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Executive Summary

The analysis of masculine norms on South African social media reflects a highly contested environment, shifting from merely identifying dominant expectations to critiquing their social and psychological consequences, while exploring the possibility of “positive masculinity”. The overall conversation volume concerning male norms was substantial, comprising over half of the focused social media data.

Traditional norms remain central, particularly the expectation of financial provision and leadership. However, the key divergence in recent discourse is the explicit framing of this provider role as a significant mental health burden. Counter-narratives advocate for shared economic responsibility to reduce stress and improve quality of life for men. The persistent contradiction of absentee fatherhood also remains a theme, underscoring that men often have the option to disengage from caregiving, contributing to a disproportionate burden of care on women.

The discourse highlights severe critique of the socialisation process, noting that the belief that “boys are easier to raise than girls” results in young males being neglected in essential life skills, emotional care, and hygiene, instead being primarily prepared for toughness or financial success. In the online sphere, accountability clashes fiercely with social enforcement. While some men visibly reject harmful norms like the “bro code” when it excuses violence, these progressive stances are frequently met with ridicule, deflection, or being labeled a “simp,” a term for a man submissive to women. This dynamic creates a “perception gap,” where men fear social ostracisation for challenging rigid norms or “putting a foot wrong”.

The emergence of “positive masculinity” including frameworks like Critical Positive Masculinity, suggests ways for men to reinterpret traditional traits (like strength or autonomy) to foster health-seeking behaviors. Yet, the concept itself is contested, with critics arguing that it risks perpetuating patriarchal hierarchies by attributing universal human traits (like resilience and courage) to a gendered concept. Ultimately, the South African social media landscape functions as a site where entrenched expectations and pressures on men clash with emerging calls for accountability and more authentic, healthy identities.

Introduction

In November 2024, the [Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change](#) (CABC) released *An Exploration into Gendered Norms on South African Social Media Report* (Gender Norms Report). In respect of masculine norms, the findings suggested a tendency towards leadership and provision, lack of emotional depth in friendships as well as absentee fatherhood. In respect of feminine norms, insights suggested that the normative behaviour of women should reflect submissive behaviour, respect of men as well as highlighting women as manipulative. Dress code emerged as a vector for spectators to pass value judgments on women. In respect of the LGBTQIA+ norms, it was highlighted that despite formal legislative protection, such protection has not yet had a normative impact on society. Affording the community respect and equality was also manipulated into theories that scrutiny of traditional norms will lead to the degradation of society and immoral behaviour.

In light of the concerning findings above, the CABC investigated how these norms have shifted or changed since our last reporting period. This research is in line with Pillar 6 of South Africa's National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Sustainable Development Goal 5. This report seeks to improve understanding of the extent and nature of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) specifically among social media users through the lens of gender normative behaviour and values.

Insight into gender norms a year-on within the South African context surfaces the evolution of conversation, insights and provide guidance into social media interventions that can address harmful norms and practices at a systemic level. Posts referenced in this post are, therefore, not isolated examples but illustrative of narratives circulating in similar fashion on social media broadly. While the researchers extract posts inciting violence, hate speech or the like, the report also focuses on the softer forms of misogyny that feed into a broader patriarchal society.

As in the prior report, this report does not seek to explain what gender is or the accuracy of any narrative presented. It simply highlights insights about gender norms taking place on X among South Africans. An overview of the methodology employed by the CABC is provided in the Appendix

Masculine Norms

The prior report focused on the dominant masculine norms exhibited in South Africa with a particular emphasis on the occupation of the provider role, initiation of courting, displaying strength or toughness and / or its propensity towards violence. This report shifts gears towards what is termed 'positive masculinity', in particular, critical positive masculinity as defined by Tim Lomas (2013). The study of men and masculinities has historically been dominated by a "deficit model," which frames masculinity primarily as a risk factor for health, a source of violence, or a collection of toxic traits. However, an emerging body of literature seeks to shift this focus toward "positive" or "healthy" masculinities.

The prevailing academic and cultural tendency is to view men as "damaged and damage doing". Lomas (2013) identifies a pervasive discourse that treats masculinity as a "risk factor" for poor health outcomes, such as lower life expectancy and higher suicide rates, attributing these to norms like risk-taking and emotional stoicism.

Barry (2023) argues that this "deficit model" constitutes a cognitive distortion known as "gamma bias," where negative behaviors are magnified when associated with men, while positive behaviors are minimized. His research suggests that adhering to a negative view of masculinity is detrimental to men's well-being; conversely, men who hold a positive view of masculinity—viewing it as protective and family-oriented—report higher mental well-being scores. Similarly, Agozino and Agu (2021) argue that the "taboo" nature of masculinity in discourse has obscured the historical reality of "progressive masculinity," particularly among men of African descent who have utilized intellectual and moral leadership rather than violence to effect change.

In literature, we divergent definitions of what constitutes "positive" masculinity, ranging from the recuperation of traditional traits to the complete deconstruction of gender norms.

Lomas proposes "Critical Positive Masculinity," a framework influenced by positive psychology that recognizes men's potential to negotiate traditional norms in ways conducive to health and well-being. This approach does not reject all traditional norms; rather, it suggests men can re-interpret norms like "strength" or "autonomy" to support health-seeking behaviors, such as engaging in meditation or alcohol abstinence. However, Lomas retains a "critical" stance, warning that ostensibly positive masculinities can still uphold patriarchal power structures.

Badaszewski (2014) defines positive masculinity among college men as the process of "breaking through gender norms to embrace an individual sense of self". In his model, positive masculinity is not simply the opposite of hegemonic (dominant/toxic) masculinity, but a state "outside the binary" where men develop a healthy self-concept with the support of significant others.

Agozino and Agu (2021) utilize a "scholar-activist" approach to define "progressive masculinity" through biographical case studies of figures like Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, and Martin Luther King Jr. They argue that positive masculinity is characterized by "love of learning, connection to the community, critical thinking skills, love for the people and creative courage," rather than physical dominance or hyper-sexuality.

In a study of adolescent boys, O'Gorman et al. (2024) observe a shift toward "flexible masculinities," where young men increasingly accept diversity and emotional disclosure. They utilize a framework where positive masculinity involves "developmental progress toward the embodiment of key human strengths," such as connection and authenticity. Their findings suggest that for young men, positive masculinity manifests as a willingness to "call out" sexism and homophobia among peers.

There are several key mechanisms through which positive masculinity is constructed and maintained.

