Project: Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society

Project Series: GBV & Misogyny

Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence on Social Media

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Contents

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence	Any act, that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of information and communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.
Cyberstalking	Use of information and communications technology, particularly social media platforms, to intimidate and harass individuals or organisations.
Deepfake (A portmanteau of 'deep learning' and 'fake')	Use of artificial intelligence and/or deep learning technology to create fake images, videos or recordings.
Doxxing	Collecting of a user's private information, sometimes across multiple platforms by an unauthorised individual, who publishes the information in an attempt to shame or embarrass the user.
Impersonation	The act of pretending to be someone else, with intent to mislead or deceive.
Trolling	An individual who starts/exacerbates online conflict for amusement which may done through tactical aggression to evoke emotional responses or disturbing regular discussions online.
Non-Consensual sharing of intimate images or videos (Revenge Porn)	Any act that involves the sharing of an intimate image or video of someone else without the permission of the subject of the image or video.
Defamation	Wrongful and intentional publication of defamatory matter causing reputational harm to another.
Slut shaming	Stigmatisation of an individual based on their appearance, sexual availability, and actual or perceived sexual behaviour.
Gender-Based Violence	Violence committed against a person because of their sex or gender and includes violence of a sexual, emotional/psychological, socio-economic, domestic nature.
Intersectionality	Social theory describing the interaction and cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination.
Systemic Sexism	Sexist behaviour and ideology becoming part of the normal assumptions and operations of a culture or society.
Cyber-harassment / Cyberbullying	Use of Information and Communications Technologies to intentionally humiliate, annoy, attack, threaten, alarm, offend and/or verbally abuse individuals.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on technology-facilitated gender-based violence (hereafter 'TFGBV') and aims to provide an overview of conversations on X (formerly 'Twitter') regarding TFGBV. This report distinguishes itself from prior work on TFGBV by analysing the common understanding of what constitutes TFGBV on social media in South Africa.

Drawing from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3[1] and Goal 5[2], this report provides insight into common understanding and comprehension of acts that constitute TFGBV in order to address gender inequality and good health and well-being. The findings discussed in the report are shared with researchers, practitioners, digital activists, civil society, governmental institutions as well as the general public to inform policy and practice.

In 2024, Global Digital Reports estimated that South Africa had 45.34 million internet users with an internet penetration rate of 74.7%[3]. Social media users represented 42.8% of the total population[4]. In terms of demographic data, the report indicated that 49.8 % of South Africa's social media users were female, while 50.2% were male[5]. The split, therefore, between men and women on social media participation on social media is equal*.

Relying solely on the averaged demographic percentage of all social media participants may present a skewed perception in respect of understanding the prevalence and/or pervasiveness of TFGBV. While TFGBV can be, and often is, present on all social media sites, certain platforms present more fertile ground for the proliferation of harmful and gendered statements than others. For example, X (formerly Twitter) is a

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[1] https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3
[2] https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5
[3] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-south-africa
[4] ibid.
[5] Ibid.
* The report accounted solely for men and women, and not other groupings in the country.

predominantly text-based social media platform where users are encouraged to post publicly and share their thoughts with a wide audience[6].

Anonymity also thrives on X, as the platform allows individuals to sign up using anonymous usernames. The popularity of any individual is also not dependent on identifying information, with largely anonymous influencers being able to attract wide audiences solely based on their content[7] as well as receiving compensation based on engagement with their content, if subscribed to X premium[8]. Anonymous influencers and accounts are able to propagate harmful messaging without fear of repercussions due to their anonymity. At the start of 2024, 39.8% of X's ad audience was female and 60.2% of their audience was male[9], meaning that males form the majority of the population on social media.

This is an important consideration given the recently published First South African National Gender Based Violence Study by the Human Sciences Research Council ("HSRC"), which outlines the prevalence of physical, sexual, emotional, economic violence as well as psychological abuse among youth and adults in the country. According to the report, 66.6% of ever-partnered men agreed that a woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family[10]. At the same time, about 59.6% of ever-partnered women believe that a woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for the family. This suggests that South Africa's normative framework, in terms of gender roles, remains skewed. And while the statistic cannot directly be translated to the social media platform X, it does give us an indication that a significant proportion of both men and women believe in and perpetuate gender roles in South Africa.

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[6] Toxic Twitter - The Psychological Harms of Violence and Abuse Against Women Online - Amnesty International
[7] The Powerful but hidden hand of anonymous paid influencers who lack accountability and transparency - Daily Maverick
[8] https://help.x.com/en/rules-and-policies/content-monetization-standards
[9] Supra note 5.
[10] The First South African National Gender-Based Violence Study, 2022 - Human Sciences Research Council

By undertaking this study, the CABC intends to understand online perceptions about TFGBV within the South African context. Understanding these perceptions allows for improved interventions that can address harmful gendered ideas and behaviour both online and offline. Evaluating whether individuals online regard certain acts perpetrated on social media as gender-based violence can assist in understanding knowledge gaps as well as norms associated with online behaviour. This work is crucial in educating and changing individual's attitudes to their online behaviour and how to shift such behaviour in line with building a society that is equal both online and offline.

This report provides a broad, non-exhaustive definition of TFGBV. Due to the nature of our research tool, we focused our investigation on the common forms of TFGBV and gender stereotyping found on social media. For an overview of the methodology employed by the CABC, see Appendix B.

2.   KEY FINDINGS

Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Images / Videos
- Conversation under this focus area tended towards justifying and trivialising the act as well as being warranted in cases where both parties agreed to the *recording* or *photography* of intimate moments that are of a sexual nature.
- Under cases where notable celebrities or influencers' intimate images/videos are leaked, several accounts openly showed their disregard to the harm of revenge porn by calling for the video/image to be posted or linked.
- There also seems to be a misapprehension that the law only prohibits and sanctions the individual that first distributes the image/video and not those individuals that further share the videos.

Cyberbullying
- When discussing cyberbullying, users engaged in a troubling justification: the idea that by sharing content online, individuals implicitly 'accept' harassment or

bullying as a consequence. This logic perpetuates victim-blaming and simultaneously normalises acts of cyberbullying by shifting responsibility onto the victim instead of holding perpetrators accountable.

- There is further an expectation that individuals should ignore or minimise acts of cyberbullying because they occur online. Individuals consider the act of blocking or deleting the app as sufficient protection from potential harm.

Trolling

- While trolling is theoretically distinct from cyberbullying, in practice it often falls under the broader category of cyberbullying online. The distinguishing factor in practice is that harmful acts such as cyberbullying are often under the guise of humour.
- A disturbing act of cyberbullying and body-shaming was found, where individuals piled on and made remarks similar to that of cyberbullying, that the poster opened herself up to trolling by posting her images.
- There was further some critical discussion surrounding the nature of individuals that engage in malicious trolling behaviour online.

Doxxing and Defamation

- No high-profile instance of doxxing, pursuant to our report themes, occurred during the reporting period.
- A high-profile academic was, however, called out for publicising information about an activist who called out her support of Chris Brown. Responses to the disputes varied, with some noting that while the information was public, the academic exposed the activist to an audience which may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and others supported the academic, noting freedom of choice as crucial.

3. TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence can be defined as "any act, that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of information and communication technologies ('ICTs") or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms".[11] ICTs and digital tools are broad terms referring to communicative technologies, including the internet, wireless networks, digital devices such as cell phones, social networking and media applications which enable access, retrieval, storage, transmission and manipulation of information in digital format.

With the advent of the internet and the consequent invention of social media, communication and the sharing of information have become significantly more convenient and interactive than ever before. Whereas traditional media formats such as newspapers, magazines and/or news channels are one-way communication (information flows from sender to recipient without feedback), 'new media' allows for two-way communication, where the recipient can provide feedback.[12]

This nature of new media, and social media in particular, is that every individual has an equal voice in the conversation. This is both a positive and negative aspect of these platforms because it allows for varied and decentralised communication but at the same time, communication/messaging is subject only to the participant's own moral code, education level or inherent bias. Social media, further, has the potential to blur the boundaries between fact and opinion especially where such facts require nuanced understanding. In this respect, Itzchakov & Van Harreveld, 2018, notes:

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[11] UN Women, 2023, Technology Facilitated Violence against Women-Report of the Foundational Meeting of the Expert Group

[12] Al-Quran, Marwan. (2022). Traditional media versus social media: challenges and opportunities. Technium: Romanian Journal of Applied Sciences and Technology. 4. 145-160. 10.47577/technium.v4i10.8012.

> "…users generally tend to search, believe, and share information that conforms to their own beliefs and attitudes, but ignore the information that challenges their beliefs and attitudes."[13]

This confirmation bias leads individuals to form echo chambers, where they consume content that either reinforces or expresses their same viewpoint[14]. This, however, is a two-way interaction between users and platforms. Users may have a tendency to seek out content that confirms their views and social media platforms.In turn, serves up content that confirms their views and ideology due to its goal of keeping users active on their platforms[15]. The shared ideology that forms among the 'echo chamber' and those trapped within it can range from conspiracy theory, extremist thought and, as the report investigates, harmful and gendered ideology.

