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Norms Online**

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GENDER LINKS
FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

Executive Summary

This report examines how LGBTQIA+ identities, rights and communities are framed, contested and defended within South African social media discourse on X.com between 1 June 2025 and 31 May 2026. Drawing on more than 909 250 mentions from over 156 830 unique authors, the analysis shows that queer norms remain highly contested online: hostile narratives achieve significant reach, while affirming and resilience-focused narratives circulate with comparatively lower visibility. The report concludes that, despite South Africa's formal legal protections for LGBTQIA+ persons, online discourse reveals a persistent gap between legal recognition and normative social acceptance.

- **Intersectionality & Structural Inequality:** The conversation shows how trans identity, race, gender and public visibility intersect in online discourse. High-reach posts concerning transgender women in sport attracted significant hostility, with many users misgendering trans women or framing inclusion as a threat to women's sport. At the same time, lower-reach affirming posts celebrating transgender women of colour demonstrate that supportive communities exist, though their reach is smaller than hostile narratives.
- **Erasure and Marginalising Terminology:** The use of "gay" as a casual insult remains a prominent pattern in the dataset. These posts often detach the term from sexual orientation and use it to signal weakness, inadequacy or social failure. This everyday language functions as low-level norm enforcement, reinforcing heteronormative expectations and contributing to the cultural marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ identities.
- **Corrective Rape Rhetoric and Online Harm:** Posts condemning corrective rape gained substantial engagement, indicating widespread concern about this form of violence and its normalisation online. However, the continued circulation of corrective rape jokes and rhetoric suggests that condemnation alone is insufficient. The report identifies this discourse as a pathway through which online narratives may contribute to offline threat, especially for lesbian, bisexual and asexual women.
- **Historical Weaponisation and Objectification:** Some high-reach narratives position homosexuality and LGBTQIA+ identity as "un-African" or as a threat to African cultural continuity. These narratives invert the historical record by ignoring pre-colonial evidence of diverse gender and sexual practices, while also objectifying African women in attempts to exclude or delegitimise queer African identities. Counter-narratives challenge this framing, but tend to circulate with lower reach.
- **Pride Month, Celebration and Community Resilience:** Affirming posts linked to Pride Month, Transgender Day of Visibility and queer joy show that online spaces also function as sites of solidarity, self-expression and community-building. These narratives present queer identity as compatible with African heritage and offer important resistance to hostile frames, even though they are less amplified than anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives.

Introduction

Gender remains one of the most important and ever-present topics on social media. In its narrowest conception, the discussion hones in on what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman in modern society. In 2024, the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change released “An Exploration Into Gendered norms on South African Social Media” (“Gendered Norms Report”) which report covered three distinct focus areas: (i) Masculine norms; (ii) Feminine norms; and (iii) ‘Queer’ norms.

Data points under queer norms suggested that while the community is formally protected through legislation and regulations, the community still faces stigma in society and legislative protection has yet to achieve a normative impact on the community¹. Degradation of societal norms as well as the objectification of female bodies were presented as rationales behind why the queer community either cannot exist or should not exist in society. The report further acknowledged its limitations by providing avenues for further research which concerned, *inter alia*, positive online messaging around the community; **the use of fear-mongering in the queer community as well as ‘norms’ as socially constructed / negotiated against the moral framework of society at any point in time.**

This report is, therefore, the natural successor to part 3 of the Gendered Norms Report and hones in on conversation regarding the LGBTQIA+ community online, particularly on [X.com](#). Recognising that gender and by virtue, gender norms, extend beyond narrow conceptions of male and female, and that Gender-Based Violence extends to violence enacted on queer bodies - whether online or offline - this report supports Pillar 6 of South Africa's National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and extends the understanding of GBV specifically among social media users on [X.com](#) through the lens of queer norms.