- **Relationships with Women:** Badaszewski found that female friends and family members played a crucial role in helping college men access their emotions and vulnerability, providing a safe space often unavailable in male peer groups. O'Gorman et al. similarly noted that mothers were key confidantes for boys navigating friends' mental health crises.
- **Role Models and History:** Agozino and Agu emphasize the necessity of teaching boys about historical male figures who achieved success through non-violent, intellectual means to counter the "myth of the black macho". Conversely, Badaszewski's participants often struggled to identify immediate role models, relying instead on movie characters or celebrities.
- **Navigating Norms:** A recurring challenge is the "perception gap" or lack of a "new map" for masculinity. O'Gorman et al. found that while boys rejected traditional rigid norms, they felt anxiety about "putting a foot wrong" in the current political climate, fearing cancellation or social ostracization if they misspoke regarding gender issues.

While many authors advocate for reconstructing masculinity, Mackay (2025) offers a sharp critique of the very concept. She argues that the drive to promote "positive masculinity" is a "protection racket" designed to save the concept of manhood rather than men themselves.

Mackay contends that traits labeled as "positive masculinity"—such as courage, resilience, and protection—are simply human traits that women also possess. She argues that attributing these universal virtues to "masculinity" perpetuates biological essentialism and maintains the gender hierarchy. Furthermore, she introduces the concept of the "masculinity burden," where men's struggles (e.g., unemployment or rejection) are framed as existential threats to their manhood, eliciting a specific type of "himpathy" that is not afforded to women facing identical struggles. For Mackay, the solution is not "better" masculinity, but "positive humanity".

There is thus, a tension between validating men's experiences and dismantling patriarchal harms. While Barry and Agozino & Agu advocate for celebrating the unique and positive contributions of men to improve well-being, Lomas and Badaszewski suggest a more nuanced negotiation where men redefine norms to foster health and authenticity. O'Gorman et al. highlight the practical confusion young men face in this transition, while Mackay challenges the utility of the gendered lens altogether, advocating for a focus on human values over masculine ones. Collectively, these works suggest that while "positive masculinity" serves as a pragmatic tool for engaging men in health and behavioral change, it remains a contested concept caught between essentialist validation and constructionist critique.

Data Overview

The male norms query returned an overall conversation volume of approximately 2.1 million mentions and 1.36 million of the returned posts were reposts. Approximately 156 260 accounts contributed to the conversation, representing an average of 13 mentions per unique account (See Figure X).

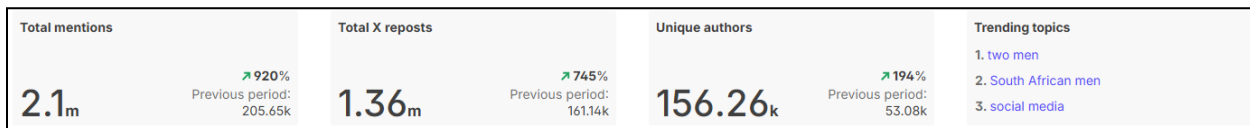


Figure 1: Key Metrics

A word cloud of the top 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates the most common words used which include women, people, time, good and love (see Figure 2). It is interesting to note that these keywords overlap with the high volume keywords in the [Gender Norms Report](#).

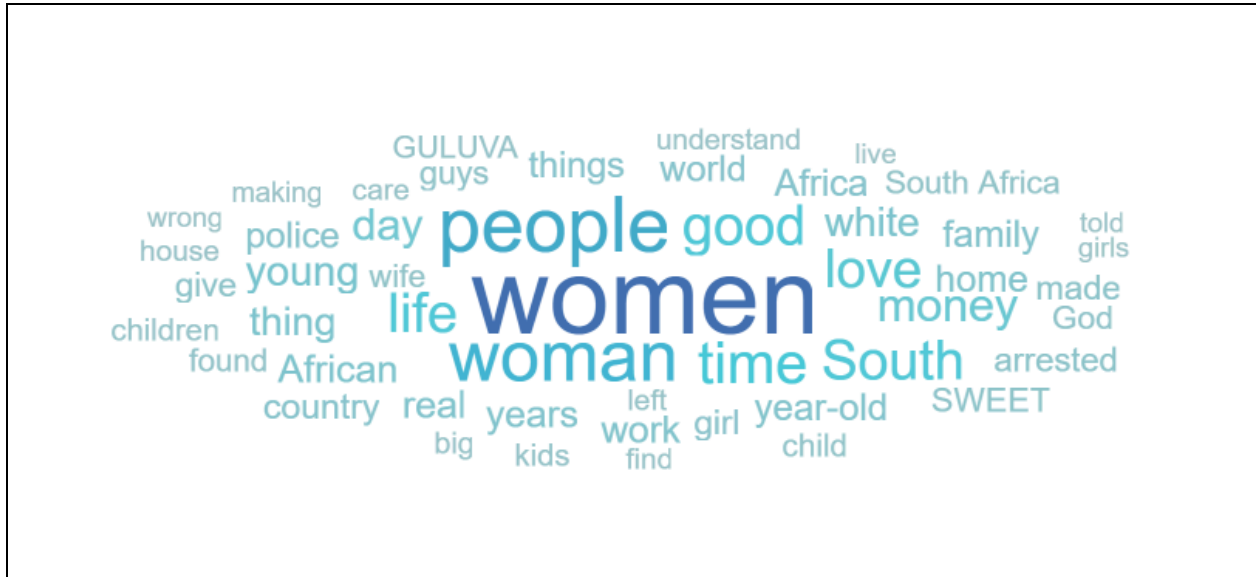


Figure 2: Word Cloud coloured by volume

The trending topics visualisation showcases phrases, hashtags and keywords which form themes of conversation throughout the time period (see Figure X). The visualisation shows that the phrases, hashtags and keywords are spread across the graph with the majority centred in the middle. To the right we note two phrases and the name of a popular DJ in South Africa, likely trending due to significant media attention around them.