In this regard, a disturbing trend has been observed by researchers in the TFGBV space, where harmful ideas and acts are trivialised under the guise that "the internet is not a real place". Actions taken on social media platforms are not regarded as being significant or 'real' enough to warrant legal and/or regulatory recourse, as well as social stigma[16]. The nature of social media, and the internet in general, is that participation is deemed as optional and users have the ability to 'opt-out' if they do not enjoy the experience.

Modern society is moving to an increasingly digital world where the internet and social media are mandated through social pressure and are considered an invaluable part of economic, social and political participation. Furthermore, several studies and reports have identified offline consequences for online acts.[17] Within this intricate and complex matrix, we turn to TFGBV.

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[13] A Confirmation Bias View on Social Media Induced Polarisation During Covid-19 - Sachin Modgil et al.
[14] Ibid
[15] The echo chamber effect on social media - Matteo Cinelli et al
[16] Decoding Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Report, 2024
[17] Offline Consequences of Online Victimization: School Violence and Delinquency - Sameer Hinduja & Justin W. Patchin

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is an extension of the gendered norms, stereotypes held within our society. It is tailored for the digital era, the internet and social media. It includes acts such as cyberbullying/cyber-harassment, cyberstalking, the non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos, deepfakes, trolling, doxxing, impersonation and defamation of character.

The shift to an increasingly digital world results in diverse opinions being expressed online. Harmful and gendered practices, ideologies and views have likewise shifted with individuals as they populate cyberspace. Dunn (2020) suggests that perpetrators of GBV have adopted technology as tools to broaden the violence that can be enacted on their victims[18].

While there can be no doubt that perpetrators of GBV have utilised technology to broaden their violence, the nature of conversations and perceptions propagated online are also a reflection of the deeply unequal society that we have constructed. Viewed in this manner, TFGBV is both a conscious act by perpetrators as well as an unconscious reinforcement of systemic inequalities and patriarchal norms that perpetuate harm against women. It is a tool for both intentional violence and unintentional violence. Violence can now extend across geographical locations and borders, further enhancing its potential impact[19].

4. RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF REPORT

In a study conducted by Amnesty International across 8 countries, researchers found that around one-quarter of women reported experiencing abuse and harassment online, with 95% reportedly seeing other women face abuse.[20] Women journalists and politicians face rampant Gender-Based Violence online. When such violence occurred

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[18] Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence - Suzie Dunn
[19] Ibid.
[20]   supra note 4 (see further Freedom of the Net South Africa, Freedomhouse)

in languages other than English, it was frequently not moderated by platforms.[21] Women and LGBTQ+ people routinely experience online harassment, with estimates that around one in every four women in South Africa have experienced online Gender-Based Violence[22].

Statistics of TFGBV online are usually not precise due to the vast nature of online platforms, underreporting and technical challenges in accurately classifying content. According to the Decoding Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence report, some individuals did not interpret their experiences as attacks on their gender or sexual orientation or were uncertain whether it was indeed an attack[23]. This further speaks to how society characterises TFGBV.

The trivialisation of TFGBV, limited public awareness and education often result in underreporting.[24] The characterisation of TFGBV as an online phenomenon with no real offline consequences hinders effective policing and indeed, reporting thereof. On the flip side, findings suggest that perpetrators may themselves perpetuate and inflict TFGBV without realising that it is Gender-Based Violence.[25] Lack of understanding on the impact and severity of their actions allows perpetrators to continue unabated with their actions. While the perception exists that TFGBV has no offline consequences, this has been rebutted by several studies.

By focusing our report on online conversations online TFGBV, where the actual acts are being perpetrated, this report hopes to serve as a tool to inform interventions in the space.

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[21] Online Gendered Abuse and Disinformation During the 2024 South African Elections - Clara Martiny
[22] Internet Feminist a for Research Feminist African ,Internets Alternate Realities Alternate - Neema Iyer
[23] Supra note 13.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

5.   DATA RESULTS

The data for this report was collected from the social media platform X. Publicly available social media data within the South African context was isolated from the period of 1 February 2024 to 28 February 2025. The resulting dataset contained approximately 18,430 mentions inclusive of reposts. Approximately 11,390 unique authors took part in the conversation (see Figure 1).
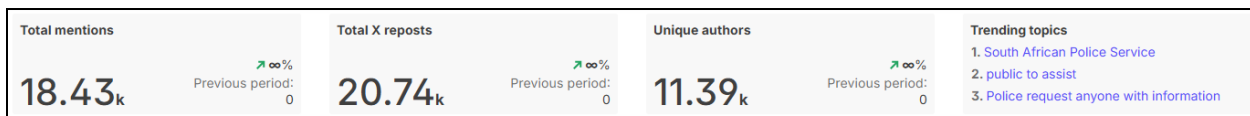

Total mentions		Total X reposts		Unique authors		Trending topics
	↗ ∞%		↗ ∞%		↗ ∞%	1. South African Police Service
	Previous period:		Previous period:		Previous period:	2. public to assist
18.43k	0	20.74k	0	11.39k	0	3. Police request anyone with information

Figure 1: Metrics associated with the overall conversation.

Regarding the overall conversation. Around 48% of the recorded mentions related to revenge porn*. Cyberbullying accounts for 38% of the filtered data with trolling accounting for around 10% (See Figure 2).
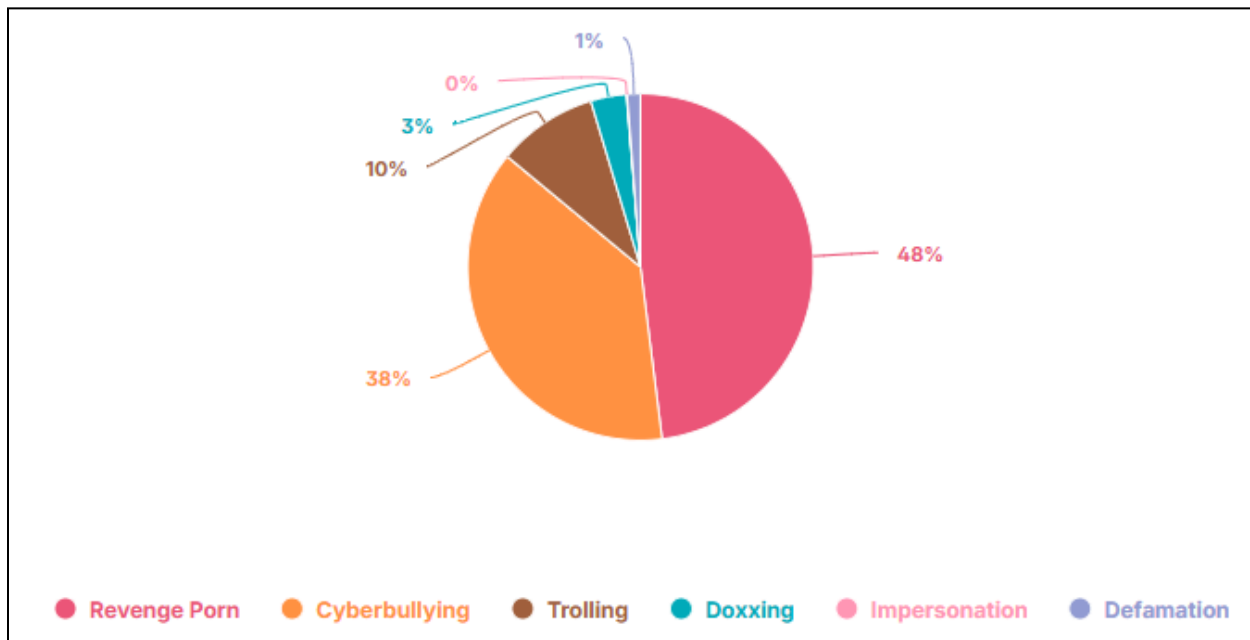
Figure 2: Breakdown of Conversation by Topic

Breaking down mention volume over time, by weeks of the time period, provides insight into narratives and events which saw heightened conversation around TFGBV (Figure 3).
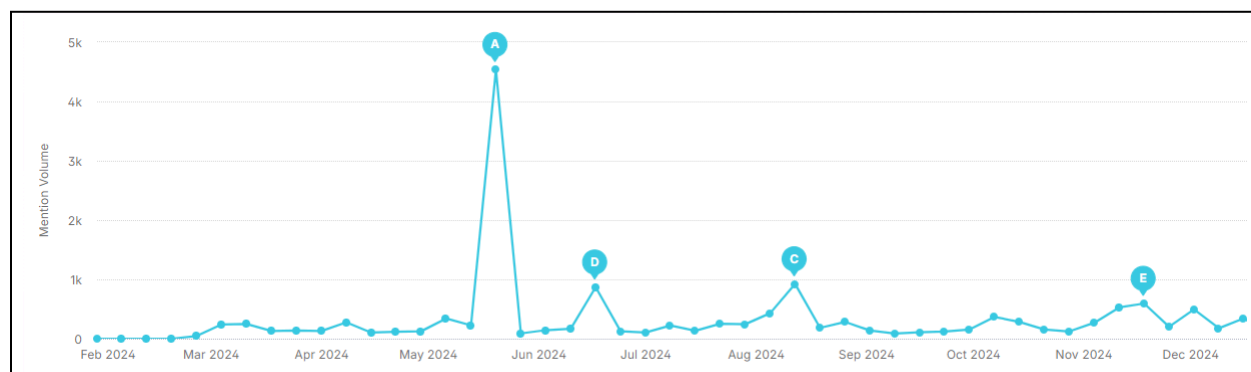

Figure 3: Mention Volume Over Time

These peaks are explored below by the magnitude of the marked peak.

