



horizon

DIGITAL ECONOMY RESEARCH

**The impact of online
misogyny and sexism
on participation
and wellbeing**



Engineering and
Physical Sciences
Research Council

Warning: This report contains language and/or material that may be distressing

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Executive summary

Misogyny online is a significant global problem. According to various reports, women who either personally experience or witness online misogynistic speech self-censor, de-platform, or reduce their interaction in online spaces and public life.

Women who have multiple intertwined marginalised identities (e.g. race, disability, sexuality) and women in the public eye are more impacted¹. Self-exclusion from online participation due to fears regarding harms that may result from this, means that the world is deprived of important perspectives from users who have expertise or experiences that are valuable to the conversation.

The “Gendernet” project sought to explore experiences of misogyny online to identify new modes of interaction that support the online participation of women. This report presents the experiences of our participants in their own words. Our participants narrate their own experiences with online misogyny and the effect that it has on their digital participation.

This report also outlines the ways that the law is attempting to respond to online misogyny and provides links to some important resources for anyone who has experienced behaviours of the types identified in this document. Of course, some of the things that have been experienced by our participants may be traumatising, both to them and to those who read this report. However, it is important to bring this to light in order that there can be a serious discussion regarding the ways that online misogyny can be combatted.

Finally, it is important to note that this report can only present a snapshot of the data that was uncovered during the “Gendernet” project. We hope that this report is the start, not the end, of efforts to make a better online world, where everyone can participate without having to worry about the response that they will receive due to gender inequality.

In summary, this report has two main purposes:

A

To give a voice to people who are often silenced in social media because of fear, past traumatic personal experiences or exposure to normalised misogyny.

B

To provide a brief overview of the recent efforts to confront online misogyny by regulatory initiatives and share practical resources to support and empower individuals experiencing either personal attacks or fear.

¹ Gaspanicova D. (2021), *Violence against women politicians: An unacceptable cost of gender equality*. Glitch, UK (2023) “The Digital Misogynoir Report: Ending the dehumanising of Black women on social media” <https://glitchcharity.co.uk/our-work/research-digital-misogynoir-report>

Introduction

Our survey is one of several studies that examine issues of misogyny, sexism and antifeminist speech and highlight the impact of this phenomenon on online participation¹.

An Alan Turing Institute survey shows women feel more vulnerable to online harms and are significantly less willing to participate publicly online, with only 23% comfortable expressing political views versus 40% of men.² According to a survey conducted for Amnesty International UK (2025) with 3,032 participants (young adults aged between 18 to 25 in UK), women use social media more than men and more passively. The survey suggests that 61% of Gen Z are using social media more than 4 hours per day (65% women vs 56% men). Nearly three quarters (73%) of all participants have encountered misogynistic content on social media (77% of women vs 69% of men). Overall, 53% of Gen Z online users are exposed to misogynistic content at least weekly. One in five (20%) women say they have left or avoided certain platforms after seeing misogynistic content online.³

The media disseminate these surveys and frame the discussion about online misogyny in terms of victimisation. Women are often presented as targets and legitimately feel vulnerable, upset, frustrated and feared. These behaviours influence their mental health and self-image.

This presentation of our research findings attempts to add another angle. Female participants are exposed to misogyny and sexism. Most of them respond by protecting their privacy/identity online and participating more passively (not posting, commenting or responding to misogynistic comments) to save their time and energy and to protect their wellbeing. There are, of course, exceptions, women who fight back, but they declare that they do not find it particularly impactful. They also express empathy for public women who are targeted, recognising the personal cost they pay for speaking, and admire their resilience.

Although they are often silenced, our female participants have lots of thoughts, concerns, visions, requests and suggestions. All of these calm and collected opinions are kept out of the public sphere, as they are not publicly shared, so they cannot become a useful source for further discussion about how to view issues of gender equality and the causes of increased online misogyny. The purpose of this report is to give voice to their experiences of silencing and make visible their often-invisible concerns, thoughts and ideas.

73%
of all Gen Z participants have
encountered misogynistic
content on social media,
Amnesty International UK

- 1 Watson, S. <https://pure.york.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/taking-on-the-world-tackling-gender-based-violence-in-the-online-/>. British Society of Criminology, University of Brighton
- 2 Stevens, F. et al (2024, March). Understanding gender differences in experiences and concerns surrounding online harms: [A nationally representative survey of UK adults](#). The Alan Turing Institute
- 3 GenZ in the UK, Perceptions and experiences of misogyny on social media, A Savanta report for Amnesty International UK (March 2025). <https://savanta.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/P044375-Amnesty-International-Gen-Z-and-Online-Misogyny-Savanta-Report-March-2025-1.pdf>

Gendered Exclusion and Wellbeing project (Gendernet)

The *Gendernet* project, led by Dr Anna-Maria Piskopani, examines the various efforts of gendered exclusion in the digital public sphere, especially in relation to misogynistic, sexist, and antifeminist speech. The project was funded by UKRI EPSRC-funded Horizon Digital Economy Research as part of a Welfare Campaign.

As part of the project, we interviewed thirty-one people, members of the University of Nottingham (staff and students) about their online experience. Our study involved twelve UK staff, three international staff, nine UK students and six international students. Twenty-six identified as women, two as men and three as non-binary. Their ages ranged between 18 and 65. Thirty of our participants currently used social media and one had done previously but no longer did.