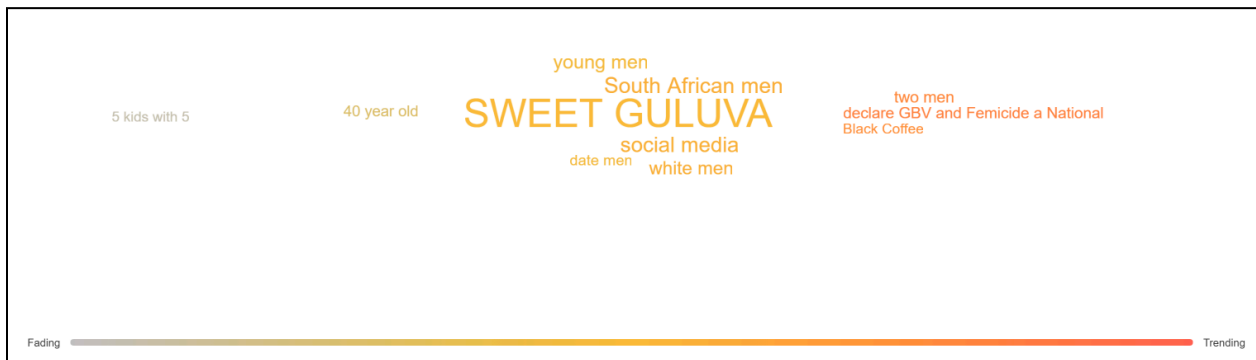


Figure 3: Trending Graph

Popular Posts and Topics

In this section, we examine the context and content of highly engaged posts in the male gender norms conversation. Figure 4 below illustrates that there are men that seek to shift the narrative and hold men accountable for their actions and what they say in

respect of women. In respect of the first post, the user notes that there is no “bro code” when it comes to rape and abuse. The “bro code” refers to an unwritten set of rules that supposedly governs male behaviour and friendships by prioritising loyalty and solidarity among men. The second post calls out a particularly revolting post which harbors sexual innuendos.



Figure 4: Masculine Norm Shift

Responses to the first post were largely supportive of the user, with many endorsing a no tolerance approach to rape and abuse of women by their friends. Notably, one user notes that the 'bro code' is for conduct amongst friends, not amongst criminals and criminal activity. Responses to the second post, however, ridiculed the poster while simultaneously deflecting the conversation to the 'wicked' acts that women engage in. The comments largely tended along calling the man a simp¹ as well as noting that the conversation that women have about men are equally problematic.

¹ Generally a man who attempts to gain the favour of women by being submissive.

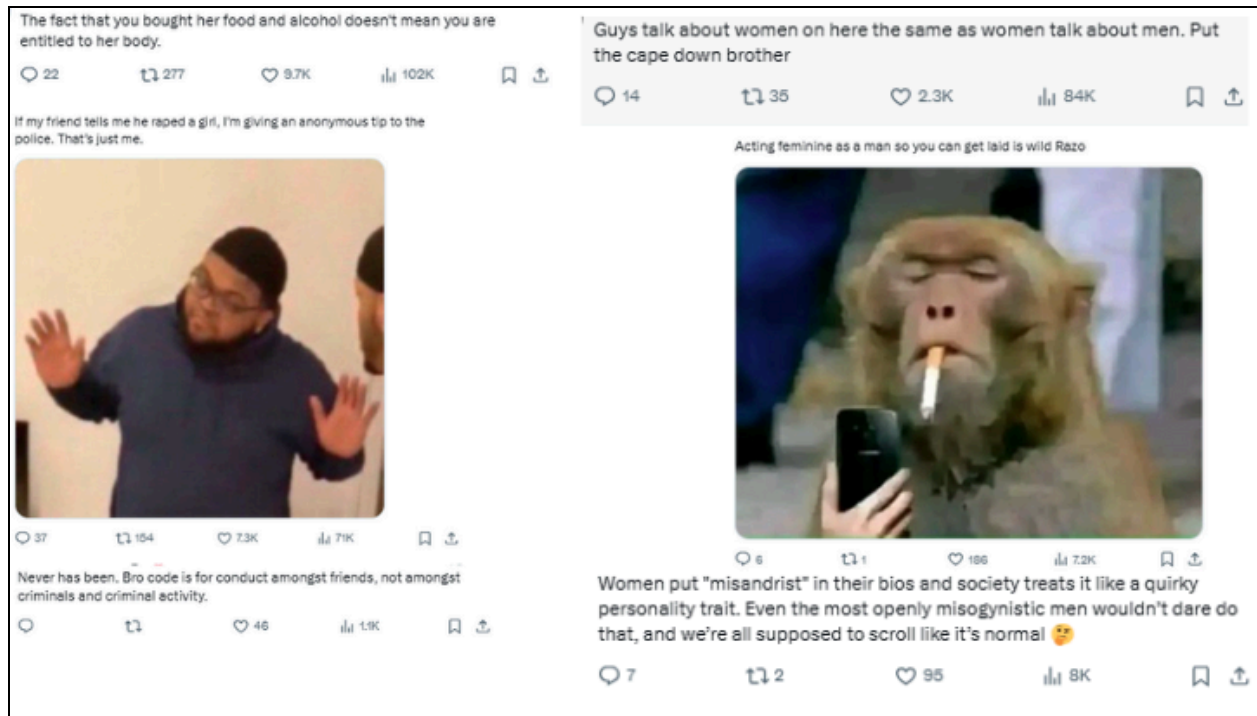


Figure 5: Responses to Figure 4 Posts

The second set of posts addresses socialization and, indeed, social pressure on men. In the first instance, the user asks how to raise a chat about cleanliness after using the toilet to which another quotes and says “we are witnessing the results of “boys are easier to raise than girls”. This phrase denotes that care of the female child requires more effort than the care of the male child due to societal expectation that boy children are not responsible for their own self care or developing hygienic habits. This further extends to emotional care of the boy child as well. The second post highlights the external pressure placed on men to provide and/or spend lavishly on their partners.



Figure 6: Posts concerning Socialisation

Accounts noted that the notion that boys are easier to raise and, by implication, less care is required are neglectful parenting. Two interesting perspectives were uncovered where the individuals noted that parents do not expend any effort in teaching boy children basic self-care and survival skills, noting that they only need to teach the child how to survive long enough until someone else can pick up the burden. In respect to the second post, greed from women becomes a recurring theme where men note that some women expect men to spend money casually. On the other hand, a user countered by asking if the man informed the women that they are managing their money.

