you are a mistake, and you should kill yourself.” Figure 1 depicts a word count representing the most frequent negative comments directed at people identifying as transgender on the three selected platforms. The words that appeared the most were “There are only two genders”, “mental illness”, “delusional”, and “gross”. Some of the hashtags particularly included “#F*cktrannies”, “Transwomenaremen”, “#imtransphobic”, and “#Nototransgender”. These words and hashtags were accompanied by insults and, in some instances, threats to people identifying as transgender.

The notion that there are only two genders is not a new argument, as people identifying as transgender have often encountered such comments even beyond the realm of social media. These findings correspond with the findings by Hinduja and Patchin (2020) that transgender students are slightly more likely to be bullied online as compared to heterosexual students. In May 2021, GLAAD evaluated the “LGBTQ user safety experience” on social media and found that Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X) and YouTube were the top five unsafe (Silva, 2021). This study investigated Facebook, TikTok and X, confirming that people identifying as transgender experience victimisation whether they are posting their own content or whether someone creates a fake account that is focused on victimising people identifying as transgender.

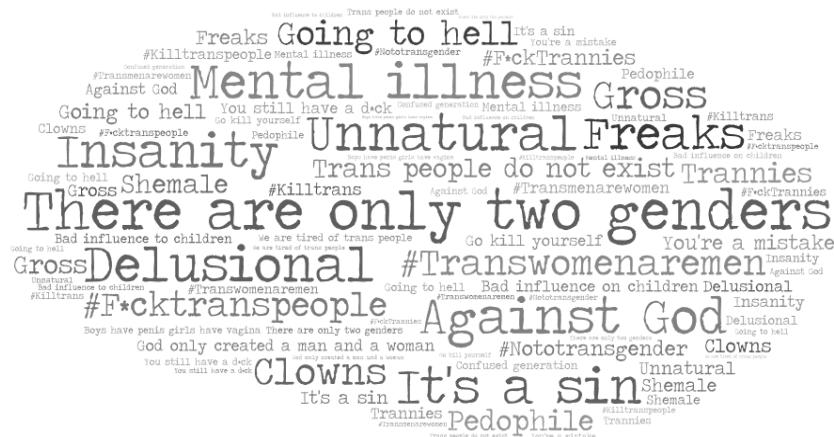


Figure 1: Word cloud of frequently used words for transgender individuals on social media

In addition to hateful content such as derogatory slurs, offensive jokes, or targeted harassment, people identifying as transgender are also targets for abusive language and threats, such as being told to kill themselves. The following are some of the users' posts and comments on TikTok:

I bet there is something I can do if you walk behind my daughter....and trust me it won't be calling the cops (TTv).

If people are getting killed for being trans why tf you ain't jus stay ab boy [laughing emoticons] (TTc).

*Why you still alive. Jump off a finnish bridge onto a boat. Ur FAG *ss WILL NEVER BE ANYTHING BUT A MAN (FBc)*

Together with threats, people identifying as transgender experience online harassment from either people they know or people they do not know. This study found videos and posts from people identifying as transgender who shared that they were being threatened for being transgender. The study also detected comments which were defamatory against people identifying as transgender, calling them names such as “paedophile” and “pathological”. Other comments showed support for the killing and victimisation of transgender people, using laughter and explicit insults to convey approval. These posts include death threats, threats of harm, or dehumanising language aimed at intimidating and demeaning them. People identifying as transgender posted online, talking

about how they have been threatened by people on social media through comments and direct messaging. These findings correspond with those of Evelyn et al. (2022) that people identifying as transgender receive threats of physical harm online, including threats of rape, physical assault, and murder.

Justification of Victimisation by Perpetrators

This study found that perpetrators of transphobic cyberbullying find it justified to post harmful content against people identifying as transgender by referring to the Bible, culture or science, to refer to people identifying as transgender as “abnormal” or to refer to them as “mentally ill”. Even though the World Health Organisation (WHO) no longer includes transgender-related categories under mental disorders (Robles et al., 2016; Canady, 2019), people on social media continue to refer to individuals who identify as transgender as “mentally ill”. Most negative replies on transgender users’ posts claimed that there are only two genders, calling people identifying as transgender various names, which include but are not limited to “nonsense”, “gross”, “ugly”, “delusional”, “mentally ill”, “unnatural”, and “a sin”. Some of these arguments quoted the Bible verses such as *Genesis 1 vs 26-28*, which they believe support them that “When God created human beings, He created them male and female”. For this reason, many perpetrators of online transphobia use this claim to support their online behaviour against people identifying as transgender and to claim that being transgender is not normal. The notion that “there are only two genders” appeared to be the most common in comments on transgender posts and comments. This was also supported by their argument stating that being transgender is a mental illness, followed by insults. Below are some of the comments:

So I'll say once again, people identifying as transgender are in fact delusional (TTc).