Our key findings were:

All participants witnessed incidents of online misogyny and online hostility. Few female and non-binary participants said that they have experiences of personal attacks, and all female participants have a sense of normalisation of this phenomenon. All participants claim that to safeguard their mental wellbeing and privacy and identity, they try to minimise their interaction with social media. Female participants shared that they attempt to curate their online experience to avoid the exposure. Their strategy for navigating social media is to minimise sharing personal views on posts or comments and occasionally self-deplatform. Two participants shared a fear of exposure and backlash – simply for being a woman who speaks online.

“If someone is going to comment on something, I can guarantee you it'll be anything to do with my gender”

Female participants withdraw from actively participating online but silently are deeply concerned and worried about how this affects them. There is also unease about what such attitudes reveal about men – whether known personally or not – and a desire to understand what sociopolitical shifts led to this climate. They also express a fear for future gender equality and the role of women in society.

Finally, most participants questioned whether enough is being done to address their negative experiences and if there is enough public conversation about these topics. They stress that moderation, transparency and accountability are critical to create safe and inclusive online spaces. Most importantly, they identify a need to find new ways to encourage people to think about the impact of their online experiences on their lives and the lives of others.

In this report we are going to present their responses. We chose responses from women and non-binary people, as they are most affected by this form of violence and culture. Of course, this is a small part of our study, and we can only present a snapshot of the responses here, but we hope that we do justice to the insightful, and often courageous, ways that our participants engaged with the process.

In their own words

What is the value of using social media?

Most interviewees found there are still benefits to using social media, such as being informed, sharing information, connecting with family and friends, and using it for professional reasons. Participants with disabilities, non-binary participants and activists found it particularly useful to reach their communities. Few feel there is little point in participating in such spaces and most express disappointment with the current state of social media, which they see as being dominated by extreme, polarised content.

“It is like a window to the world because I remember a time when it wasn't a thing. It's much easier to access information that other people share and it's much easier to share information that I chose to, with other people”

“It feels that it is less centrally guided as a form of information dissemination compared to the mass media we had earlier where someone decided exactly what would be told and it was practically impossible to respond to that in any way”

“We can keep up with what friends are doing on their stories and their posts. I see a lot of people posting about their engagements, pregnancies and all that kind of stuff, which is like if I didn't have social media, I wouldn't be knowing what was going on in these people's lives”

“I enjoy just watching funny videos or reels of animals which are really cute, but I enjoy the educational content side of Instagram as well. A lot of people use it to share awareness about different topics which I found useful. I think I've learnt quite a lot just reading these things”

“I use social media within a professional capacity to a certain degree”

“I am a disabled person. If you're a minority and in your surroundings you're struggling to find people like you, the Internet and social media will give you that space. And then there are genuine friendships, like stemming from that”

“To be informed about issues relating to the trans community. There's less information that is readily available through conventional media sites and news channels in relation to the effects of certain reviews or policies implemented by the government, in relation to transcare, for example. So I found it very useful to be part of those communities in various spaces and receive that information”

“Being a black woman, Twitter was the place for me to talk about my beliefs in gender equality and express some of my progressive political beliefs. But it has sort of changed a lot over the last two or three years and become very toxic”

Can they name any examples of online misogyny and sexism that they personally experienced or witnessed?

Most female participants have witnessed forms of online misogyny and sexism especially targeting academics. Those who have been more active shared personal threats, insults and unwanted sexually suggestive requests.

“I think from a very early age I was exposed to different types of misogyny and sexism and hate speech online. I think that it's gotten worse. I believe that content moderation systems have become weaker over time on social media platforms to the extent that certain ones I find almost unusable. I feel like it's almost become background noise within my use of social media. It is so frequent it is under every single post in the comments, where to the degree I almost tune it out automatically”

“I see negative comments for reasons like women being overweight or having some sort of normal body features. Women's appearance is also being talked about in a derogatory way, about the fact that maybe they've had more than one relationship in their life, suggesting that they're ugly and nobody will want them, suggesting that they sleep with people to get job promotions, all of those kinds of things”

“The comments I see are not only insulting and hate comments, but very dismissive. I see these things happening all the time, but I cannot give you like a specific example”

“I follow academics accounts and they share their experiences about other people correcting them and trying to say about the topics they're experts in. I'll see something about them that's against them, kind of questioning their credibility. In a sense, it may put like a seed of doubt in your head, but at the same time when you look at all of the comments, you'll get that these people are just targeting a specific prominent figure, just to get at a specific group of women”

“When I've been involved in kind of more political conversations when I was younger, I had like rape threats and people threatening to like docks my house and things like that because people online can be really awful, particularly when politics gets involved”

“I try to follow accounts about educational kind of ways, like those of medical staff. People posting about birth experiences or things like their experience in medical systems like related to mental health or endometriosis and all these kinds of women's health and sexual health and other topics like the abortion rights. People are trying to promote knowledge, and you can see all these kinds of hateful comments. These comments are disheartening”

“I consider things like unsolicited direct messages that people send requesting for specific types of images or requesting for specific type of nudes, that to me, is an example of misogynistic behaviour, that entitlement that some people have, specifically men, requesting for such things”

How do they react when they see a misogynistic comment/behaviour/content?

Most participants were puzzled about the most effective way to react in order to protect themselves and others.