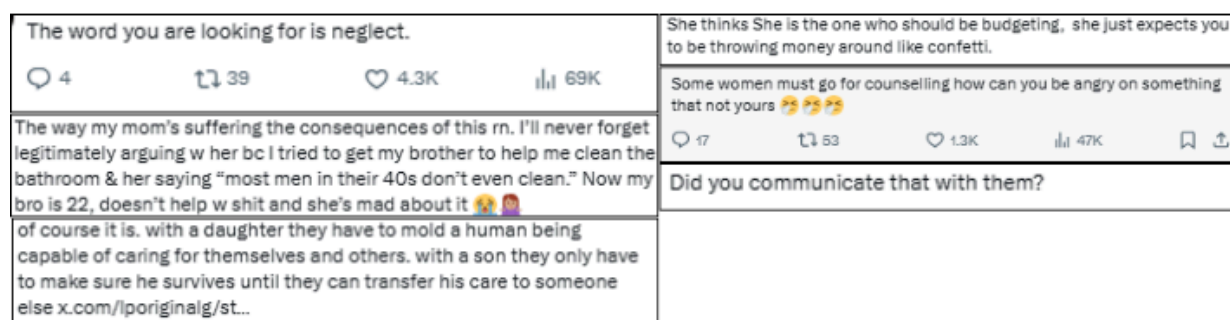


Figure 7: Responses to Figure 6 Posts

The third set of posts concerns men and relationships with a particular focus on how men approach relationship longevity and commitment. The first post notes that a man

will tolerate their partner for years knowing that he will marry someone else. The second post notes that men are very intentional and even “lack of intention” is intentional.



Figure 8: Posts concerning Men and Relationships

Varied responses were recorded in respect of the first post. There was a general consensus that some men do engage in maintaining long relationships without any intention to settle with the partner and several reasons were advanced such as physical intimacy and recordal of undesirable behaviour over the course of the relationship. This was, however, countered by perspectives questioning why maintain a relationship for a long time when the intention to settle is not present - as this constitutes a waste of time and resources. There was also consensus in respect of the second post, however, emotional immaturity was raised as a cause of this as well as past trauma with partners. It was further noted that this trait extends across genders.

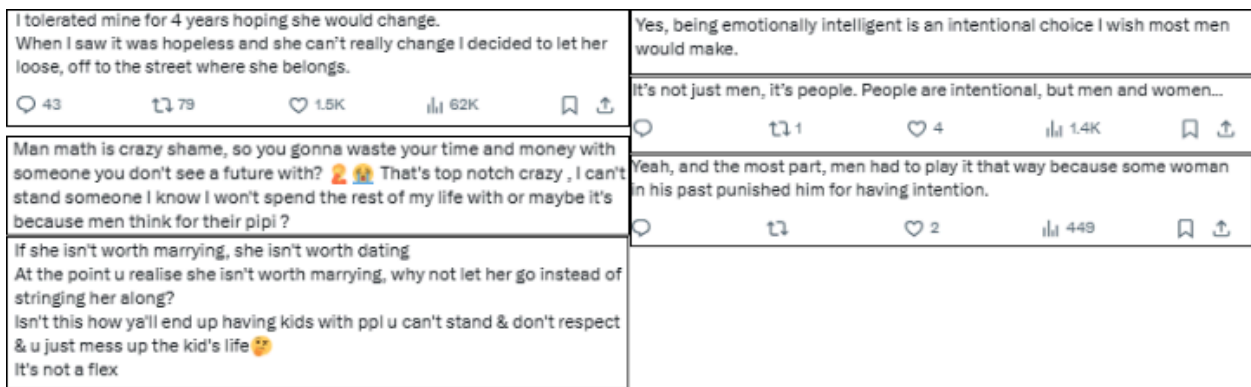


Figure 9: Responses to Figure 8 Posts

Thematic Analysis

This section of the report evaluates the themes extracted from the data collected in the masculine norms conversation. Financial provision and leadership remained key themes in the conversation, with posts still reflecting on the societal expectations placed on men. Conversation remains divergent with a view that it is the responsibility of a man to be the financial provider in the household, and that men take up this role and provide the last they have without telling their partner that it is the last. On the other hand, the responsibility placed on men was also critically challenged in respect of mental wellbeing. In addition, one account called out women's financial dependence on men as a mechanism of control for men in a relationship.



Figure 10: Collected Posts in re Financial Provision

Responses to the initial post indicated largely that the comment is out of touch with reality and noting that women participate in the economy now and are capable of contributing to the household. The financial burden placed on men was similarly called out as a key contributor to declining mental wellbeing in men. Accounts also agreed with the perspective that less financial pressure is a win for a man, which reduces stress, improves quality of life and more effort can be directed towards achieving mutual goals.

Times has changed generations are not the same anymore, both Man and Woman must contribute in house hold, that the only way to gang up on this life thing!!	It allows you to focus on building a healthy partnership... fostering emotional connection... and achieving mutual goals without the constant stress of meeting traditional financial expectations
<div> <div>9</div> <div>6</div> <div>396</div> <div>29K</div> <div></div> <div></div> </div>	<div> <div></div> <div></div> <div>3</div> <div>622</div> <div></div> <div></div> </div>
In today's society, the traditional gender roles of men being the sole breadwinners and women being responsible for managing the household expenses have shifted. Both men and women are now equally responsible for contributing to household costs and managing the finances. This..	I think I like it actually. The pressure of a woman who requires dates, romance, more effort than most, etc. If you love her, it can be another reason to work hard and hold yourself to a higher standard. As long as she's not ungrateful of course.
<div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>7</div> <div>700</div> <div></div> <div></div> </div>	

Figure 11: Responses to Figure 10

Conversation in respect of child maintenance was also raised and how men spend their money. A generalized statement noted that men have more expendable money because they do not support their children while another user questioned men buying materialistic items.

<p>We budget different - men don't waste money raising their own children.</p> <p>Null @Vhoyde · Feb 11</p> <p>Women are buying up all these Chinese cars while men are still buying German to impress them. Amazing.</p> <p>1:31 PM · Feb 11, 2025 · 535.6K Views</p> <div> <div>165</div> <div>1.1K</div> <div>79K</div> <div>319</div> <div></div> </div>	<p>Some men are living a soft life because their kids are not part of their budget 💔</p> <p>7:07 AM · Feb 18, 2025 · 284.7K Views</p> <div> <div>153</div> <div>953</div> <div>6.9K</div> <div>189</div> <div></div> </div>
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Figure 12: Child Maintenance and Budgeting

Responses to the posts were polarized, with some standing in support of the comment made while others called out the post. In this respect, accounts noted that all fathers cannot be painted with the same brush and one account noted that they are currently fighting for access to their child, but are struggling even despite legal action being taken.