Queer Norms

At the outset, this report utilizes the reclaimed word ‘queer’ as an all encompassing term for the LGBTQIA+ community with awareness of the context within which it developed. Reclamation, as espoused by Mihaela Popa-Wyatt, is a form of socio-political protest that seeks to re-shape oppressive social practices by controlling what can be done with words². Assigning and then attempting in defining a term for something as complex and consequential as gender identity will always result in inadequacies and simplification. The conversation has largely been shaped by two streams of philosophical thought: (1) is genderqueer identity best defined by its personal and descriptive content, or (2) by its collective and political role in challenging the binary system.

¹ CABAC, An exploration into Gendered Norms.

² <https://philpapers.org/archive/POPRTB.pdf>

A descriptive and personal definition of genderqueer focuses on the individual's sense of self, without requiring any particular political stance or collective action. Otis (2020) proffers the following as a descriptive and personal definition and defines genderqueer as "a person who has a gender identity that exists outside or beyond the gender binary by embracing a fluidity of gender that is not limiting. Someone who identifies as genderqueer may identify as neither male nor female; both; a combination of the two; or somewhere in between".³ A collective and political role definition of genderqueer focuses on social function and the systemic position of people who claim the identity. Dembroff (2018) defines genderqueer as "a category whose members collectively destabilize the binary axis, or the idea that the only possible genders are the exclusive and exhaustive kinds of men and women"⁴.

The difference between two is that the former is purely self-referential and emphasizes internal experience while the latter emphasizes the relationship to the binary system and requires a form of resistance (active or passive) and treats identity as socially and politically situated. It is not the purpose of this report to critique nor prefer one definition over another but, instead, to rely on the academic literature in support of and to explain the phenomena observed in the data gathering process.

Notwithstanding the above, and as illustrated in the Gender Norms Report, norm adherence and violations are both intrinsic and extrinsic. Individuals adhere and violate norms through both internalisation where norms are taught and reinforced from a young age through rewards and punishment as well as externalisation, which depends on the beliefs and through observation of others. Ultimately, therefore, both descriptive, personal definitions and collective, political philosophical thought will play a role in any evaluation of queer norms.

Queerphobia

A primary driver of contemporary queerphobia is the enduring legacy of colonial ideologies and missionary-imposed sexual moralities. Colonialism introduced heteronormative Christian beliefs replacing more fluid pre-colonial social roles with a rigid binary gender system.⁵ This history remains weaponised by post-apartheid political and religious leaders to label queer identities as a 'colonial import' or 'fundamentally un-African' despite extensive historical and linguistic evidence of same-sex practices in pre-colonial Southern African societies.

³ Otis, Hailey (2015) "Genderqueer: What It Means," *Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado*: Vol. 4: No. 3, Article 2.

⁴ Dembroff, Robin (2018). Real Talk on the Metaphysics of Gender. *Philosophical Topics* 46 (2):21-50.

⁵ Westman, C. S. (2023). *Colonialism and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: South Africa*. Free State Centre for Human Rights, University of the Free State

Educational systems compound the issue by functioning as a site for the policing of heteronormativity, as schools often proliferate “compulsory heterosexuality” through curricula, pedagogy, and rigid dress codes which assume all learners identify as heterosexual.⁶ Educational institutions are also critical points of socialisation where queer youth face isolation, bullying and assault from peers with complicity or active participation by teachers.⁷ Similarly, religious institutions frequently serve as vectors for queerphobia, utilizing biblical narratives to discredit and disqualify queer individuals from participation in spiritual life.⁸ The institutionalisation of exclusion often leads to profound alienation and verbal abuse with severe psychological and indeed, physical consequences on queer individuals.

In its most extreme manifestation, queerphobia results in hate crimes with a disproportionate effect on black queer women.⁹ “Corrective rape” is a widely documented phenomenon where queer women are sexually assaulted with the stated punitive intent of “curing” them of their orientation.¹⁰ These targeted attacks are often characterized by excessive brutality and serve as a method of patriarchal social control over women who transgress traditional gender norms.