“Women that I met here in the UK are more likely to take action against it versus my own culture which is more like just push through it, ignore it and act like it doesn't really bother me as much. I think I wasn't exposed to the possibility of being allowed to be upset by it, so I was like, that's just how things are. Deal with it”

“I comment supportive and congratulatory kind of things and supportive things to the women accounts that I follow, as opposed to sort of trying to reply to the bullies and the misogynists because I think they have their views, and they will just turn it into personal attacks on you if you try to reply to them”

“It's a double-edged sword. I think I'm mainly frustrated. If it's someone that I know acting up again then I'm like, I could confront them in real life. But is it worth it? I have to keep seeing them in real life. I stopped commenting on posts because I knew that I'd face some sort of backlash and I don't want to engage with some trolls or people who just slaughter me in that comment section”

“A lot of the time I responded, I was like, trying to use the same crude strategies as those people use. So, if they were like, oh, this woman is like working in literature, therefore, she doesn't really know anything and that's a useless degree. I would go like, well, at least she has a degree, look at you - that kind of thing, which wasn't good, but it was a means of fighting back. And I think a lot of my saying that, oh, it wasn't a good way to fight it, comes with the expectations of women being expected to be calm and like, not overreact and just be like the better person. And like you can't really get involved in a fight because that's not very feminine of you”

“I am sort of motivated to fight back sometimes in the comments, but I never do that because I know that these people are probably looking for somebody like me to respond and just to take this to the next level. If you give something too much attention, if you do interact with it, that means it is doing the job that it probably wants to do, which is to get more attention to become more popular. So, I feel like it's best just not to interact with anything like that at all, just so it doesn't get more attention that it needs online”

“I'm like you are not changing anybody's mind. You are not convincing anyone to agree with you. You're just screaming into the universe and all it's doing is making you angry. And that's just not healthy”



How has online misogyny impacted their online participation?

The online misogyny and sexism makes participants withdraw or reluctant to get involved, and frustrated about the social media and society they are living in.

“It does make me timid, I guess in that respect, you know. The fact that I won't put the comments out there and maybe it disadvantages me, if I am reluctant to make a comment where I could be informing or contributing to a discussion. Maybe I'm doing myself a disservice by not contributing. It can affect me in that I'm not part of the conversation. I may see the conversation, someone else might make a comment, but I'm not recognised in the conversation”

“After experiences of responding to comments, I got really into these conversations and the back and forth, and you know like it has an effect on you because I went on with my day, and I kept thinking about these comments. So, I think that's what later led me to say that I shouldn't be talking to people online about these things. Even if it's people I know or people I don't know.

So that's what led me to not post about things anymore and led me to just deactivating my accounts and then realising I feel better because I'm not thinking about it like, I don't need to think about what others think”

“Mainly I just get annoyed. I'm like, why am I seeing this? Why are people still being like this? People still think that way? You want to believe that we're progressing as humanity and that we're getting better and then you see comments, like, you're as a woman, essentially like a child carrying machine. That's all that we want from you, which frustrates me twice as much because I'm disabled, so obviously there are things that I won't be able to do as a traditional kind of wife”

“I accepted that in order to keep myself feeling safer from the risk of being harmed, I don't participate. So, I accept it. It's I feel, sometimes a shame that I don't feel comfortable to say something. And I have been told by others in my family who are much more vocal, if someone disagrees with them online that it rolls off their back. They're not females, so I do wonder whether that makes a difference. They say, oh it's a shame that you don't feel like you can comment on these things. And I'm like, well I just don't appreciate the backlash that I fear may come and for them, it's like, well I don't care what people think – that's their opinion and it doesn't hurt me – people can say what they want and it doesn't bother me. But I'm not built that way”

“I'm saddened and disappointed that in some ways we haven't really progressed as society as much as we like to think we have. There's still violence against women that makes me feel anxious to engage with stuff online. And even like, it makes me think that if these people are like that online, I'm sure there's violence in them, sort of hiding even when you meet them in person. So that makes me anxious in actual physical spaces as well, where I'm sometimes like, oh, does this person mean any harm to me or something like that? So, it's hard. As a person it's become really hard for me to relax sometimes when I see like a lot of strangers around, or if I assume that this is a completely new space and I might be in danger here”

How do they think other people are affected?

Participants identified that misogyny and sexism affects others and could change the perception of different genders and human relationships. They expressed concern particularly for those with a high profile who are often targeted.

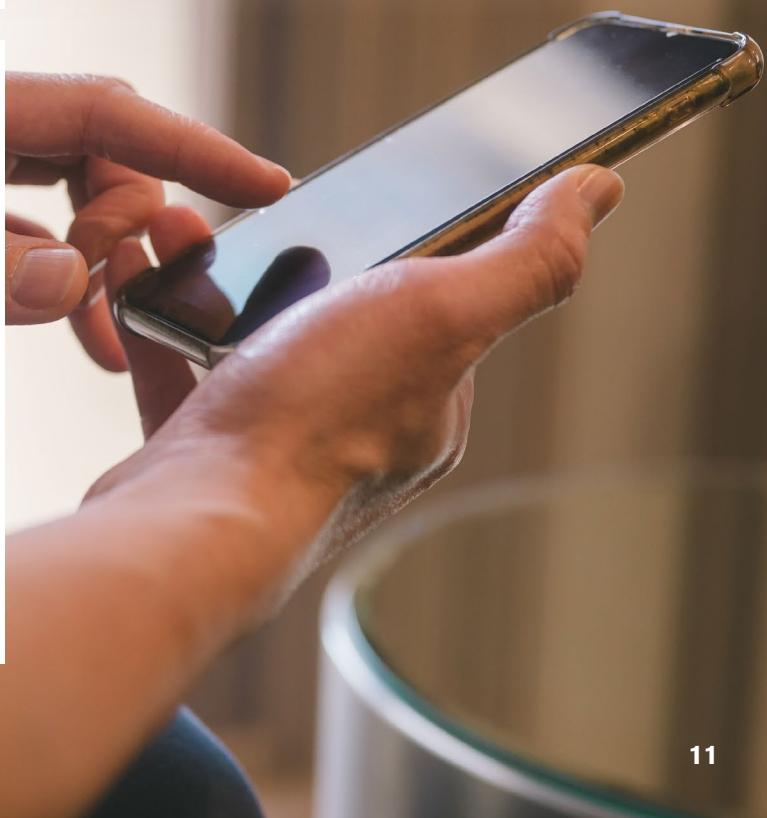
“So, I’m just thinking about celebrities and any high-profile person like whatever you do is going to be scrutinised and is going to be put under that lens of this is wrong or this is stupid. People will just find a way to insult you”