- Peak A (May 20 - May 26, 2024):
  - The peak referred to above concerned conversations reacting to the non-consensual sharing of an intimate video of a prominent social media influencer and businesswoman in South Africa allegedly shared by her former partner. The most prominent and engaged posts highlighted that the act constitutes "revenge porn" which is illegal in South Africa. A comprehensive overview and analysis of the conversation is provided below.

- Peak B (January 6 - January 12, 2025):
  - The South African Police Service posted, via their official X account, a video of a woman being assaulted by three men and requested that the public assist in identifying the perpetrators. This post was reposted around 2 200 times by users.

- Peak C (August 12 - August 18, 2024):

- ○ Conversation around Algerian Olympian Imane Khelif's cyberbullying lawsuit against J.K. Rowling, Elon Musk and Donald Trump. Khelif sought to hold the three s accountable for alleged online harassment relating to her gender identity.

- **Peak D (June 2024):**
  - ○ No particular topic drove the Peak noticed in June, however, several references were made to the leaking of the intimate images of a South African influencer and businesswoman as well as conversation concerning cyberbullying and TFGBV.

- **Peak E (November 2024):**
  - ○ The peak noticed in November was primarily driven by reports that the Johannesburg High Court awarded a plaintiff approximately R4.3 million in damages against a couple for defaming and distributing intimate images and recordings of her.

6. Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Images/Videos

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images and/or videos (sometimes referred to as "Revenge Porn") or image/video manipulation is almost entirely driven by advances in technology. The ability to record moments of intimacy became commonplace when technology advanced to the point where accessibility of video and/or image recording technology was no longer restricted to a few. While accessibility may have improved steadily over the years, the invention of the internet provided the opportunity for wide dissemination of intimate recordings[26].

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[26] Criminalisation of "Revenge Porn" in South Africa - Melody Musoni

The research, in respect of the victims of revenge porn, is inconclusive. While certain studies indicate that women are the primary victims, there are studies which show that males and females are victimised at similar rates[27]. Addadzi-Koom, however, notes that:

> *"While Gender-Based Violence is experienced by both men and women, women are the mainstream victims of Gender-Based Violence especially in instances where the violence is sexual in nature."*

This statement is evidenced by several recent high-profile women going viral on X due to intimate videos being leaked online. Videos of high-profile men are also leaked online with similar consequences, however, these are circulated less frequently than those of women. Their virality is further not as enduring as those of women, whose posts may, after several years, continue resurfacing.

The use of technology, therefore, allows for extensive invasion of privacy and continued trauma and traumatisation as well as continued violence enacted upon victims due to their continued reproduction through digital means.

This abuse is further enhanced where the victims of revenge pornography are labelled "sluts" and shamed for having their intimate images/videos leaked online. Often, the victim's further personal identifiers are also leaked or disseminated. These identifiers include residence and employment information. The consequences of these acts are well documented.

Not only does revenge porn raise risks of both online and off-line harm but also severe psychological effects such as shame, embarrassment as well as forms of post-traumatic stress disorder or, in extreme circumstances, suicide by the victims particularly vulnerable populations such as teenagers[28]. The dissemination of intimate images may also have economic effects on victims, who may withdraw from work or get dismissed.

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[27] [Trading Nudes Like Hockey Cards: Exploring the Diversity of 'Revenge Porn - Dodge](#)
[28] Supra note 22.

Within the above context, we examine 'revenge porn' in the South African context below.

6.1. Data Overview - Revenge Porn

The 'Revenge Porn' category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing approximately 6822 mentions and said mentions were reposted around 8930 times, with 5227 unique authors contributing to the conversation (See figure 4).
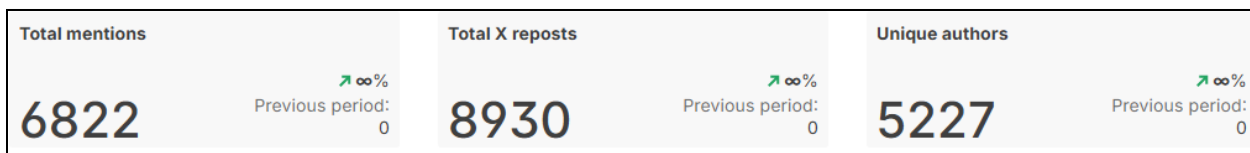

Figure 4: Metrics under "Revenge Porn"

The word cloud below represents the top 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags which are coloured by volume and indicates that, under 'Revenge Porn', the most commonly used words include privacy, sex, leaked tape and violation, amongst others (see Figure 5).
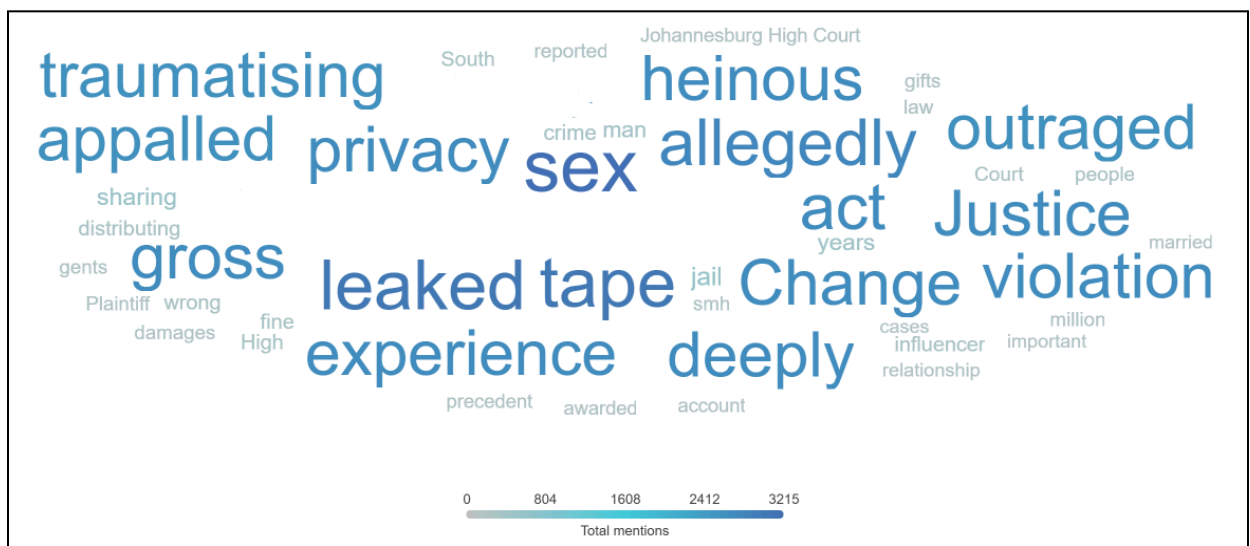
Figure 5: Word Cloud showing most frequently used words

The trending topics visualisation showcases phrases, hashtags and keywords which form themes of conversation throughout the time period (see Figure 6). The visualisation shows that the phrases, hashtags and keywords vary, with phrases such as "revenge porn is a crime" fading and phrases such as "victim of revenge porn" trending.

This suggests that the conversation around revenge porn online ebbs and flows, particularly in respect of new events that may ignite conversation surrounding the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos, as evidenced by "Johannesburg High Court" trending, which is dealt with more fully below.
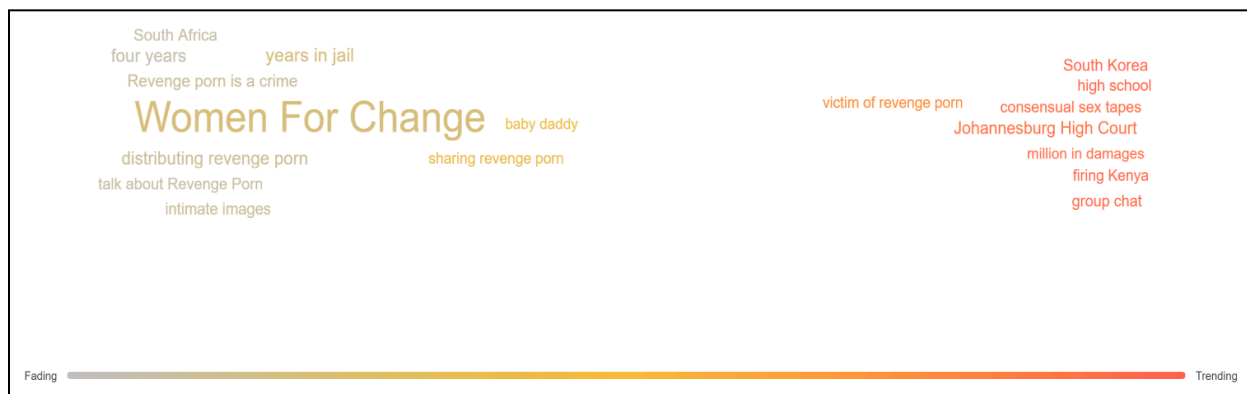
Figure 6: Trending Graph

6.2.   Popular Posts and Topics

This section of the report examines perceptions of "revenge porn" in the South African context and is centred around 'viral' occurrences of either leaked images or videos of South African influencers and/or celebrities, or news reports on the topic in question. Notably, and as a point of departure, during the first month of our reporting period, there was a slight uptick in conversation regarding the Films and Publications Amendment Act

11 of 2019, which prohibits the distribution of sexual photographs and films through any medium, including the internet and social media.