<p>n Im here strugglin to get access for my kids, I can't even eat nice foods bcus I dont know wat are my kids eatin or whos takin care of them. Baby mama shes fighting with me using the kids, I have tried social worker n family court they said I must go where kids stayin n is far</p>				
3	1	10	2K	
<p>That's true, I even took my brother's daughter because her father doesn't wanna be a father to her so I've stepped in as her father</p>				
2	1	5	974	
<p>Some men are living a hard life because they are supporting other biological men's kids 💔💔</p>				
1		3	314	
<p>You are right. I read a confession from a guy who was complaining about contributing 50% and how the mom took their son to expensive school. It turned out that the guy drives German machines, has bottle and sneakers collection</p>				
2	3	81	7.6K	

Figure 13: Responses to Figure 12

Gender Roles also remained a prominent concern in the conversation recorded. Contemporary expressions of masculinity are critiqued, contrasting the same with traditional expectations in the first two posts. The notion that no positive male role models was also challenged, instead reflecting that young boys are often steered towards celebrating and engaging in negative traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. One account further provided a counter-narrative from a healthcare setting, spotlighting men who demonstrate their masculinity through consistent and practical acts of care for their partners.



Figure 14: Traditional Expectations and Role Modelling

In response to traditional expectations of men, accounts endorsed the view that men must display certain cultural norms in traditional settings and called out the post for failing to address this with her partner prior to joining. These traditional expectations were also challenged, with one noting that even black people have diverse backgrounds, beliefs and upbringings that do not lend themselves to the more traditional settings. There was, further, agreement to the notion that harmful masculine traits are elevated in society with individuals highlighting in particular [illicit] employment as a vector for harmful masculinity. Finally, several individuals posted their stories in respect of men showing up for their partners in hospital and highlighting that masculinity is fluid and dependent on context.

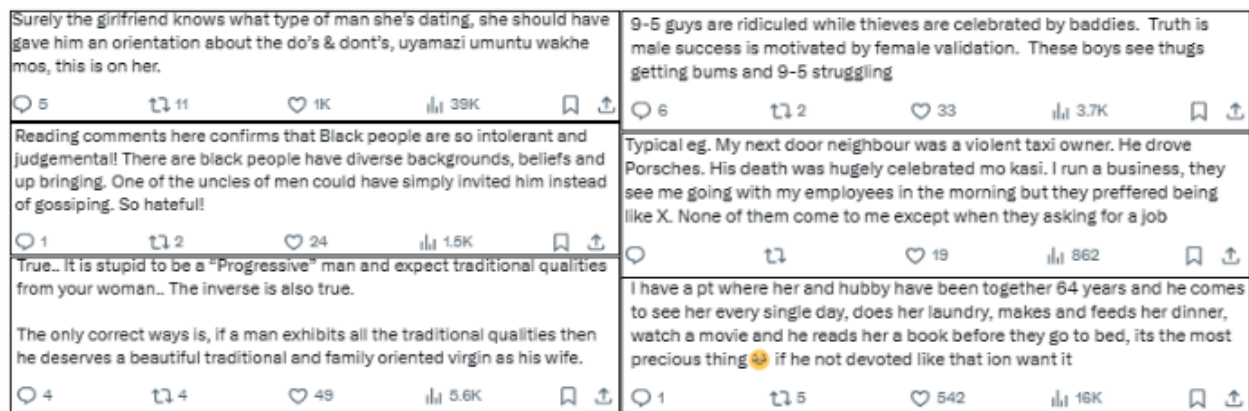


Figure 15: Responses to Figure 14

The disproportionate burden of care similarly remains a key theme in the conversation around masculine norms. One account noted that motherhood is permanent and cannot take a break from it while men have the option to take a break or not participate at all. The final two posts reflect on how care remains relegated to the realm of the female members of the family, with one account reflecting on how financial provision remains the sole burden placed on men.

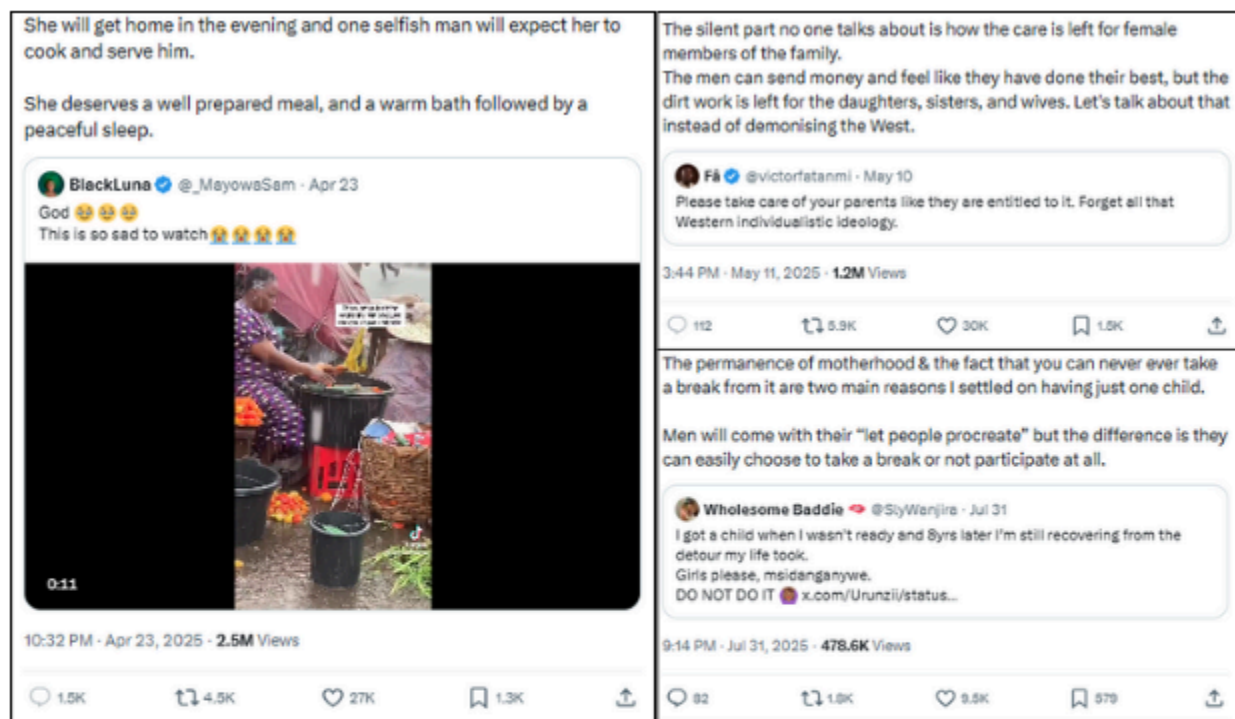


Figure 16: Disproportionate Care Burden

In respect of motherhood, there was consensus that motherhood is more taxing on women from the point of conception with one account noting that mothers therefore tend to have more investment in the child than a father. Another account pushed back against this sentiment, stating that the predominant view that mothers must take on the caregiving load is wrong and that both parents must be active in caring for their children. Responses to the caregiving conversation opened up cultural concerns where it was noted that men are coddled in their households and that females carry the caregiving load for elder males while men are just expected to send money home.