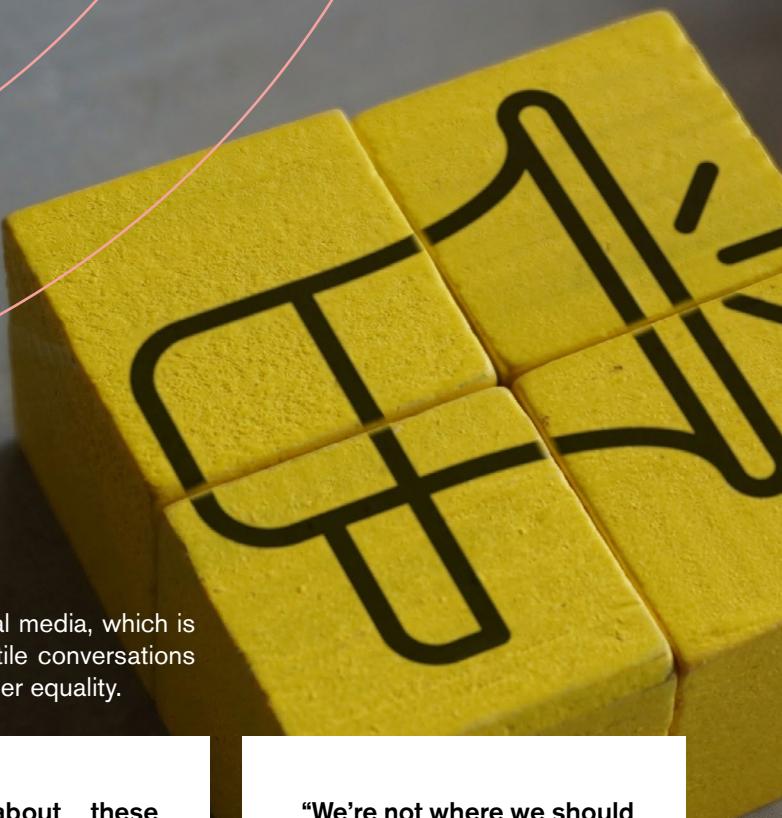
“People who face this attack, they definitely are discouraged from participating more online. But sometimes they become even more, I think, steadfast, resilient and whatever to keep them going to continue doing this. I’ve also seen really great responses and a supporting community”

“It’s really hard for the other people to keep going and keep their momentum up when they’re getting potentially volumes of targeted attacks. You know, it just must be so hard sometimes to either believe in yourself or what you’re doing. I mean, obviously depending what people are targeting you about and to keep that momentum and that belief going when you’re just being you. It must take an enormous amount of strength and courage to try and still exist in those spheres and those platforms where you’re being attacked consistently. You know, it really must take quite a lot to remain there. Yeah, just must be exhausting and relentless”

“The exposure that I and others have had throughout our lives to misogyny online makes us the victims of it. The way that I see it, my friends and relatives are exposed to this kind of information, it’s either caused them to be less loud on social media, to be less prominent on it or to espouse kind of hateful views which will negatively impact their relationships and lives”

“The young woman who posted about completing her PhD on Twitter, the young, attractive blonde woman who then received loads of misogynistic content directed towards her on the basis of, you know, people don’t like pretty women and pretty clever women. You know, it makes me so sad. It makes me really angry. And if I were to say something about work and had people directing stuff towards me on that basis, I think I’d find that really, really hard to cope with. I think, intellectually you could say, well, you know that they’re just idiots online just saying stuff, but actually to have that kind of hatred directed towards you personally, I think I’d find it very, very difficult”