The resurgence of the SABC post seemed to have been motivated by a South African artist claiming, in a now deleted X post, that she was threatened with acts of Revenge Porn. Responses from users under the artist's post indicated to the artist that there were avenues available to protect her.

The Month of May 2024 saw the highest mentions being recorded conversation was driven by the leaking of a South African influencer and business woman's private and intimate videos, allegedly by her previous partner. Due to her popularity, the videos went viral on X and reached the public sphere beyond X. This was picked up by Women For Change, a feminist online organisation who called out the alleged leaking as well as posting an explainer of revenge porn (see Figure 7).
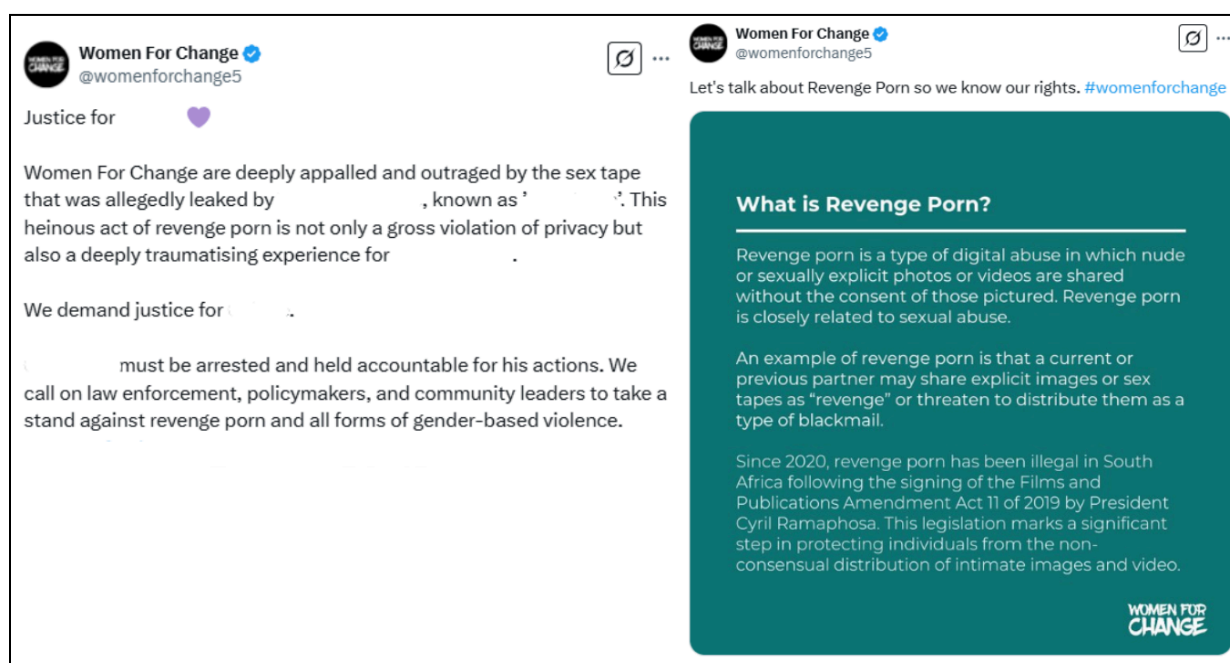
Figure 7: Post by Women For Change calling out "revenge porn"

As the posts below suggest, the sharing of intimate images and/or videos is often trivialised or dismissed as harmless, ignoring the possibility that those depicted may not

have given their consent for their private content to be distributed publicly. A rather stark representation of this opinion is illustrated by the post that states, "When you are recording your sex activity, it is not for private viewing, you guys are doing it for the public [sic]."

Thus, several interrelated and harmful opinions emerge which aligns with the research set out above, such as Revenge Porn is:

a.   Justified;

b.   Trivial in nature; and

c.   Warranted, in cases where the video or image was taken with the consent of both parties.

Figure 8: Responses to Women for Change posts

In respect of the same event referred to above, the CABC recorded further instances portraying the attitudes of certain accounts to the sharing of intimate videos and/or images. Under a post calling out the partner for allegedly leaking the intimate videos, users responded by calling on the author to post the video or by linking to the video. Instances of victim-blaming were similarly recorded in our dataset (Figure 9).

Figure 10: Further discussion on Revenge Porn

There further seems to be a poor understanding of the laws surrounding the circulation of intimate images and videos without the subject's consent. In terms of the Films and Publications Amendment Act, any individual who knowingly distributes private sexual images or videos without the consent of the subject and where such subject is identifiable shall be guilty of an offence which shall include a fine not exceeding R300 000.00 or imprisonment. A highly engaged post noted the consequences of such an act (see Figure 10 below).

Those sharing the leaked sex tape of social media influencer ███████ ████ could face up to four years in jail and a R300,000 fine for distributing revenge porn.
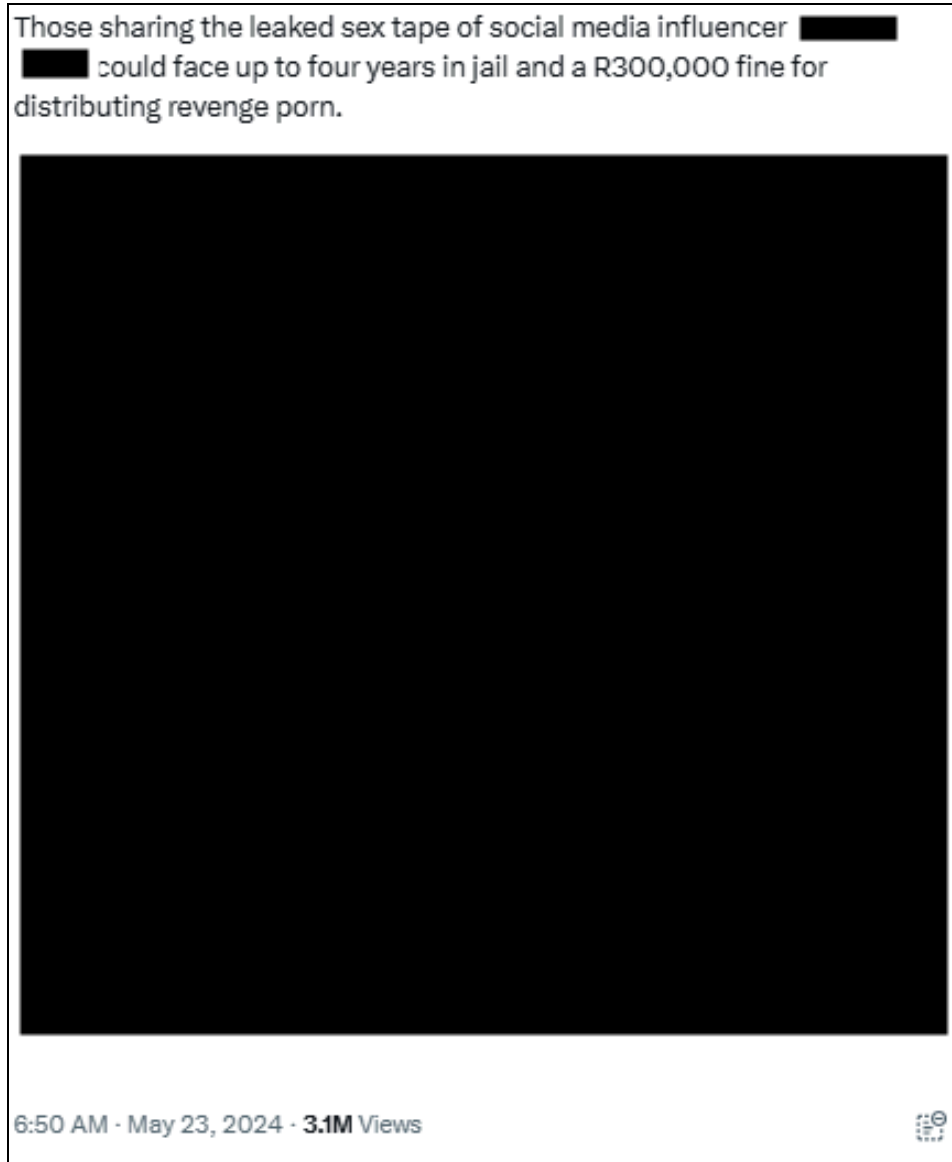
6:50 AM · May 23, 2024 · **3.1M** Views

Figure 11: Post expressing legal repercussions of sharing revenge porn

The consequences of revenge porn, as illustrated in figure 11, were ignored by certain users who, despite being warned, continued calls for the video to be posted. Others questioned the efficacy of such a regulation, given the significant amount of pornography found on X, or misunderstood the law by noting that it is only applicable to the individual that *initially* distributed the content online.