<p>Making a baby takes a mother 9 months of intense work from her body, a man puts in between 3-10 min worth of "work". You cannot convince me that men have the same investment in the child's well-being as the mother. If they did we wouldn't have so many taking off.</p> <p>5 43 1.1K</p>	<p>Wholetime the males were always preferred, coddled and given special treatment growing up in the household but when the parents get old and frail the females need to carry the labour. Lol</p> <p>7 2 145 5.7K</p>
<p>I think society whereby the mother takes on the whole caretaking load is doing it wrong. I don't think humans were supposed to grow up that way.</p> <p>My grandparents were very active in helping to care for me, and now, my parents are very active in caring for their grandchildren 🧓</p> <p>1 26 3.1K</p>	<p>This is what happened in my family—my mom's parents always treated her badly compared to her brothers, but when they got sick the brothers just sent money and my mom had to do everything. I've never liked my uncles since then.</p> <p>4 59 2.6K</p>
	<p>How can you turn a brief, context-less video into a dramatic story.</p> <p>We don't know her reality, whether she has a partner or what their dynamic is. She might be strong and independent, or she might have a supportive home. Reducing her to a victim of patriarchy for viral engagement feels performative and, frankly, exploitative.</p> <p>3 14 153 10K</p>

Figure 17: Responses to Figure 16

Facebook Analysis

The CABC further sought to analyse the posts on Facebook within this reporting period with the focus on masculine gender norms. Researchers found that the data trended along similar lines with a slant towards negative masculine norms. Relationship power dynamics, financial expectations, gratitude and domestic violence.

In the Figure 18 below, the author argues that women will openly humiliate men lacking “strength” and references specifically, Dj Zinhle memorialising the late South African music artist Kiernan Forbes, known more commonly as AKA, in her home and making her current partner look weak or stupid.

When Dj Zinhle does such things to Bongz, it's not by mistake but intentional. This is what happens when a man is w£ak, the woman will openly humiliate him

She was alpha widOwed by AKA, that's why she makes it a point to show him off or talk about him any chance she gets. Regardless of how it makes Bongz look w£ak, timid and even stupidi

As a matter of fact, alpha widOws get turned on humiliating their w£ak man. She has no respect of you whatsoever, you actually disgyst her but she keeps you around for the dutiful servant you are

She continues to humiliate him, hoping to inspire some sort of masculinity in this w£ak man, she actually wants him to reclaim his manhOod. Sadly he never gets it, thus the constant humiliation every chance she gets

Be a strong man or else a woman will openly humiliate you at every turn

is the volume okay ?

Figure 18: “Weak man” narrative

Some responses defended Dj Bongs, redefining strength as loyalty and support a man provides for his family despite public ridicule. As one commenter emphasizes, real love is found in supporting your partner despite public ridicule.

No matter how much you think Bongs is weak, I still respect for being the man he is. He's all the support he's giving his family and for still sticking although people call him names and etc. This is real LOVE that most won't even get the chance to experience and see in the Name of "batho ba tloeng".

He promised to love Zinhle and her kid wholeheartedly, this is part of love. They are now attering and supporting their kid mourning her father. As a friends, team, couple and a family. God will bless this man

 See less

I feel it's disrespectful for putting ex babe daddy pictures in our house or background 🖼️.the daughter can put his father 🖼️ in her room

🤔🤔🤔🤔these are the kind of girls who fought for the surname amendments 👍👍👍 can we check if Bongs is not using Zinhles surname 🤔🤔

Figure 19: Responses to Figure 18

One post discusses a high-profile example to argue that women should show enthusiastic gratitude for financial gestures. The post claims "modern women" feel entitled to "princess treatment" and argues that because a man spends his "blood, sweat and time" to earn money, ingratitude should not be tolerated.

Black Coffee said he once bought an expensive gift (a car to be specific) for his ex wife Enhle Mbali and she simply reacted with an "ok". He expected more for his gesture, in his words he wanted her to even cry. And somehow he is being criticized for saying that, being termed narcissistic

What's narcissistic about buying someone a gift, an expensive one for that matter and expecting gratitude for your gesture? Gratitude is a trait that any woman who wants to be in a man's life should have. No matter how small or big it is, you have done for her, it should be accompanied by an enthusiastic "thank you" clapping her hands on her knees

It shows appreciation of your efforts. The problem with modern women is they feel entitled to all these things. In their heads, men owe them the princess treatment. Don't let these women shame you for expecting gratitude for your efforts, it's your money that you spent on her, she should be grateful

When you give a woman money or buy her a gift, you have just given her a portion of your life - that's your blood, sweat and time you've given her. Don't tolerate ingratitude. let her go [See less](#)

Figure 20: Expectations and Gratitude

Responses to the post indicated that the amount of money spent on a gift does not matter if there is no thought put into the gift or your partner. Researchers found further posts illustrating the danger of financially-driven relationships. In one post, an account details a man arrested for stealing a birthday gift because his girlfriend threatened to end the relationship if he did not get her a gift. Another user recounts sponsoring a woman's lifestyle for several years, only for his partner to leave once she became financially independent.



Facebook profile

ID: 916817141292474

🕒 30 Dec 2025, 13:43

Expensive gift doesn't mean = more effort. Sometimes it's the "easy way out". Not much thought/effort put into it. A great gift is whatever a person really wants from you at that time. It could be your time, your company, your advice, your support in the mundane things. LOVE wins over money EVERYTIME

Expecting someone to be excited about a gift YOU think is great IS narcissistic. [See less](#)



Queen Luci Baloyi

queenluci.baloyi • 18 Sep 2025, 13:41

SAD 💔💔💔💔💔😭 This man you see in the photo was caught stealing, not because he wanted luxury, but because he was desperate to make his girlfriend happy. ❤️

It was her birthday, and she told him straight: "If you don't buy me something, we're done."

The problem? He's unemployed, struggling, with nothing in his pocket.

So out of pressure and fear of losing her, he went into a store to steal — just to keep his relationship alive.

Now look at him... in tears. Not only because he's headed to jail, but because after everything, he's still going to lose her.

The saddest part? He risked his freedom, his dignity, and his future — for someone who only valued him for what he could buy. 😭❤️ copied



Kwenisto Makgakga

Makwena • 9 Oct 2025, 02:38

This is the same girl I've been posting all over my social media accounts. The girl I've been sponsoring for the whole 5 years since 2020. The girl whom I introduced her to this fancy lifestyle y'all think she's living. Well I've been more of her Father than I was her Boyfriend. I paid every single thing for her. Now she got a Job in Studio 88 Tzaneen Mall recently, and started fucking with this guy called Chris from Lenyenye working in the same Studio 88 shop in Tzaneen Mall.