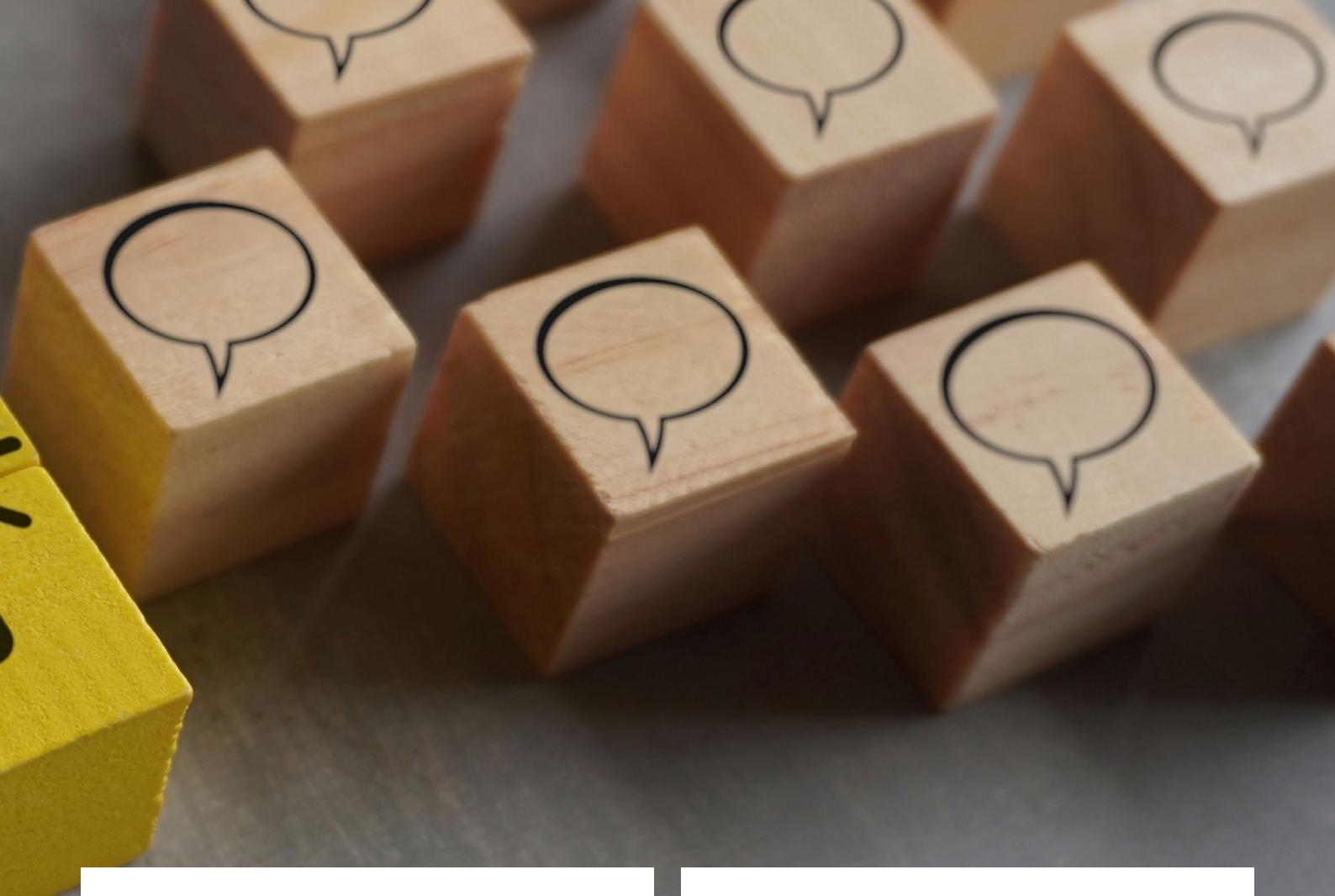
What were their main concerns?

They expressed disappointment with the current state of social media, which is dominated by extreme, polarised content and impersonal hostile conversations and can reinforce prejudices and lead people to question gender equality.

“When seeing specific men respond to women’s content, it’s creating this massive perception of groups of the opposite sex that attack everyone. It is fed maybe from pre-existing prejudices on both ends and some bad experiences, so when women are seeing men attacking specific women, it’s like pushing women to one end of the spectrum saying, yeah, men are not the best, and the men do the same for women. And even if they may have some people in their life that have shown them otherwise, they just start questioning”

“Discussing about these issues online, it’s not a conversation. It’s made it harder for people to have those discussions cause it’s so much easier to be angry on one side of a screen when there are no, you know, consequences when you don’t have to look at a friend and reevaluate your opinion because theirs is different from yours. The back and forth of comments doesn’t facilitate a conversation. And that, I think, is part of why political polarisation is such an issue right now because we’re not put in situations where we have no choice but to reconcile our beliefs with other people. We can just scream and then when we don’t like what other people are responding with, we can just sign off”

“We’re not where we should be. Every time we take a couple of steps forward, something seems to kind of knock us back. So, for me it was just a case of trying to indicate to the people around me like, you know zoom in. We are not in an equal position. Women get treated differently in medicine, in employment and in all these different areas because of their physicality, because they have a uterus because they have two breasts. These things actually play a part in employers wondering whether they’re going to be around later on because they might have children or how healthcare workers treat them for pain or whatever it is”



"This kind of economic uncertainty is not like it was 30 years ago. A man could work at a Ford factory building cars and have a great career and get a pension and retire. And his family could live off of his salary. And that's not the case anymore. And so I think things are needed to happen to help women and things are needed to happen to help men too. Obviously, that's not the same as, you know, we need laws that protect women from domestic abuse. We need laws that help protect women from rape. But we also need laws that help to start building a world where both men and women have access to jobs, both men and women feel secure, both men and women have access to higher education if they choose that. Then that might prevent situations where women are/where this misogyny is becoming as rampant as it is, and this massive backlog. In a society you know, we will benefit the most when both genders feel as though it can reach that kind of personal achievement. And when one is struggling, the other will necessarily struggle"

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"We really need to look at the internet and look at what social media has become and what it has done to our species and to our communities and how it has facilitated hate speech and misogyny. You know, that kind of violence against women, but also against minorities, against people who are from different religions. It's just our species has always been really good at killing each other and we've always been really, really paranoid about people who are different than us. Socially we did not evolve without real life communities. This is huge for this kind of impersonal socialisation, and I think it's really hurting us globally. I think it could do untold damage to our species, and I feel like that sounds like I am overreacting. But sometimes I feel like the people who were talking about climate change 80 years ago, nobody was listening to them either. I'm you know, I'm sort of screaming into the void on this but I think that as a world, we need to really, really step back and rethink what these things are doing to us"

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Do they think about the algorithm and how it affects online experience?