Furthermore, queerphobia directly exacerbates health risks by creating barriers to essential services. Social stigma and the fear of secondary victimization by health providers often lead queer individuals to delay or avoid medical care, particularly for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.¹¹ This environment of “walking on eggshells” contributes to high levels of anxiety, depression, and self-hatred, as individuals are forced to continuously update peers and family on their whereabouts to ensure their physical safety.¹²

The impact of queerphobia is not uniform; it is profoundly shaped by the intersection of race, class, and geographic location.¹³ While affluent queer individuals in urban suburbs may enjoy some constitutional protections, those in impoverished townships remain highly vulnerable to environmental insecurity and mob violence.¹⁴ For these individuals, the struggle for a “sense of belonging” is a constant negotiation between their queer identity and their cultural heritage.¹⁵ Ultimately, addressing queerphobia requires moving beyond identity

⁶ Francis, D. A. (2017). “Homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools: A review.” *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 14(4), 1–21

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Resane, K. T. (2020). “Theological dialogue towards ethical restoration in a homophobia-riddled society.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 76(4)

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Abaver, D. T., & Cishe, E. N. (2018). “Violence, abuse and discrimination: key factors militating against control of HIV/AIDS among the LGBTI sector.” *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, 15(1), 60–70

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Supra* note 4.

¹³ Mkhize, N., Bennett, J., Reddy, V., & Moletsane, R. (2010). *The country we want to live in: Hate crimes and homophobia in the lives of black lesbian South Africans*. Cape Town: HSRC Press

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ludt, S. (2023). *Coming Out in South Africa: What’s Beyond the Closet?* SIT Digital Collections. Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, 3711

politics to a systemic deconstruction of the patriarchal and colonial discourses that continue to privilege heterosexuality at the expense of queer lives.

Within this context, we analyse queer norms within the South African context based on social media data.

Data Overview

The data for this report was collected from the social media platform X (previously Twitter). Publicly available social media data, within the South African context, was isolated from the period 1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026. The resulting dataset contained +909 250 mentions (posts, reposts, replies), of which 65% were retweets resulting in 275 400 original posts and replies. More than 156 830 unique authors took part in the conversation - representing an average individual contribution of 5 mentions per unique account (see Figure 1).

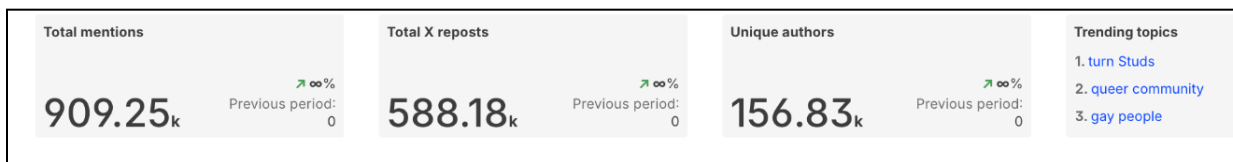


Figure 1: Metrics associated with the conversation

Breaking down the mention volume over time, by weeks of the time period, provides insight into narratives and events which saw heightened conversation around queer norms (See Figure 2).

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

Peak A: This Peak was driven by the hashtag #justiceforkwakhanya which was used to raise awareness and stimulate discussion around the tragic murder of a 16 year old child with reports indicating that the murder was a brutal homophobic attack. The community rallied for justice, and highlighted the ongoing violence against LGBTQIA+ community. [1] [2]

Peak B & C: Both peaks concerned corrective rape. The most engaged post under peak B concerned a story by a lesbian woman who experienced verbal abuse during high school based on her sexuality and had an individual attempt “corrective rape” on her later in life. The second is similarly condemning corrective rape and the importance of labelling it as rape. These two posts were engaged heavily in South Africa. [1] [2]