Bullsh*t NO ONE is born trans anything! Trans people are delusional (TTc).

Your remains scientifically prove that. Check your mental health (FBC).

God help them as they are changing the phenomena of themselves which is created by the creator FBC2

They are the first persons to enter hell fire. FBC3

Lord have mercy on them Because it's their devilish mindset that is misleading them. Save us from this disgrace and inhumane behaviour
FBc4

God made them male and female. We stand for clear truth; there are only two genders. God is not the author of confusion. FBp1

The study also found that in some posts where an individual identifying as transgender was either assaulted or murdered, the comments supported the actions of the perpetrators. Some comments included “He deserved it” (using “he/him” to refer to a transgender woman). These comments also cited the Bible and the notion that “transgender women aren’t women” to continue their support for the perpetrator. The following are examples of comments made in response to the killing of a transgender woman by her male partner:

Free the guy, he is innocent, you stop this nonsense TTc

He is a hero TTc

....save this man (TTc

Good job TTc

The trans was wrong ad women support this TTc

These comments suggest support for the perpetrator in his killing of a transgender woman. The results of this theme correspond with various studies demonstrating that transgender individuals face victimisation, frequently driven by the argument for a gender binary (i.e., that only two genders exist) (Craig, 2007; Goldblum et al., 2012; Veale et al., 2022). The belief that there are only two genders and being transgender is “unnatural” and “against God” leads to further victimisation of people identifying as transgender, which includes threats and harassment. Research indicates that transphobic remarks often involve assertions that there are only two genders, which correspond with the two sexes, male and female (Gilbert, 2009; Richardson-Self, 2020; Bond & Capra-Thomas, 2020).

The social identity theory examines three stages that contribute to how people perceive themselves (in-groups) and others (out-groups), which are social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison (Khadka, 2024). It is evident from this study that people

who post and comment on social media tend to harm people identifying as transgender due to this categorisation. They also have a belief that it is okay to harm people who identify as transgender. The notion that there are only two genders and non-conforming individuals are “othered” and thus victimised. Due to this exclusion of people identifying as transgender, some justify their victimisation of people identifying as transgender as a form of “protecting children” and others as “correcting sin”.

Transgender Women Face Greater Discrimination

While this study acknowledges that transphobia is directed at people identifying as transgender of both sexes, it was observed from posts and comments that transgender women experienced more negative comments than those posted on transgender men. These negative comments included insults, misgendering (calling transgender women men), name calling and threats. While transgender men also experienced both negative and positive comments on their content, the content on transgender women was viewed to be more negative. Transgender women are called paedophiles and gross, stating that they are men and not women. The following are some of the comments directed to transgender women.

Transwomen are actually gross men! (TWc).

Call them perverts. Let's do it again (TWc).

No sane black man, white or purple would date you; you're not a woman (TTc).

The problem is that you have a penis (using derogatory word) (TTc).

You are a man and that is what I see, a man (TTc).

Most comments or replies to the above posts and comments agreed with these users by extending insults or laughing and sharing the content. The findings observed that when it comes to the concept of transgender, the focus of concern is directed to transgender women who ultimately face harm due to their gender identity. These findings correlate with the findings from other studies that transgender women tend to face greater discrimination than transgender men (Rudin et al., 2023). A study conducted by Miller (2015) found that transgender men reported fewer

incidences of discrimination compared to transgender women. This study found that transgender men tend to get more positive comments, including compliments and other online users joking about questioning their sexuality. On the other hand, transgender women tend to experience negative comments that include insults, threats, and being called names.

Use of Fake Accounts to Perpetrate Transphobic Cyberbullying

One of the major concerns in social media is the use of fake accounts to perpetrate harmful posts against people identifying as transgender. According to Awan (2016), on social media, people can remain anonymous, and the nature of cyberspace remains unregulated. This study's findings indicate that fake accounts are deployed to directly target transgender people and the community with offensive and derogatory comments. Perpetrators use anonymity to spread hate, intimidate, and demean people identifying as transgender. Such accounts use false names or fake identities to insult and harass others (Mkhize & Gopal, 2021). Some of the accounts contained usernames about the hatred of people identifying as transgender, specifically posted memes, pictures and comments that show hatred towards people identifying as transgender. These include hashtags such as #imtransphobic, #ihatetranspeople, #fucktrannies, #nototransgender, #malesaremales, and #femalesarefemales. The content under these hashtags showed hatred toward people identifying as transgender. Some of the posts and comments from these users were as follows:

Go slice your throat, u pathetic f*ckingpedophile, u a man. Deal with it u will never be a mother fagg*t (FBc).