They attempt to curate the content they receive and adopt methods to protect and shield themselves from harmful material. They block, use platform settings and specific apps. However, these efforts are not always effective. Participants also worry that taking measures necessary to protect themselves from online misogyny may reduce their exposure to diverse content.

“I follow feminist groups and get some related content. You know how there’s this whole community of male rights groups? I don’t think I get sent any of the content related to those people. I’ve never seen anything, but I know there is. This is huge as well. So yeah, I do think that. I don’t know if this is discrimination, but there’s definitely a difference”

“So let’s say there’s a sociopolitical issue going on at the moment - any issue. And if I talk to two different people and I see the sorts of reels that those two people are sending me, they could be polar apart. They have completely different narrative, completely different things that these people are getting fed and sometimes this difference is extremely obvious, and I don’t think that either of us are in control of that”

“If I’m female, I anticipate getting scented candles because they think I’m a girl, you know? Yeah. I definitely think that all the time. You think, why have I got this? You know, because you think, well, why don’t I get lots of stuff on cars or engines or whatever? But I don’t”

“In YouTube I sort of do control what I see and so sort of try to help the algorithm with this is the sort of stuff I want to see. This is the stuff I don’t want to see and you can sort of feed that data to YouTube and say that, yeah, this does not interest me, this interests me, but I don’t think I can say the same about, let’s say Instagram reels for example, or Instagram in general. I don’t think that I’m in control of it at all”

“I do sometimes block people, but just because it’s again the algorithm that keeps showing me people, I don’t follow people I don’t want to know about. And they keep popping up. And then that’s really annoying. Because it’s like, why are you showing this person? I don’t want their messages. I don’t want to see it because I know this is how they like to create an audience, but I don’t like it”

“I’ve got this great app called One tab which essentially allows you to gather together the content from social media you want”

“Initially I’m like I don’t even think I want to associate with these people. Should I unfollow them? But then at the same time, I was like, OK, maybe I shouldn’t because it’s only by having those opposing views present in your horizon that you see what the other side is. I know that social media also has the capability of making you like getting you into that echo chamber of having a polarised view and I don’t want that. I want to see the other side”

What do they think about (self) regulatory efforts?

They express frustration about platform moderation and reporting mechanisms and believe more can be done by policymakers and law enforcement.

“I know there are ways of reporting and blocking accounts and stuff and I am trying to report them, but I don't have much confidence in those systems anymore”

“On social media, there have been a lot of regulations and rules about people not being allowed to make any hate comments or anything to do with race or gender or sex and stuff like that. But I don't think it helps that much because people will still find a way to say it and try not to get banned. But they'll rephrase it in ways that you understand what they mean”

“I have reported comments in the past and then, you know, they come back, and they say we're investigating this and then nothing happens. But also, even if people's accounts do get blocked, they can just make a new account. So, I don't find those kinds of tools particularly effective. I tend to report more when they're attacking other people's content than when it's on my own, actually”

“I think a lot of the problem is that anonymity of it. It's really, really difficult to track when people are saying and making threats and stuff online and being misogynist, it's difficult to track who that's coming from. And it's not a top priority, right? So, I'm sure there are ways to track it through IP and things like that, but that's all resource intensive”

“I mean, even if you can have the perfect regulation. It means nothing. It really depends on how it will be enforced by the platforms and service providers and how then the state regulator will come back to see what's being asked of them in terms of assessing, analysing and mitigating.

And that's a huge issue because, you know, social media, you don't care necessarily only about the one comment, the one user, you need to see this as, you know, systemically”

“I feel like the consequences should be more direct, stronger, and definitely the process shouldn't take so long because there's so much like you have to report and you have to wait for the person to get back to you. You have to tell the story over and over, which is upsetting in itself. And you have to wait for the investigation while the person is walking around thinking they've done no wrong. And then weeks, months again can pass, and then they're like, oh, we found no hard evidence. So, I think if the process was sped up, also if there was more just kind of like socially credibility given to women's statements, that would be helpful”

What is their key message for a better and more inclusive online space?

Some participants shared the belief that withdrawing from social media and focussing on 'real life' is the best solution to the current state of online platforms. Others express optimism about the potential for social media, emphasising the importance of building supportive online community, stressing that respect and understanding of the impact that words have on others are critical to creating safe and inclusive online spaces.

"Women deserve to be able to have equal access to these online spaces. We deserve to not feel afraid. To be online and have a presence online, and I think that the world needs to do more to make sure that that can happen"

"Experiences of sexism and misogyny and trans misogyny are real. They impact people's real lives. These platforms are having tangible effects on their users and their life experiences. I think that from my experience and the experience that I've witnessed with other people, women and trans, feminine people are increasingly self-selecting out of participation in online spaces. Something has to be done about that"

"Unfortunately, some of the people in these leadership positions are not always helpful. They're not always acting in responsible ways themselves"

"What do we all want? For me to live my life in peace. Everyone has to be equal because if there's inequality then it's so easy to attack. And if you're attacking, that's not peace. It's not peace for you. It's not peace for them. So what's my message? Just live and let live, and equality is the only way. Inequality comes with a whole bag of negative issues, and the other party can't live in peace with all these negative issues. I don't want to think about someone who's worse or better than me. So, equality and respect are the only way. Equality and respect in the world, everywhere - politics, home, everywhere"