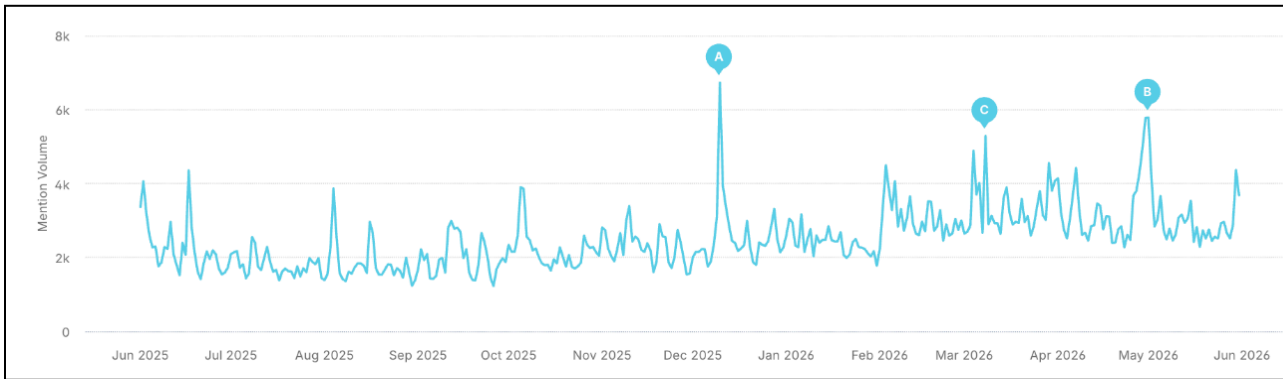


Figure 2: Mention Volume Over Time

The trending topics visualisation showcases phrases, hashtags and keywords which reflects topics that are trending, constant or fading in the conversation, measured by trending score and mention volume (Figure 3). The visualisation shows that the phrases, hashtags and keywords tend towards the trending. The phrase “turn Studs” reflects a viral post which calls out straight men attempting to have sexual intercourse with lesbian women in an attempt to turn them straight. “Wendy and Diana” refers to two women who were arrested and charged for kissing in public.

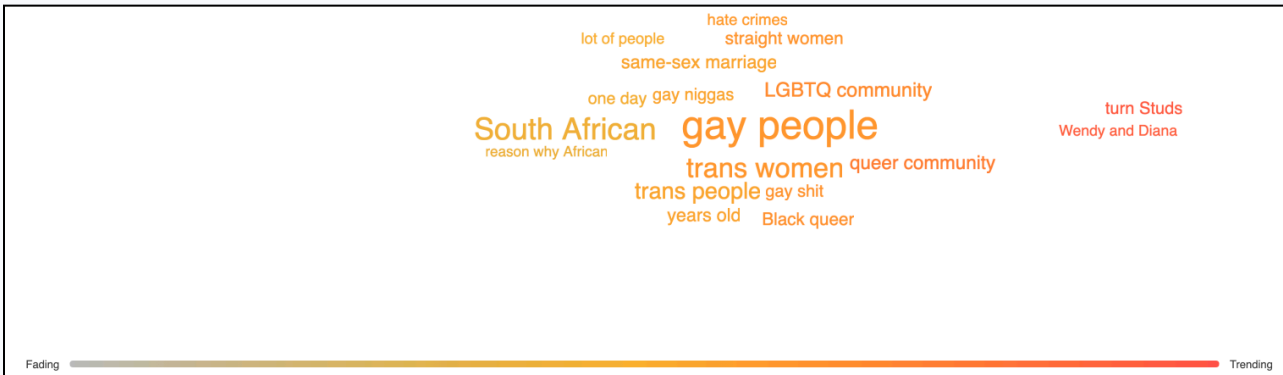


Figure 3: Trending Graph

Below is a topic wheel, which characterises the major themes contained within the data in the centre circle, with subtopics forming the periphery, and suggests that the conversation largely focused on intersectionality, religion, violence with slang casual referring to uncharacterised posts calling individuals or a general audience as “gay” in an insulting manner. The dominant themes shall be investigated more fully below.