So in just 4 months of working, a girl who had absolutely nothing in the past years, living under my roof almost everyday, can now finally pay her own Bills and I'm no longer her type anymore. Story of my life 😭❤️

By Real Frankie Rams cheated by Koketso Leseka [See less](#)

Figure 20: Financially-Driven Relationships

Fatherhood also reflected in the conversation, with a father named Solomon posted a plea for help after being **left by the mother of his two young children**. He describes the difficulty of being a single father without a job or proper identification for his children, seeking food assistance and guidance.



Untold Stories from Kasi

9 Dec 2025, 13:29

💔😞 I am struggling my children needs help their mother left us since March
My name is Solomon. I am a father of two young children. Their mother left us,
leaving the children in my care. I'm located at ext 11 Khuma and I have all the
necessary documents to prove that the children were born here in South Africa. I
need my children to have IDs. I had to leave my job to take care of them; it's tough.
There's no food, and they don't have identities. Their mother is from Lesotho.

DONATE HERE

Bank: Capitec

Account Holder: Mr S. Mabbasso

Account Number: 1482899785

Reference: Solomon Children Support

📞 063 393 7821

For information :0746933606

I have a copy of her passport. My baby boy is 1 year and 3 months old, and my
daughter is 3 years old. Since their mother left, I have been fully responsible for
taking care of both children alone. I am trying my best to provide for them and
ensure they are safe, healthy, and cared for during this difficult time.

I am asking for support, guidance, or any assistance that can help me continue
caring for my children while we wait for their mother to return or clarify the
situation.

SupportSingleDads #ChildrenDeserveBetter #AbandonedChildren #Fatherhood
#SouthAfrica #IDSupport #FoodAssistance #FamilyInNeed" [See less](#)

Figure 21: Fatherhood and Abandonment

While some users offered sympathy and guidance, others questioned whether the child was his and stated that he should go for DNA testing to confirm. His public plea for assistance was also criticised, suggesting that he should go and work. One commenter specifically noted a perceived trend of women from Lesotho leaving families because they may have marriages elsewhere.

**Facebook profile**

ID: 747556095100924

🕒 16 Dec 2025, 06:04

Try reatsotella or programs related to them they can help with dna testing

**Facebook profile**

ID: 862714169844952

🕒 15 Dec 2025, 14:38

You are a phenomenal father indeed god bless you on this tough journey this is the second case about Lesotho woman they just runaway and leave kids cause they are married at their original places afraid to carry kids with them. [See less](#)

What if you find out that the kids aren't yours?

**Facebook profile**

ID: 865331642933754

🕒 13 Dec 2025, 13:12

WE WOMEN RAISE OUR KIDS ALONE AND STRUGGLE WITH THE KIDS..
WHY CANT MEN DO THE SAME THING AND RAISE THEIR KIDS IN PEACE AS WE WOMEN DO..BESE
KUTHIWA AMANTOMBAZANE AY AHLANYA UMA ETHUKA ABAFANA ITS ALL BECAUSE OF SUCH
THINGS,THEY WAY YOU FEEL DEPRESSED WOMEN ARE LIKE THAT TOO ..
YOU HAVE A FAMILY STOP ASKING MONEY FROM PPL,UKUZEHLISA ISTHUNZI LOKHO...
ASK FOR JOBS KOMAKHELEWANE DO GARDENS,WASH CARS,TEKKIES START LAUNDRY BUSINESS...
WHICH MEANS LABANTWANA ABAKAZE BAJOVE EMPILWENI(IMMUNIZATION)
GO TO POLICE STATION MAKE AFFIDAVIT AND STATE YOUR PROBLEM,GO TO CLINIC LAPHO
ABAZALELWA KHONA AND ASK FOR BIRTH RECORDS THEN HO TO HOME AFFAIRS AFTER GO TO
COURT ,THEY WILL DO DNAS IF YOU'RE A S.A CITIZEN YOUR KIDS WILL HAVE CERTIFICATE...ITS A
PROCESS KONA [See less](#)

**Facebook profile**

ID: 1370645451462185

🕒 12 Dec 2025, 14:54

I feel your pain brother bcoz majority of women they love you when you're walking into the light but immediately dark time comes they disappear like they never looked into your eyes and made a vow that they'll be with you till death [See less](#)

Figure 22: Responses to Figure 21

Discussion

The data highlights several persistent themes that shape contemporary masculine identity in South Africa. Financial provision remains a cornerstone of societal expectation, depicted both as a source of pride and a significant mental health burden. Conversations reveal anxiety over economic roles, with some men expressing resentment toward perceived financial dependence, while others advocate for shared economic responsibility as a path to reduced stress and improved relationships. Similarly, caregiving and emotional labor are prominently debated. While traditional norms often relegate nurturing roles to women, counter-narratives emerge of men actively participating in childcare and partner support, particularly in contexts like healthcare. However, the dominant discourse still frames motherhood as inherently more taxing and permanent, underscoring the deeply ingrained gendered division of domestic labor.

The analysis of popular posts reveals a social media environment where accountability and backlash co-exist. Encouragingly, there are visible efforts by some men to reject harmful norms like the “bro code” when it excuses violence against women. Yet, these progressive stances often meet with ridicule, deflection, or accusations of being a “simp,” illustrating the strong social enforcement of hegemonic masculinity. This dynamic points to a significant “perception gap” — many men, especially younger ones, may wish to move beyond rigid norms but fear social ostracisation for misspeaking or challenging peers.

Posts about raising boys—highlighting neglected lessons in hygiene, emotional care, and basic life skills—critique a culture that often fails to equip young men with tools for holistic well-being, instead priming them for performance of toughness or financial success. This connects to concerns about a lack of accessible, positive role models beyond idealised celebrities or historical figures, leaving a vacuum filled by often-toxic online influencers.

The Facebook data reflects a society grappling with shifting gender roles and the tension between traditional expectations of masculinity and modern relationship realities. There is a clear divide between those viewing relationships through a transactional/financial lens and those prioritising emotional support, set against the backdrop of concern regarding abandonment and expectations.