"Diversifying the content around feminism and trying to figure out who gets that information. I mean, even like the medical side of feminism, I think is really important, especially with funding getting cut for those things. So, it's just, I don't know what you can do to tackle this. But if people have a safe space to go, I think that's a that's a good start"

"I don't think it's a problem that can be solved by focusing only on the Internet, I think there have to be more campaigns in real life. I guess I'd agree with people that more people need to get out more and engage with the real world and not to be so online all the time"

“There is always an argument between freedom of speech and hate speech, right? But sometimes when it's really clear it's hate speech, you should be able to kind of report it and flag it, but not everybody knows that you can actually flag it and that there's actually ramification to this sort of content. So, I think education is really important. Be more kind and raise awareness around this. As a user also to have our own responsibility to take action in order to make sure that we take care of one another”

“Teaching people to be nicer to one another, bringing back this sense of accountability and making sure that people are aware that it's real and it has real impacts and holding each other to account, not legally or enforceably, but through our peers and our communities and actually saying that's not right and finding better ways to do it”

“I think I would ask that people respect each others differences. You see people all over the world are never going to agree on everything. But if you see something you disagree with, just leave them alone and move on. I'll try to think of a more, like better way to say it but by speaking over others, you're causing harm and you're not creating a positive impact on the world, you're only creating a negative impact. So, if you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all. It's very old fashioned, but that's kind of my mentality with it all”

“Mission for a safe online space should put the focus on creativity. I think creation is such a great way to pull people together because it gives people an outlet, which is often what they turn to the Internet for - an alternative outlet that can be used in a softer or more constructive way”

HOPE

Recent regulatory efforts

Most of our interviewees asked if there are any regulatory efforts to combat online misogyny. This phenomenon has been characterised as a challenge for regulation, as this harm must be balanced with conflicting rights.¹ A clear and coherent definition of misogynistic behaviour – content that harms human rights and chills women's speech and online participation – can assist regulatory efforts.² A technical term for the behaviours outline by our participants is technology-facilitated gender-based violence, (TFGBV) and is defined as any act perpetrated through digital technology which leads to "physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or infringements of rights and freedoms."³

The Council of Europe has recently highlighted that this form of violence against women has its roots in gender inequality and includes specific terms and examples of these behaviours, as well as refuting the common misconception that these behaviours are not really harmful or do not affect people offline⁴. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ('GREVIO') in its first General Recommendation (2021)⁵ positioned the interpretation that digital forms of violence against women are included within the remit of the Istanbul Convention. This means that states that have signed the Convention, such as the UK, have to do more to combat digital forms of violence against women.

The recent recommendations by United Nations Women, offer a useful guide for shaping laws and policies to address Violence against Women and Girls ('VAWG') and can be a guide for a law and policy strategy.⁶ Data published by the UK National Police Chiefs' Council [in July 2024](#) found that about 3,000 VAWG offences a day were recorded by the police in 2022-23, an increase of 37% since 2018, with one in every 12 women a victim each year. **An Amnesty International survey also uncovered the forms of online harassment that Gen Z women face, including: More than half (53%) had received inappropriate emojis on their posts and photos; 44% had received unsolicited explicit images; 43% had experienced body-shaming; 40% had been subjected to unwanted sexually suggestive comments; 32% had experienced hate speech; and 27% reported online stalking.**⁷ As highlighted by Equality Now, "the drip-feed of violent ideologies, sexist commentary, and normalised humiliation creates a digital culture where abuse becomes an ambient and ever-present background noise that shapes how women behave, engage, and self-censor online."⁸ This reflects the comments of our participants. New technologies are expected to bring new ways of online abuse.⁹

1 Barker K and Juraz O (2019). Online misogyny as a hate crime: a challenge for legal regulation.

2 Black, Iona; Bakina, Ksenia; Jurasz, Olga and Pavon Perez, Angel (2025). [Response to the Women and Equalities Committee's consultation on Misogyny, the Manosphere and Online Content](#). Centre for Protecting Women Online, Milton Keynes, UK

3 Koukopoulos, N., Janickyj, M., & Tanczer, L. M. (2025). Defining and Conceptualizing Technology-Facilitated Abuse ("Tech Abuse"): Findings of a Global Delphi Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 41(1-2), 249-275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241310465> Global Partnership. (2023). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: Preliminary landscape analysis. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-preliminary-landscape-analysis>

4 Barker, K. (2024). Emerging Practices in The Investigation and Prosecution of Digital Violence Against Women. Council of Europe.

5 Council of Europe (2011) <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-reco-no-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>. Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

6 UN Women - Headquarters (2024) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/03/placing-gender-equality-at-the-heart-of-the-global-digital-compact> Power on: How we can supercharge an equitable digital future.

7 GenZ in the UK, Perceptions and experiences of misogyny on social media. A Savanta report for Amnesty International UK (March 2025). <https://savanta.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/P044375-Amnesty-International-Gen-Z-and-Online-Misogyny-Savanta-Report-March-2025-1.pdf>

8 Equality now (2025), [Consultation Response](#)

9 Gestoso P. (2024, January 8). [Techno-Patriarchy: How AI is Misogyny's New Clothes](#)



Platforms put in place methods of moderation to remove some types of content from their sites. Much of this moderation is automated. In recent times, influenced by the changing political climate, particularly in the US moderation is perceived by our participants to have become less responsive to their concerns about online misogyny.