Figure 4: Topic Wheel of Themes and Sub-themes

Thematic Selection

Four themes were selected for deep narrative analysis based on prevalence, engagement, sentiment patterns and alignment with the research objectives around LGBTQI+ health, safety and social norms. These are: (1) Intersectionality; (2) Erasure & Marginalising Terminology ; (3) Cultural Nationalism; and (4) Community Resilience.

This report analyses, across the themes, how LGBTQI+ identities, rights and communities are framed, contested and defended within digital discourse. The analysis surfaces narrative framing, implied social norms, forms of harm as well as support. It should be noted that the posts are treated as evidence of online narrative patterns, not as proof of offline prevalence or representative of all South African opinion. Though this report carefully distinguishes between observed online narratives and offline social reality, it is trite that online discourse both reflects and shapes norms yet at the same time, does not determine them.

Amplification and presence on social media does not equate to majority opinion, and absence from the dataset does not indicate absence from lived experiences.

Intersectionality & Structural Inequality

High reach posts from eNCA (news media) concerned Caster Semenya expressing anger at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) President, Kirsty Coventry, for banning transgender women athletes. Semenya's comments were largely received quite negatively with many supporting the decision by the IOC with many framing the issue as not allowing "men to compete with women". Irrespective of the the IOC President's decision, it is notable that there remains strong opposition to trans people and their identities with many commenters referring to and labelling transwomen as "men" or "ex men" or, indeed, as not women.

On the flip side, a post celebrating transgender women of colour gained significant support (but significantly less reach than the IOC post) with 3.900 likes and several comments in support. It is notable that this post managed to obtain such significant support indicating that while there remains opposition to acceptance of the queer community, there is a steady support for them found on social media as well.

The posts and their comments can be found below:

Key Posts

Post	Author	Date	Link
Two-time Olympic champion Caster Semenya is angry. She slammed the IOC President, Kirsty Coventry, over a decision to ban transgender women athletes.	@eNCA	2026-03-30	http://twitter.com/eNCA/statuses/2038514190252482998
Transgender women of colour. 🏳️‍🌈	@gemini_natasha	2026-03-20	http://twitter.com/gemini_natasha/statuses/2035037169329270855

Erasure and Marginalising Terminology

The dominant narrative frame treats "gay" as a casual insult or descriptor of undesirable behaviour, divorced from sexual orientation. Posts ask "Is he gay?" in response to perceived weakness, poor behaviour, or

aesthetic choices. Examples include: "@MtotoAfrika_: Is he a gay?"; "@BoogieHarrySA: Why dis nigga always talking like he gay 🙄". This usage reflects what sociolinguists term "heteronormative slang," wherein "gay" functions as a floating signifier of deviance or inadequacy rather than as a descriptor of identity. The pattern suggests that whilst LGBTQI+ identities may be formally recognised, the cultural association of queerness with failure, weakness, or undesirability remains deeply embedded in everyday language.

Notably, this theme does not engage with LGBTQI+ identity politics, rights, or community narratives. Instead, it treats "gay" as a free-floating insult available for any context. A post from @reefcity_ exemplifies this: "There's a guy on TikTok whose girl told him that she was pregnant 🙄🙄bro turned gay all of a sudden." Here, "gay" is invoked to describe a man's perceived failure to accept paternity—a usage entirely disconnected from sexual orientation. This pattern suggests that homophobic language operates at the level of casual, unreflective norm-enforcement rather than as deliberate political opposition to LGBTQI+ rights.

The literature on gender norms identifies that norm violations are policed through both explicit sanction and casual, distributed mockery. This theme exemplifies the latter: the constant, low-level association of queerness with failure and inadequacy functions to reinforce heteronormative expectations without requiring explicit argumentation. For LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly young people navigating identity formation, exposure to such language contributes to internalised stigma and shame. The data does not measure psychological impact, but the narrative pattern aligns with literature on how everyday language shapes norm adherence and violation.