Since there is too much porn on Twitter at the moment,how would I know that ███████ sex video is a result of revenge porn? How is the state going to prove that I did it intentionally coz I don't even know who █████ is.

11:04 AM · May 23, 2024 · **178.5K** Views

♡ 5   �   ♡ 190   🔖 4   ⬆

You wish, and tell those UNISA lawyers to go read the law and stop clownish behaviours 💯 🤙 😂😂😂

Only the person who distributed the video can be held accountable, not those who shared it 🙇 🙇 🙇

Once anything is here, it belongs to us, no longer belongs to anyone, is our video now chief😭😭😭😭

that is if they have the capability and the capacity to identify the legal entity behind the cyber profile. Not to mention the ability to win such a case. Maybe this is to scare people.

3:11 PM · May 23, 2024 · **17.7K** Views

Figure 12: Responses to legal repercussions

In November 2024, the Johannesburg High Court handed down a landmark judgment in a case concerning revenge porn and defamatory statements. The Court ordered the perpetrators to pay the victim an amount of R4 300 000.00 in damages for the sharing of her intimate videos online as well as making defamatory statements about her on the social media platform, Facebook (Figure 13).

The total awarded by the Johannesburg High Court for damages is 4,3 million.

4,3 million for uploading & circulating revenge porn!

Figure 13: High Court Revenge Porn Case Quantum

The judgment was widely shared and liked, however, it failed to garner significant engagement in the form of comments. The majority of individuals that did engage the posts through comments, agreed with the court's approach and judgment, noting that it is about time as well as requesting stricter handling of revenge porn cases that do make it to court.

Good. May this be the first of many.

8:44 AM · Nov 19, 2024 · **336** Views

The sub human savage couple should be jailed in addition to the financial penalty which I can almost guarantee they won't pay. 🤬🤬🤬 What despicable excuse for human beings

5:39 PM · Nov 18, 2024 · **764** Views

Abt time since these guys ruin people's lives....

3:59 PM · Nov 18, 2024 · **498** Views

Figure 14: Responses to High Court Case

7. Cyberbullying

While various definitions of cyberbullying exist, it is perhaps best encapsulated as peer aggression performed through the use of technology such as text messages, emails or social networking sites.[29] Cyberbullying is encouraged by the anonymity that social media offers, as the perpetrators often face no consequences for their actions.[30] It has been reported that women and girls tend to report more experiences of cyberbullying compared to men[31].

South Africa, in particular, has a massive cyberbullying issue, especially with respect to minors. A survey by YouGov reported that at least 1 in 5 teens experience cyberbullying in their life, however, reports differ, estimating the prevalence rate of cyber-victims anywhere between 15.2% and 46.7%[32]. According to one study, peer pressure, jealousy, revenge and boredom were cited as common reasons for cyberbullying[33].

The effects of cyberbullying are now well documented, ranging from emotional and psychological issues as well as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. In certain instances, cyberbullying may even lead victims to commit suicide after undergoing such a traumatic experience. It should, however, be noted that most of the literature on cyberbullying is centred on the experiences of teenagers and young adults. It is a misnomer to construe cyberbullying as solely reserved for teenagers and young adults, as any individual at any age may experience it, especially as we move towards increasingly digitally mediated social, economic and political spaces.

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[29] Gendered Impacts of Cyberbullying among College Students - Rebecca Rose
[30] Ibid.
[31] Gender-Based Cyberbullying: Understanding expected bystander behaviour online - Kelly Lynn Mulvey
[32] Cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation among adolescent psychiatric patients at Lentegeur Hospital, South Africa - Mahomed Paruk & Rene Nassen
[33] The Impact of Cyberbullying in South Africa - Masiphephe Network.

7.1. DATA OVERVIEW

The Cyberbullying category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing 5426 mentions with 4457 consisting of reposts. Within the conversation, 3933 unique authors contributed to the conversation (Figure 15).
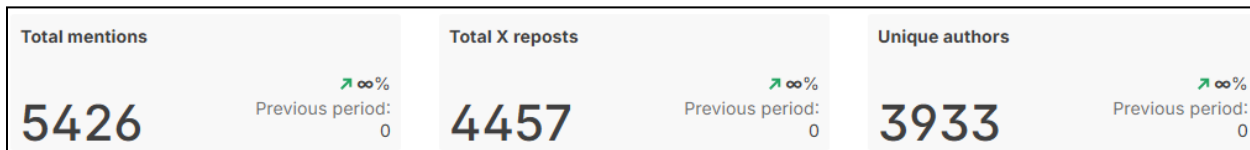

Figure 15: Metrics associated with cyberbullying conversation

A word cloud of the 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates that the most common words used in the conversation include notable public figures such as J.K Rowling, Elon Musk, Imane Khelif (Figure 16).
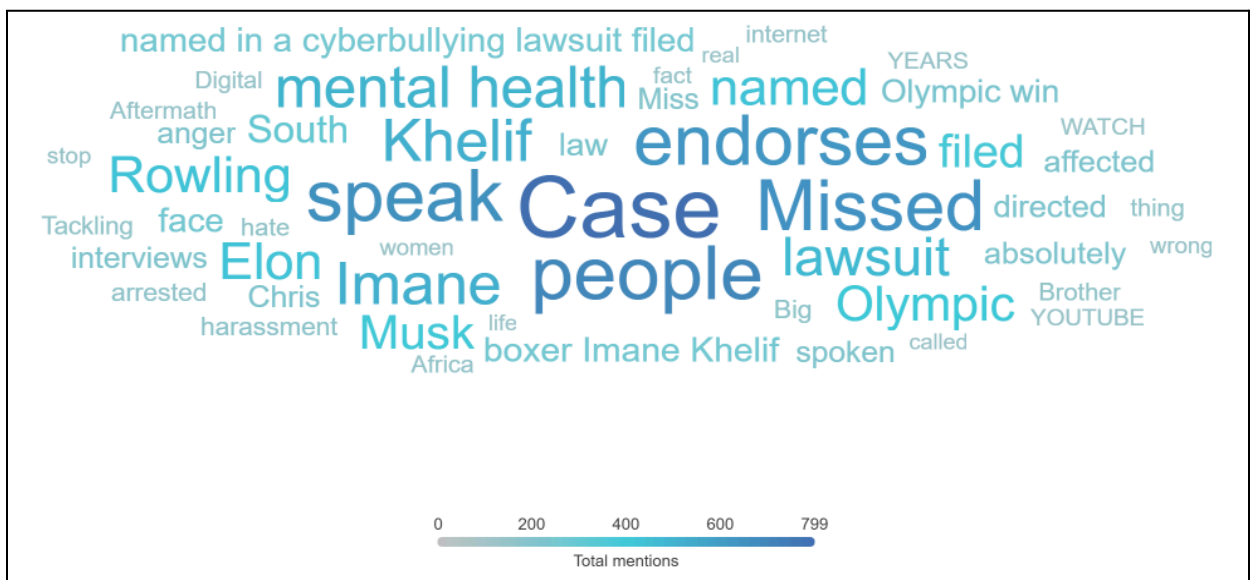
Figure 16: Word cloud showing most commonly used keywords

The trending visualisation under Cyberbullying suggests varied conversation with names such as Imane Khelif, J.K. Rowling fading in conversation volume as time passes. This is due to Olympian Gold Medalist trending during the 2024 Summer

Olympics, where she alleges that she was cyberbullied by, most notably, J.K. Rowling (Figure 17).
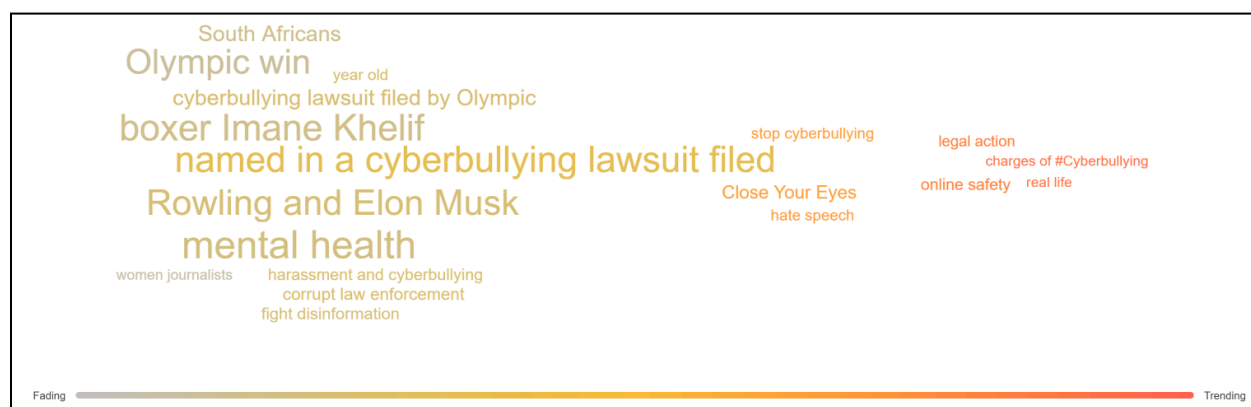

Figure 17: Trending topics graph

7.2. Popular Posts

This section of the report examines the context and content of highly engaged posts in the cyberbullying conversation. Negligent or wilful promotion of cyberbullying emerged as a key theme in the conversation, with posts noting the normalisation of cyberbullying by certain accounts or trivialising cyberbullying acts. There is a clear expectation to ignore cyberbullying or minimise certain acts because they are performed online (see Figure 18). The bottom post aptly captures the position online by summarising some of the responses that victims of cyberbullying encounter when such acts are committed against them or when individuals call out cyberbullying.