In the UK the Protection from Harassment [Act](#) 1997 (which covers criminal instances of online stalking and harassment that cause specific harms to people, such as fear of violence or distress with substantial adverse effect on victims' lives) and the Stalking Protection [Act](#) 2019 provide protection against specific behaviours. The Equality [Act](#) 2010 could apply in some cases of gender discrimination (particularly in circumstances that involve the reinforcement of stereotypes of women's role in society). The non-consensual sharing of sexual images is criminalised by the Sexual Offences [Act](#) 2003.

There are layers of regulation that apply to online communications in digital platforms. Digital platforms have obligations to comply with any requests for collaboration from law enforcement that investigate these crimes. Additionally, new regulatory frameworks, such as the [EU Digital Services Act](#) (DSA) and the recent [UK Online Safety Act](#) (OSA) 2023, attempt to impose new obligations on platforms to address these issues proactively. A shared feature is the requirement for platforms to conduct risk assessments, develop mitigation measures and adhere to or follow codes of practice or guidance issued by regulators. However, in the UK, the risk assessment obligations do not focus on the risks of online misogyny, with the cornerstone of the legislation being the protection of children online.

The OSA 2023 includes increased protection against illegal forms of online misogyny after severe pressure from women's organisations. Part 10 of the Act has included various communications offences, criminalising such instances as sending rape threats, sending sexually graphic images with the intent to cause alarm, distress and/or humiliation, and sharing or threatening to share intimate photographs or films, with a similar intent to.¹⁰

Using powers given to it by the OSA, Ofcom issued guidance on the safety for women and girls online in November 2025 with the goal to ensure that digital spaces allow everyone to participate fully and hold tech firms to account.¹¹ During its public consultation on draft guidance, Ofcom worked to strike a careful balance between competing challenges stating: "These harms cover both illegal and legal content. While illegal content needs to be taken down, we also need to protect the ability of users to express themselves freely online. Crucially, this includes the need to secure the ability of women and girls to speak out and have their voices heard, without being silenced by abuse". The guidance identifies a total of nine areas where platforms should do more to improve women's and girls' online safety by taking responsibility, designing their new services to prevent harm and supporting their users. During consultation on the draft there was severe criticism that it was not legally binding and failed to adequately protect women and girls from legal harms.¹² Ofcom, however stated that its role would be to hold platforms accountable through the full force of its enforcement powers.¹³

10 Online Safety Act 2023 sections 179 to 191.

11 A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls - Practical Guidance for Tech Companies
[Consultation on draft Guidance: A safer life online for women and girls](#)

12 Centre for protection of women online Response to Consultation (2025), <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-1-10-weeks/consultation-on-draft-guidance-a-safer-life-online-for-women-and-girls/statement-docs/guidance-a-safer-life-online-for-women-and-girls.pdf?v=408215>

13 Ofcom Guidance, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-1-10-weeks/consultation-on-draft-guidance-a-safer-life-online-for-women-and-girls/statement-docs/statement-guidance-on-a-safer-life-online-for-women-and-girls.pdf?v=408227>

Conclusion

In our interviews, we asked participants for their final thoughts and feedback. Some participants shared that the conversation had been a good way to take a step back, consider and reflect on what they are doing online and the impact of digital content on their freedom and the view of the world around them.

“I realised that if I’m so conscious about posting what I post on social media, am I really free? I’m actually filtering in my day-to-day life when I use social media, and even though all this time it made sense for me to do that, but it really makes me ask myself. I initially started using social media to be able to express myself, to be able to, you know, express parts of my life, but in the recent times have I been able to actually do that? There are times when I’ve posted something, and I’ve deleted it within a few hours questioning how I’m going to be perceived. Is such a platform really facilitating my freedom of expression? Or not like it’s self-censoring in a way”

“I am very aware of how I look, how I talk, and as a result, how I cannot be a target for some people as a result, but viewing this and seeing it just reminds me all the time that other people are targeted, that other people do experience this, and it reminds me that other people still need support, they still need kind of protection in that kind of respect. It reminds me that I’m fortunate that I don’t get this volume of assault that other people tend to get. That to remind myself to be kind of mindful of that and that my experiences are not the same as others”

“It gave me a sense of hope that others want to change the situation”

“I felt as though the interview gave me an opportunity to contemplate my use of social media in a way that I had not done before”

As seen in their responses, the impact of often normalised misogyny is frequently invisible – mostly to women who are disproportionately affected. Most participants needed time to think and reflect on these experiences, as their own self-sensor process was not always conscious. But discussing these gave our participants a bit of hope of possible change and inspired visions of a better online and offline world.

The goal now is for academia, regulators and users to work together to make the visions of our participants a reality. It will take more work but building a fair and equitable platform where everyone can participate is worthwhile and something that we should be excited to do.



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All quotes used in this report are genuine. We did not use any pseudonyms or further characteristics to identify our participants, our aim was to focus on their thoughts and opinions and not their identity.

Information in this publication was accurate at the date of publication (November 2025)

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Initiatives and other resources

Many participants expressed a desire for more information and guidance on ways to respond to online misogyny to protect themselves and others. Here are some useful links:

[Center for Countering Digital Hate](#)

[Online violence response hub](#)

[Online Harassment Field Manual](#)

[Centre to protect women online](#)

[Online Misogyny](#)

Based on our research findings, we aimed to promote the vision of an inclusive world - one that avoids polarization and provide visibility to silenced online experiences.

To support this, we created a series of short videos designed to guide and inspire future generations to make positive change and different voices to be heard.

These will be accessible on [Horizon's YouTube Channel](#).