Key Posts

Post	Author	Link
Is he a gay?	@MtotoAfrika_	http://twitter.com/MtotoAfrika_/status/1993028255721681127
Why dis nigga always talking like he gay 🙄	@BoogieHarrySA	http://twitter.com/BoogieHarrySA/status/2013741772644425769
There's a guy on TikTok whose girl told him that she was pregnant...bro turned gay all of a sudden	Various	https://x.com/reefcity_/status/1995831251887116367?s=20

Posts from @IC11O1 and @Merpetuality extend the analysis to intersectional dimensions: "lesbians call men ugly on here and everyone lose their minds. but when men make corrective rape jokes about lesbians, when men joke about the misconstrued dv stats, no one bats an eye"; "Bi and asexual women also face the brunt of corrective rape but that don't matter ig cause you can just choose to be straight". These posts identify how queerphobia operates selectively—lesbian women are simultaneously hypersexualised and delegitimised, whilst bi and asexual women's experiences are erased. The literature on queerphobia identifies that Black queer women face disproportionate risk of corrective rape.

A post from @liliaslamb notes: "It's not giving rapey vibes that shit is corrective rape mentality and I don't want to be friends or be associated with anyone with this gross ass mindset." This suggests that naming corrective rape rhetoric as unacceptable is becoming a norm-setting practice within activist spaces. However, the fact that such naming requires explicit assertion indicates that the norm is not yet universal. Another post from @bbyriddim states: "lesbians highkey need to be armed cause people are way too comfortable spreading corrective rape rhetoric." This invocation of self-defence suggests that online rhetoric is understood as connected to offline threat, and that the digital circulation of corrective rape narratives is experienced as a form of violence in itself.

The circulation of corrective rape rhetoric online may function as a form of normalisation that makes the actual crime seem less aberrant, or that primes perpetrators to view corrective rape as a justified response to lesbian identity. The high engagement with posts condemning corrective rape suggests that there is significant concern about this rhetoric, yet the fact that the rhetoric continues to circulate widely indicates that condemnation alone is insufficient to contain it.

Key Posts

Post	Author	Date	Link
Rape still rape, btw. Even if the purpose is to make someone 'normal.' It's called corrective rape	@kootoshidayo	2026-03-07	https://x.com/kootoshidayo/status/2030277274902331691?s=20
non lesbians jack off to corrective rape fics...calling corrective rape DYKE BREAKING	@canibalesbians	2025-12-18	http://twitter.com/canibalesbians/s

[tatuses/2049978](#)

[392456368620](#)

lesbians highkey need to be armed cause people are way too comfortable spreading corrective rape rhetoric	Various	2026-04-14	https://x.com/bbyriddim/status/2044158275847872991?s=20
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Historical Weaponisation and Objectification

As noted above, the literature identifies that “colonialism introduced heteronormative Christian beliefs replacing more fluid pre-colonial social roles with a rigid binary gender system” and that “this history remains weaponised by post-apartheid political and religious leaders to label queer identities as a ‘colonial import’ or ‘fundamentally un-African’ despite extensive historical and linguistic evidence of same-sex practices in pre-colonial African societies. Discourse online directly instantiates this weaponisation. By asserting that homosexuality is un-African, these posts invert the historical record and position queer identity as a threat to African values and cultural continuity.

Counter narratives emerged in the theme, however, at lower reach. One post states “Imagine going to Kwa Mai-Mai, thinking your fellow Zulu people will back your homophobic views, only to find out they're actually pro-LGBTQ+ and you're the odd one out.” Another post noted that “Ghana, is in the Ghana that tried to paint South Africa as an inhuman nation now has it in LAW that others are acceptable in society as they are [heterosexual] and others are criminal will face incarceration for being queer publicly’. This continental and regional framing highlights the tension in Africa, where the queerness has been positioned as a “colonial import” and Africa, as a whole, must resist “Western values”. This harmful and incorrect positioning continues to lead to queer bodies facing persecution in African society.