People like [sensored name] are what's wrong with the world and should not be here. They are an embarrassment to real women #f*cktrannies (TWp).

Trans hate is good hate (TWp).

While the researcher did not delve deeper into TikTok user information, several accounts were detected as fake, based on their lack of real names and corresponding posts. Social media platforms seem not to pay much attention to the removal of accounts that spread hate speech against and harass people identifying as transgender. This study also found that there

are pages that are created specifically to target their hate toward people identifying as transgender. Such accounts have usednames such as “I Hate Trans”, “I hate Trans People”, “I Hate Transgender”, “I’m Transphobic”, and “TransphobeMF”. The use of fake accounts can also allow perpetrators to use multiple fake accounts to disseminate hate speech, target specific individuals, or instigate coordinated attacks. Moreover, fake accounts contribute to the normalisation and reinforcement of transphobia. When others witness transphobic content coming from seemingly different individuals, it may create an illusion of widespread agreement or acceptance of such views. This normalisation can further marginalise and isolate people identifying as transgender, perpetuating harm and discrimination. A study conducted by Mkhize and Gopal (2020) also found this to be of concern, where perpetrators create false identities to cause harm to others. These fake account holders post harmful content and harmful posts and send private messages to individuals. Although transgender individuals publicly discuss these experiences, they risk encountering victimisation and insufficient support due to the comments received.

Responses of Transgender Individuals to Transphobic Cyberbullying

Many people identifying as transgender have shared on their social media posts and videos that they do not feel safe on the internet and that, in dealing with transphobic comments, they delete the post, hide comments, or remove each hate comment. Transgender-identifying individuals mentioned the following on their TikTok videos:

I have decided to end the live because people keep on misgendering me and saying that I’m a boy, I’m a girl (TTv).

It’s better to just delete the comments and move on (TTv).

I will be switching off all my comments from now on because I cannot deal with being bullied and threatened. Can you just let me be happy? (TTv).

Hateful and offensive material on social media negatively impacts users and contributes to unwelcoming online communities, obstructing efforts to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion (Upadhyay et al., 2022). Other social media users who identify as transgender believe that the

only way to prevent cyberbullying is by switching comments off to be able to post what they want to post but receive no hate. The above results indicate that there is still a lack in terms of the protection of people identifying as transgender on social media. According to a report from GLAAD, social media platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok continue to fail to protect LGBTQ users on their social networks (Fried, 2022). This lack of protection leads to the victims of online transphobia and cyberbullying being the ones to take precautions to attempt to prevent online victimisation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the bullying of people identifying as transgender is not a recent occurrence, the availability of online platforms that enable individuals to conceal their identities has made cyberbullying of people identifying as transgender more prevalent. In addition, the growing use of social media by the transgender community to discuss their experiences, both positive and negative, regarding their gender identity has created an environment for the proliferation of online transphobia. This study presented data on online victimisation against people on three social media platforms, specifically Facebook, X, and TikTok. This included posts, comments, videos, memes and pictures expressing disapproval and hatred towards people identifying as transgender, as well as the responses of people identifying as transgender to such comments. Data was analysed using content analysis.

The findings show that people identifying as transgender continue to face victimisation even in online platforms due to their gender identity and gender expression. The major concern for the mental (and possibly physical) safety of people identifying as transgender on social media platforms persists. Based on this research, it can be argued that the intolerance of people identifying as transgender is a reality, and they continue to face discrimination and victimisation on online platforms. It is also clear that the perpetration of online transphobia becomes easy for perpetrators who can use false identities on social media. This study suggests that, other than the focus being on the victimised individuals to take care of their settings, there should also be a focus on the perpetrators of online victimisation.

Given that accounts with false information enable perpetrators to more freely victimise others, it is recommended that social media platforms tighten their user policies. The existence of hashtags that contain hate comments online further indicates that there is still a lack of

protection of people identifying as transgender from online transphobia. There is still little attention on the topic of online transphobia and the responses to it. It is suggested that more research be done focusing on this topic, including empirical research on the experiences of people identifying as transgender on social media platforms.

To address transphobia on social media and reduce its negative impact on the transgender community, organisations and governments must implement a range of measures. Firstly, explicit policies should be developed that condemn transphobia and hate speech, providing clear guidelines, definitions, and consequences. Developing training programs can enhance moderators' ability to identify and effectively act against transphobic content. Encouraging users to report such content, with clear instructions and assurances of action, is crucial. Engaging with social media platforms to advocate for changes, sharing data and research on the impact of transphobia, is important. Additionally, providing support for affected people identifying as transgender through mental health resources, legal assistance, and advocacy for their rights and safety is essential. By implementing these multi-faceted approaches, organisations and governments can collaborate to foster an inclusive and safe online environment for transgender individuals.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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