Imagine being blocked by a man as a man! Just because he couldn't handle a little bit of cyber bullying.

6:59 AM · Oct 1, 2024 · **3,980** Views

"Its twitter", "cyberbullying how?" " why is she posting herself naked?" 💀 people we live amongst. The road is long.

1:41 PM · Jun 17, 2024 · **64.2K** Views

Figure 18: Minimisation of Cyberbullying

The latter post was found under a conversation regarding the proliferation of cyberbullying content by an account known to post hot-button X conversations (See Figure 19). In response, individuals noted that if you posted yourself online, you open yourself up to scrutiny and cyberbullying (Figure 20).
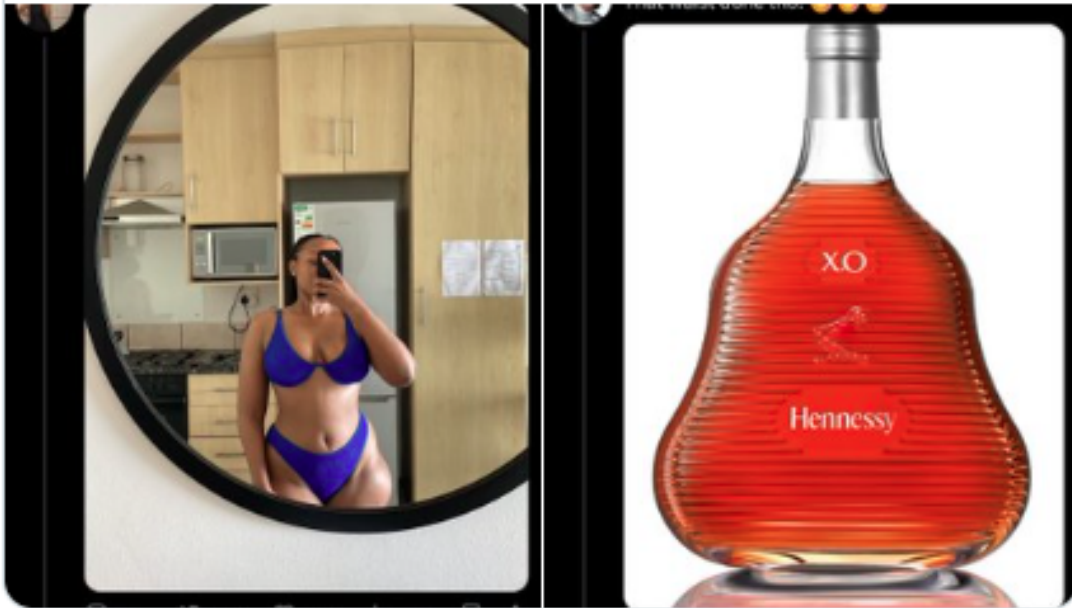
Figure 19: Post calling out an influencer

Figure 20: Responses to the post by the influencer

Figure 20 shows online responses to the post in Figure 19. Some users expressed that individuals have the option to delete the app or block content and accounts that shared offensive content. An interesting response, featured below, suggests that social media has made individuals soft, emotional and easy to bring to tears. The post is reminiscent of the claims by older generations that younger generations are softer and more easily offended.

Figure 21: Further conversation in respect of cyberbullying

The dataset also reflected the intersectional nature of cyberbullying, in particular, xenophobic sentiment and ageism. In respect of the former, and well documented in prior reports of the CABC, Vanessa Chidimma faced an onslaught of cyberbullying and cyberharrassment based on her heritage as a Nigerian.

In respect of the latter, South Africa's First Lady and businesswoman, Tshepo Motsepe faced cyberbullying in respect of her age, particularly on X after clips of her and her husband, Cyril Ramaphosa, during their inauguration were circulated online.

South Africa is blessed to have a First Lady who keeps to herself, has a life outside of Politics and doesn't compete with other politicians for media attention like we see in Zimbabwe. She doesn't deserve the cyber bullying being thrown at her. Now all Zimbabwean politicians have to imitate the First Lady's dance to get recognition!

5:01 AM · Jun 20, 2024 · **104K** Views

Figure 22: Conversation surrounding Dr Motsepe.

Dr Motsepe received an outpouring of support from individuals on X, however, noting her achievements over her lifetime and continuous service to both the country as well as the continent.
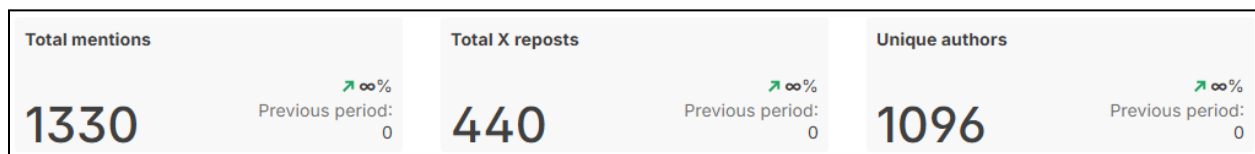
8. Trolling

Trolling can be defined as making inflammatory or unsolicited comments in order to get a reaction from individuals. In the strict sense of the word, trolling is often not directed at any particular individual, but in online discourse, the boundaries between trolling,

cyberbullying and harassment are often blurred and indistinguishable. What differentiates certain acts of trolling is that, no matter how offensive or harmful the content thereof is, the act is done in jest and the reaction sought is laughter, whereas cyberbullying is often perpetrated with malicious intent.

8.1. Data Overview

The trolling category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing 1330 mentions, with 440 reposts. Within the conversation, 1096 unique authors contributed to the conversation (Figure 23).

Total mentions		Total X reposts		Unique authors	
	↗ ∞%		↗ ∞%		↗ ∞%
1330	Previous period: 0	440	Previous period: 0	1096	Previous period: 0

Figure 23: Metrics associated with Trolling conversation

A word cloud of the 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates that the most common words used in the conversation include bullied, abortion, illegal and shaming (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Word Cloud showing most commonly used keywords

The trending visualisation under trolling suggests varied conversation with phrases including trolling fading in conversation volume over the reporting period while phrases like Serena Williams and body-shaming trending (Figure 25).
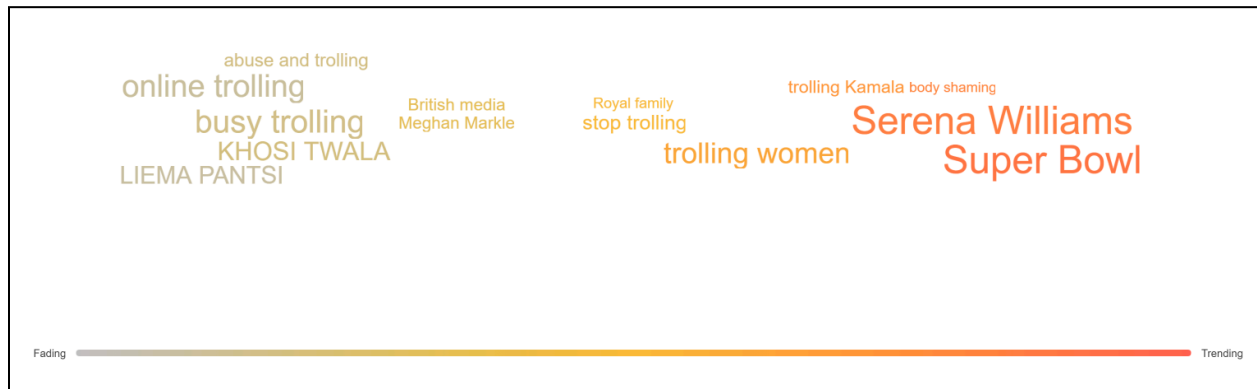