Comparative Analysis

Both reports underscore the persistence of traditional, dominant masculine norms (hegemonic masculinity) in the South African social media context. The core expectations regarding a man's role remained largely unchanged in the analysis:

Firstly, Provision and Leadership continue to be central to masculine identity. The [2024 Gender Norms Report](#) summarized masculine expectations along the lines that men should “provide” and be “strong”. Financial provision and leadership roles were defined as primary societal expectations for men. This Report confirms that financial provision remains a cornerstone expectation, noting that the conversation still reflects these societal demands.

Secondly, the contradictory norm of Absentee Fatherhood and the unequal burden of care persist as themes of discussion. The initial report observed the prevalence of absent fathers, which was seen to contradict the stated masculine ideal of responsibility and provision,. The later conversation confirms this theme, focusing on the disproportionate burden of care on women, with accounts noting that men often have the option to take a break or not participate in caregiving at all.

Finally, the underpinning association of masculinity with Strength, Aggression, and Avoidance of Vulnerability remains consistent. The [2024 Gender Norms Report](#) detailed that male friendships were often questioned for being shallow, lacking accountability, and offering no emotional support, as emotions were generally not something men were attuned to. This aligns with the historical association of hegemonic masculinity with the performance of violence, aggression, and the avoidance of weakness.

The key divergence in this report is the deliberate shift away from merely defining dominant norms toward examining the discourse around “positive masculinity” and the tangible effects of traditional norms on men's well-being.

One significant difference is the re-framing of the financial provision norm as a mental health issue. While the prior report noted financial constraints led to “frustration and degradation”, the GBV Report 4 explicitly highlighted the financial burden placed on men as a key contributor to declining mental well-being. Counter-narratives in the later data actively advocated for shared economic responsibility as a means of reducing stress and improving quality of life for men.

The conversation shifted to critiquing the notion that “boys are easier to raise than girls”, which results in boys being neglected in terms of hygiene, emotional care, and basic life

skills, thus priming them only for toughness or financial performance. Critically, the report documented instances where men attempted to reject harmful norms, such as abandoning the “bro code” when it excuses rape and abuse. However, these progressive stances often met with sharp social media backlash, including being ridiculed or called a “simp”,. This dynamic illustrates the strong social enforcement of hegemonic masculinity and highlights the “perception gap”, where men fear social ostracization for challenging their peers.

Conclusion

The analysis of popular posts reveals that the social media environment is now a primary battleground where accountability and backlash fiercely coexist. Encouragingly, there are visible efforts by some men to reject harmful norms like the “bro code” when it is used to excuse violence against women. However, these progressive expressions are often met with swift social sanctioning, including ridicule, deflection, or accusations of being a “simp”,. This dynamic illustrates the strong social enforcement mechanisms used to maintain hegemonic masculinity.

The pervasive backlash highlights a significant challenge encapsulated by the “perception gap”, where men, particularly younger ones, may aspire to move beyond rigid norms but fear social ostracization for misspeaking or challenging their peers. This fear is rooted in a culture critiqued by posts discussing the socialization of boys, which often neglects to equip them with tools for holistic well-being (such as hygiene, emotional care, and basic life skills), instead priming them primarily for the performance of toughness or financial success.

Furthermore, the concept of “positive masculinity” itself is highly contested in academic and online discourse. While proponents argue that frameworks like Critical Positive Masculinity allow men to pragmatically negotiate traditional traits (like strength and autonomy) to support health-seeking behaviours, critics argue that attributing universal virtues to a gendered concept perpetuates patriarchal hierarchy and that the focus should instead be on “positive humanity”. This tension persists between validating men’s unique psychological experiences and maintaining the imperative to dismantle patriarchal harms.

Appendices

Appendix A - Primary Keywords

<<<Masculine Gender Norms>>>

((M?n OR boy* OR male* OR Indoda OR gent OR guy OR oke OR ou OR bru OR bro OR dude OR nigga OR husband OR Boyfriend OR Masc*) NEAR/1 (must OR mustn't OR "Must not" OR moet OR "moet nie" OR will OR won't OR wont OR "wou nie" OR do OR does OR doesn't OR "does not" OR dont OR don't OR doen OR could OR couldn't OR couldn OR cud OR cudnt OR should OR shouldn't OR can OR can't OR cant OR kan OR is OR was OR isn't OR isnt OR "is not" OR Are)) OR ("gendered behavior" OR "traditional gender roles" OR "gender roles" OR "gender stereotypes" OR "gender expectations")

OR

<<<Substance Use Disorder (Alcohol)>>>

((M?n OR boy* OR male* OR Indoda OR gent OR guy OR oke OR ou OR bru OR bro OR dude OR nigga OR husband OR Boyfriend) AND (Alcohol* OR Drink* OR Substance* OR Phuza OR Syp OR "black lable" OR "black label" OR whiskey OR vodka OR ngud OR dop))

OR

<<<Event-Based Insights>>>

(((Surname OR Name) AND (Court)) OR ((Paternity OR Parent* OR Maternity OR Mother OR Father) AND (Leave))))

<<<Exclusions>>>

AND

(NOT (Israel OR Palestine OR America OR US OR Mkhwanazi OR ANC OR EFF OR DA OR Malema OR Ramaphosa OR Commission OR Apartheid OR FIFA OR Sudan OR Premier))

Appendix B - Methodology



Using a query designed to capture the broad conversation about interactions between men and women, this report covers February 2023. 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 guided our research project.

Step 1: Data Discovery

- The first step in data discovery was to draw up a list of keywords designed to isolate the broad conversation about interactions between men and women in South Africa on social media. The research and dialogue facilitation teams contributed to this list collaboratively through a shared spreadsheet. The research team focuses on quantitative analysis while the dialogue team focuses on qualitative analysis of the conversation(s).
- 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.
- Our preliminary keyword list comprised

Step 2: Data Collection

- We “collected” the resulting data using our social media analytics platform.

Step 3: Data Preparation²

- We ‘prepared’ the data for analysis by refining the query. Query refinement entails sifting through the data set while looking for posts that are not relevant to interactions between

² New keywords and exclusions are identified both at the query and tag level on an ongoing basis.

men and women in South Africa. At this stage we also look at relevant posts that have not been included.

- 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 in this report, we created libraries of categories and tags to focus on the parts of online conversation that were most relevant for this project. This development of the categories and tags was 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 built 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.
- Thematic analysis involves studying the emerging patterns in the data and exploring how units of meaning connect to form themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can highlight individuals' perspectives, ideas and experiences, and can be used to generate fresh insight into the social dynamics behind human behaviour. Accordingly, we analysed the collected data thematically to interpret the data and to gain insight into dominant themes and trends.
- The goal of this analysis is to better understand what was said during the reporting period. Thematic analysis was conducted both at the query level and the tag (focus area) level.