It is notable that African women are also objectified in pursuit of the exclusion with one post noting “Another reason why African Men can not be homosexual” which captions an video of women dancing. This type of humour hides an insidious comment where the value of African women are in their bodily features while simultaneously erasing the gay community in Africa.

By positioning queer identity as fundamentally foreign, these narratives create a framework in which queer Africans are positioned as inauthentic or as threats to African continuity. This framing may reinforce offline discrimination and violence by providing a cultural justification for exclusion.

Key Posts

Post	Author	Date	Link
Africa is saving the world population from declining by have their men marry women from Europe since most of the men in Europe are gays	@zoomafrika1	2025-12-13	http://twitter.com/zoomafrika1/statuses/1999819682644209912
Another reason why African Men can not be homosexual	@zoomafrika1	2025-07-06	http://twitter.com/zoomafrika1/statuses/1941935298092388558
Imagine going to Kwa Mai-Mai...only to find out they're actually pro-LGBTQ+	Various	2025-10-05	https://x.com/SyntaxSavvy/status/1974829998331613693?s=20

Pride Month, Celebration and Community Resilience.

While there remains harmful and hateful speech directed towards the queer community online, the online space has also increasingly become a place of affirmation through the celebration of Pride Month posts, which occurs in June every year. Pride Month is an annual observance celebrated globally to honor the LGBTQ+ community, commemorate the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan, and promote equality, visibility, and queer joy. While these posts are addressed to specific communities or individuals rather than the general audience, they are representative of queer individuals taking pride in their sexuality and identity.

During this period, support for the community is more visible and individuals are often empowered to share their stories or make decisions that they would otherwise not be empowered to do. In one instance, an author posted “Celebrating International Transgender Day of Visibility As a proud Xhosa transgender woman, deeply

rooted in my heritage”. These posts present an opportunity for the queer community to celebrate who they are as well as serving as an implicit counter against the narrative that queer identity is un-African.

Key Posts

Post	Author	Date	Link
It's pride month my baby 🙄👩🏻❤️	@Fikaflexi	2025-06-17	http://twitter.com/Fikaflexi/statuses/1934947592279916814
Happy Pride Month Kat ❤️❤️	@HisMajestyMoh	2025-06-02	http://twitter.com/HisMajestyMoh/statuses/1929535958824665179
Celebrating International Transgender Day of Visibility 🏳️🌈❤️🇺🇸 As a proud Xhosa transgender woman	Various	2026-03-31	https://x.com/ayamkela_n99/status/2038980892702429670?s=20

Cross-Cutting Findings

Normalisation of Harm Rhetoric

Corrective rape rhetoric, homophobic slang, and exclusionary sports arguments circulate widely and with high engagement, suggesting a degree of normalisation. The circulation of corrective rape in fanfiction spaces, the casual use of homophobic slang in everyday discourse, and the assertion of exclusionary sports policies as common-sense positions all indicate that harm narratives have become embedded in online discourse. This normalisation may contribute to the barriers to healthcare, safety, and belonging identified in the literature review.

Intersectionality and Vulnerability

Trans and lesbian identities face compounded harm narratives. Trans women are positioned as threats to cisgender women's sport; lesbians face corrective rape rhetoric; and trans women of colour are largely absent as speaking subjects in high-reach discourse. The theme of intersectionality reveals how multiple forms of marginalisation (gender, sexuality, race, class) compound to create specific vulnerabilities. However, the low

reach of affirming intersectional narratives (e.g., trans women of colour celebrating their identity) suggests that these counter-narratives do not achieve the visibility necessary to shift broader norms.