Figure 25: Trending Graph

8.2. Popular Posts

As noted above, the lines between trolling, cyberbullying and harassment are often blurred online. Cyberbullying, however, is more likely to be characterised and/or called out as trolling, where the content of the act is meant to be humorous. Within our dataset, we found several conversations where users referred to cyberbullying as trolling. The post to the left reflects on individuals body-shaming a woman and questions user responses if the victim of the "trolling" committed suicide. In respect of the other two posts, users again characterised the cyberbullying of two Nigerian models as trolling (Figure 26).
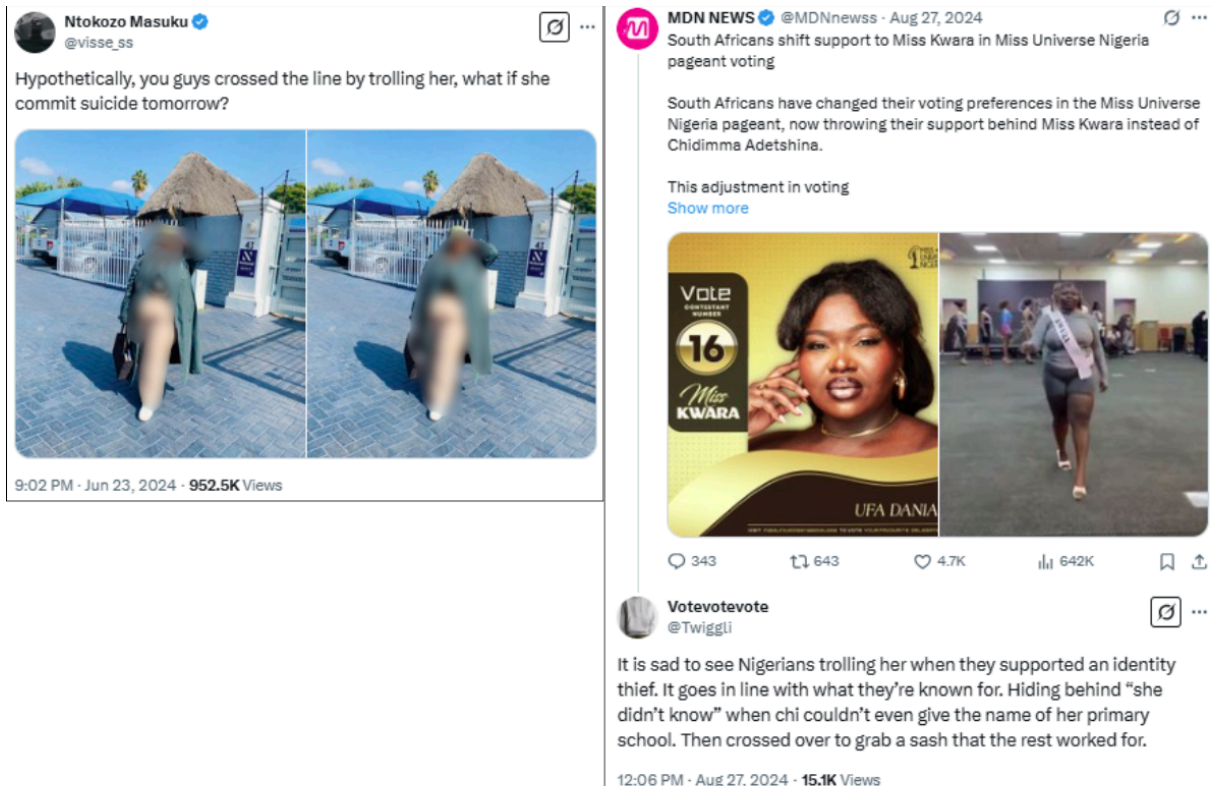
Figure 26: Posts concerning trolling

Responses to the initial post varied, with users calling out the individual for reposting the image and thereby opening the door for continued trolling of the person. Others stood in support of the message in the post. There were further posts with similar reasoning as to that found in the cyberbullying focus, noting that she should have expected the backlash to her posts due to her body, or put differently, body-shaming the individual (Figure 27).

Why are you posting her now ? You are the problem also wena

6:30 AM · Jun 24, 2024 · **35.1K** Views

Way too many heartless bullies on this app 🥲

5:45 AM · Jun 24, 2024 · **32.7K** Views

If you are weak, don't put a picture of you trolling yourself and no one will troll you. Secondly, if you look like you have 2 bums, one in front and one at the back, making it difficult to know if you are going or coming, don't post your pictures at all

Figure 27: Responses to the trolling post

While posts under this topic varied, our dataset contained several mentions that directly concerned the trolling of women online. The set of posts called out the trolling of women online. It is interesting to note, once again, that individuals do not regard cyberspace as real and having direct consequences for individuals facing abuse online (Figure 28).

HABILE. @sthedoingthings · Jan 23
Twitter isn't a place where anyone can take things seriously. The outside world is the one anyone should take seriously

♡ 1   �   ♡   ᵢₗᵢ 272   🔖 ⬆️

Tshiamo
@entlee_

With all the things happening to women and you still find it in you to speak ill of them in the way you do?

Funny how you didn't even answer me. You find entertainment in trolling women the way that you do. What a way to move through life. The fact that you willingly do that?

8:11 PM · Jan 23, 2025 · **272** Views

😂😂nah niggas like him can't pull women, so they resort to trolling women online to make themselves feel better. I know these type of broers

10:50 AM · May 10, 2024 · **457** Views

Trolling women for change on behalf of Chris Brown. The one page that gives names and identities to victims of gender based violence? You guys will do anything to feel cool and edgy. 🤣

9:37 PM · Oct 6, 2024 · **452** Views

Figure 28: Further conversation surrounding trolling

9. Doxxing & Defamation

Doxxing and defamation were grouped due to their relationship with the identity of the target. Whereas doxxing is defined as the publication of private or identifiable information about a particular individual online, typically done with malicious intent, defamation is the communication of false and/or damaging information about an individual. Defamation does not exclusively occur online, whereas doxxing is typically associated with the uncovering or exposing of an anonymous account.

9.1. Data Overview

The Doxxing and Defamation category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing 644 mentions with 661 reposts. Within this conversation, 525 unique authors contributed to the conversation.

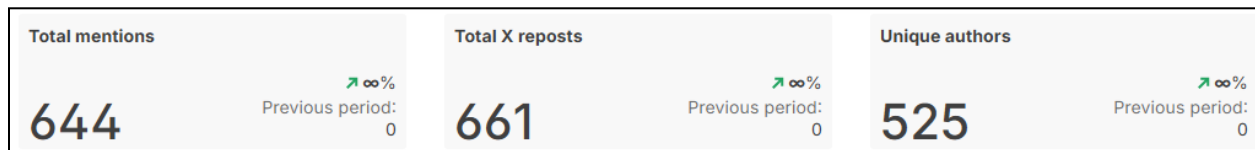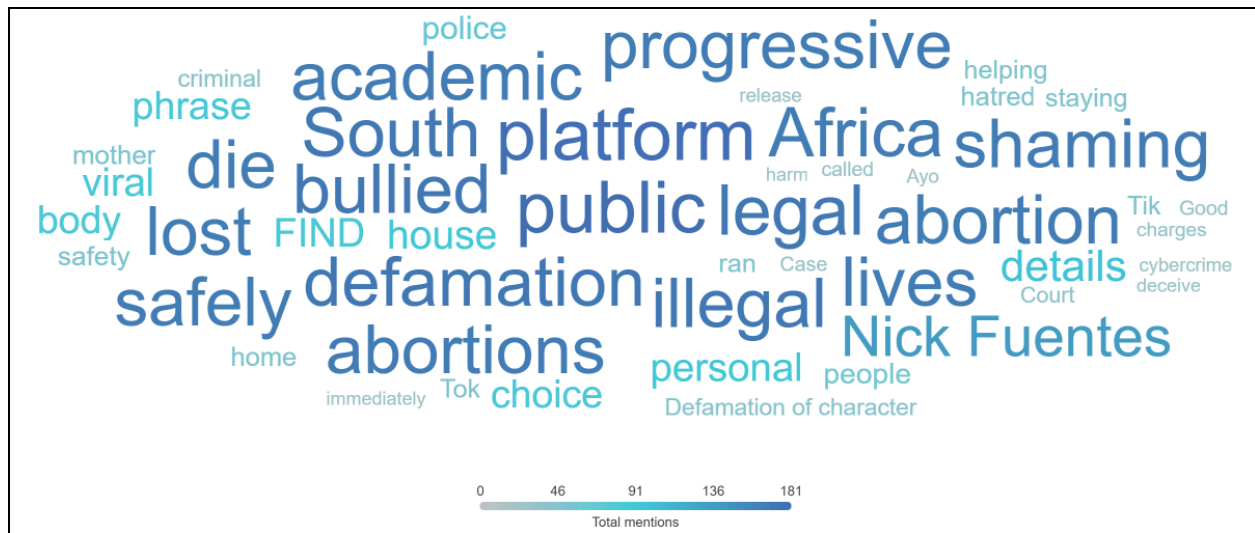| Total mentions		Total X reposts		Unique authors	
	↗ ∞%		↗ ∞%		↗ ∞%
	Previous period:		Previous period:		Previous period:
644	0	661	0	525	0

Figure 29: Metrics associated with the Doxxing and Defamation conversation

The top 50 phrases and keywords consisted of bullying, shaming, abortion, and defamation, among others.

Figure 30: Word Cloud showing 50 most commonly used terms

The trending visualisation under doxxing and defamation varied with certain phrases fading in the conversation while South Africa and Nick Fuentes, a far-right political commentator, trended.

Figure 31: Trending topics graph

9.2. Popular Posts

In 2024, it was announced that the musician Chris Brown would be performing in South Africa. The musician has a storied history of abuse against women[34]. Petitions were launched against him performing in the country by several feminist activists and

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[34] https://www.theguardian.com/music/2024/oct/29/chris-brown-documentary-history-of-violence.

organisations[35]. A popular academic and former vice chancellor posted in support of Brown and noted that she would be attending the concert by the musician.

In response to her posts, a feminist activist called out the academic's support of the musician despite the allegations made against him in respect of Gender-Based Violence. In response, the academic remarked that if the activist has the freedom to have an abortion, then she should have the freedom to attend the Chris Brown concert.

Observing the debate, one commentator noted that "Many women lost their lives due to illegal abortions. South Africa was progressive enough to make it legal so that women can do them safely. An academic is here, on a public platform shaming a woman for having an abortion and doxxing her to be cyber bullied…" (see Figure X below).

Many women lost their lives due to illegal abortions. South Africa was progressive enough to make it legal so that women can do them safely.

An academic is here, on a public platform shaming a woman for having an abortion and doxxing her to be cyber bullied. When did I die and wake up in a shithole country?

9:54 PM · Oct 8, 2024 · **146.6K** Views

Figure 32: Author being critical of an academic publicising information

Varied responses were recorded under this post, with the majority supporting the stance of the academic in question. Individuals recorded that if the activist has the freedom to terminate their pregnancy, then the academic has the freedom to decide which concerts she would like to attend. In respect of the allegation doxxing and cyberbullying, it was noted that the activist did publicly share that she had a termination however, and as captured by a commentator, the academic who relied on the termination in the response, exposed the activist to a vile community on the platform by using the termination to make a point (Figure 33).

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[35] https://www.change.org/p/stop-chris-brown-from-performing-in-south-africa-no-stage-for-abusers.

Figure 33: Responses to the author's critical lenses

Conversation captured under defamation varied, with the most notable posts referring to the revenge porn saga discussed above, the cyberbullying of Adetshina as well as the posts concerning the academic, discussed directly above. A host of TFGBV acts are grouped under defamation by users due to the nature of social media being the publishing of information as well as a misunderstanding of what constitutes defamation.

10. Conclusion

This report has sought to explore the conversations relating to Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence on South African social media.

A key theme amongst most topics is that TFGBV does not warrant action nor sanction due to the act being perpetrated online. Individuals further regard blocking and/or removing oneself from the platform as sufficient protective measures for potential and ongoing harm. An interesting insight from the conversation suggests that users have regard to the intent behind the post to excuse cyberbullying by referring to such acts as trolling and minimizing the effect thereof.

The non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos remains an area of concern on South African social media, particularly where the subjects of such images/videos are celebrities and/or influencers. Users show no regard to the sanctions that the sharing of such images or videos may attract and, in fact, blatantly disregard them by

calling for the image/video to be shared on related posts. This act may stem from users' failure to understand the laws surrounding 'revenge pornography' as amended by the Films and Publications Act, as well as misinformation that is spread online.

Appendix A

TFGBV Query

TFGBV OR "technology facilitated gender based violence" OR cyberbully* OR cyberstalk* OR "non-consensual porn" OR "revenge porn" OR ((troll* OR dox* OR deepfake* OR "deep fake") NEAR/4 (wom?n OR female OR girl OR abuse OR her)) OR "online gender-based violence" OR "gender digital divide" OR OGBV OR "online violence" OR ((sextortion OR online OR "social media" OR facebook OR technology OR reddit OR instagram OR Whatsapp OR telegram) AND ("gender based violence"))

NOT

(Davido OR roadside OR fibroid OR blyde OR "Marula Platinum Mine" OR hitm?n OR somizi OR Zuma OR Mpofu OR bolt OR telemarketers OR Misuzulu OR Biden OR springbok*)

Methodology
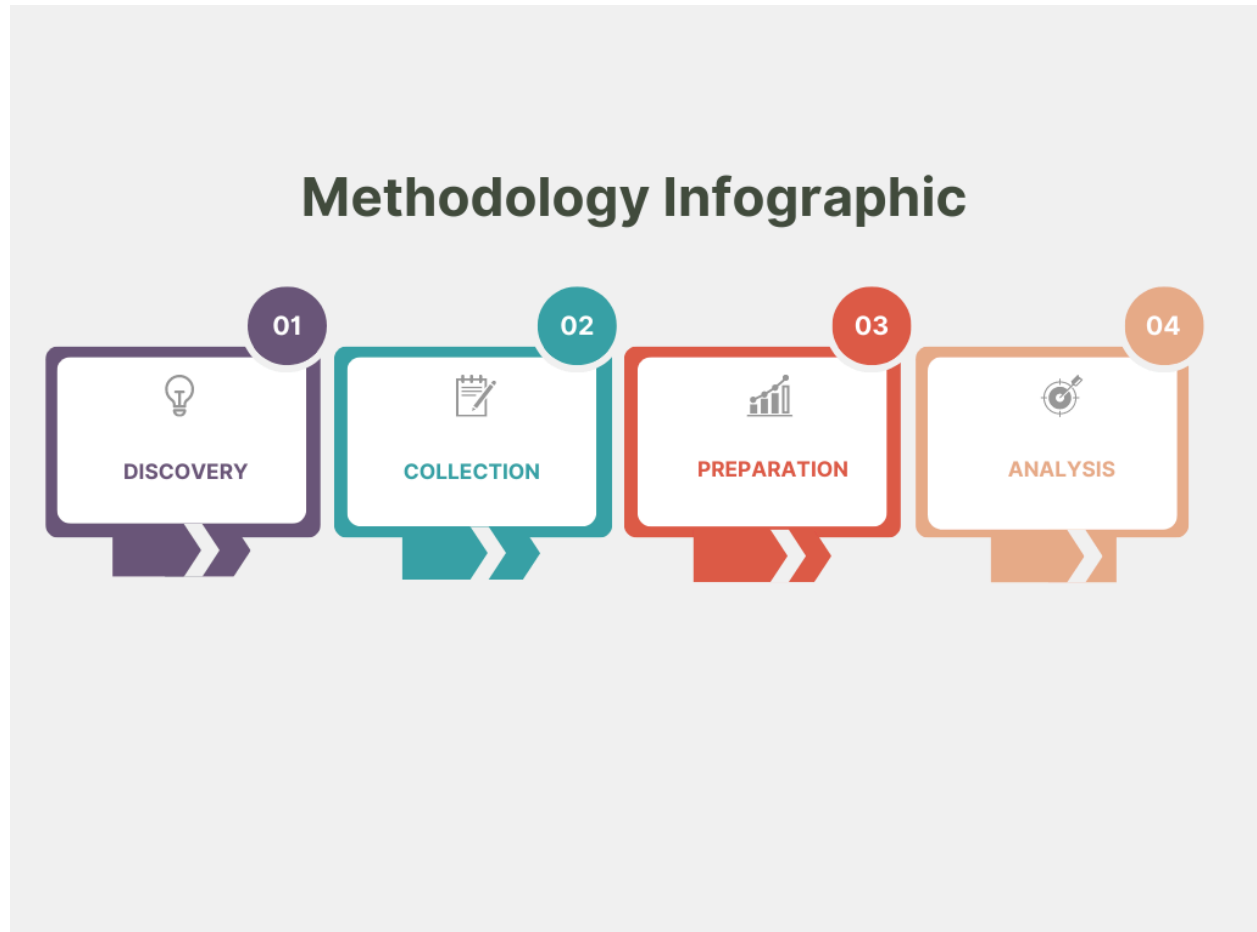
Stieglitz and colleagues (2018) identified four distinct phases in social media data analysis: (1) discovery, (2) collection, (3) preparation, and (4) analysis. Below, we describe how these phases guide our research.

Step 1: Data Discovery
- The first step in data discovery is to draw up a list of keywords designed to isolate the broad conversation of interest on social media. The research and dialogue facilitation teams contribute collaboratively to this list through a shared spreadsheet.
- To create this list, the research team drew on existing knowledge combined with desktop research, a literature review and a quantitative, analytic review of social media.

Step 2: Data Collection
- We "collect" the resulting data using our social media analytics platform.

Step 3: Data Preparation
- We 'prepare' the data for analysis by refining the query. Query refinement entails sifting through the data set while looking for posts that are not relevant.
- If and when our team finds that some words could be added or removed, they are resolved by introducing additional keywords and/or exclusionary terms to the query.

- With the goal of delivering the most useful insights possible. The development of a query, categories and tags is based on two factors:

  1. *Prominence* - this is assessed quantitatively, using a dashboard that allows us to visualise data points, and qualitatively, using researchers' expertise, desktop research and dashboard work.
  2. *Relevance* - a qualitative assessment of whether a focus area is important enough to the strategic goals of the heCareZA project to be included. Our team makes this determination based on subject matter expertise in South African social media dynamics and whether or not further research into the focus area is likely to provide valuable information for the ongoing heCareZA Programme.

Step 4: Data Analysis
- We build a dashboard in our social media analytics platform to support our data analysis. This tool produces metrics according to volume, trending topics, news stories, and unique authors in relation to the keyword list.
- We conduct thematic analysis (TA). TA involves studying the emerging patterns in data and exploring how units of meaning connect to form themes. Thematic analysis can highlight individuals' perspectives, ideas and experiences, and can be used to generate fresh insight into the social dynamics behind human behaviour.
- The goal of this analysis is to better understand what was said during the reporting period. Thematic analysis is conducted both at the query level and the category (focus area) level.