Cultural Nationalism as a Justification for Exclusion

The assertion that LGBTQI+ identity is un-African or a colonial import is weaponised to justify exclusion and to position queer Africans as inauthentic. This narrative is particularly powerful because it appeals to cultural authenticity and continuity, and because it inverts the historical record (which shows that pre-colonial African societies had more fluid gender and sexual norms). The high reach of these narratives suggests that cultural nationalism is an effective frame for mobilising opposition to LGBTQI+ rights.

Slippage Between Online and Offline

While legislative protections exist for LGBTQI+ persons in South Africa, online discourse reveals persistent stigma, religious opposition, and cultural nationalism arguments that position queer identity as illegitimate. The literature review identifies that these online narratives may reinforce offline discrimination and violence.

Community Resilience and Allyship

Despite the dominance of hostile narratives, affirming and resilience-focused content does circulate, primarily within smaller communities. Pride Month celebrations, trans visibility affirmations, and ally solidarity posts suggest that online spaces can function as sites of community-building and resistance.

Religious Opposition as a Persistent Frame

Religious opposition to LGBTQI+ identity circulates in the dataset, with posts citing biblical passages and asserting that homosexuality is sinful. However, counter-narratives also emerge, with some posts reinterpreting biblical passages to affirm LGBTQI+ identity. This contestation may reflect broader theological debates within South African religious communities.

Conclusion

The report identifies several pathways through which online narratives may contribute to offline harm. The normalisation of corrective rape rhetoric, the circulation of homophobic slang as casual discourse, and the weaponisation of cultural nationalism to justify exclusion all create a discursive environment in which queer identity is positioned as illegitimate. These narratives may reinforce the barriers to healthcare, safety, and belonging identified in the literature review, and may contribute to the documented violence against queer persons, particularly trans women and lesbians.

However, the report also identifies counter-narratives and sites of resilience. Affirming posts, trans visibility celebrations, and ally solidarity suggest that online spaces can function as sites of community-building and resistance. The circulation of posts condemning corrective rape, the challenge to cultural nationalism narratives, and the affirmation of trans identity as compatible with African heritage all indicate that queer norms are being actively negotiated and contested online.

The report concludes that while legislative protections exist for LGBTQI+ persons in South Africa, online discourse reveals a significant gap between legal protection and normative social acceptance. The dominance of hostile narratives on X/Twitter suggests that queer norms remain contested and that queer persons continue to face substantial barriers to belonging and safety. Addressing these barriers will require not only continued legal protection but also sustained efforts to shift the narrative frames that dominate online discourse and to amplify affirming and resilience-focused counter-narratives.

This report should be read as a snapshot of a specific moment in a rapidly evolving discursive landscape. The themes and narratives identified here may shift as new events, policies, or cultural moments emerge. Continued monitoring of LGBTQI+ narratives on social media will be necessary to track changes in sentiment, amplification, and the emergence of new narrative frames.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Primary Keywords

(moffie* OR isitabane ORstabane OR"corrective rape" ORinkonkoni OR izitabane
ORiinyumba OR imoffie OR Skeef OR Talase OR Poefter ORisingqumo OR skesana OR
isikhesana OR Ungqingili OR skomoro OR ((LGBTQ* OR gay* OR
lesbian* OR bisexual* OR Queer* OR Pansexual OR asexual OR androgynous OR transgender
OR Transsexual OR (trans AND (Wom?n OR person OR m?n OR youth)) OR genderfluid OR
"non binary" OR non-binary OR genderqueer OR intersex OR same-sex OR "same sex" OR
"sexual minority" OR "gender minority" OR "Sexual orientation" OR "sexual identity"
OR sodomy OR homophobi* OR homosexual OR grindr OR "gay marriage" OR dyke OR fag OR
faggot OR heterophobia OR heterosexual OR Cishet OR "gender identity" OR "gender
expression" OR "pride month" OR "pride parade" OR "pride march" OR "out and proud")
AND country:ZAF)



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 Preparation¹⁶

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

¹⁶ New keywords and exclusions are identified both at the query and tag level on an ongoing basis.

- 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.