Ofcom – Online task and workshop

Introduction

Background

In January 2022, Ofcom contracted Traverse to carry out research to understand the impact that online hate has on people from different backgrounds. The outcomes of this research will be used to inform Ofcom's expansion of their regulatory responsibilities, which may include the creation of a duty of care for platforms towards their users to protect them from online hate.

Online task objectives

- To capture further descriptions/stories of online hate deemed by participants to have been particularly harmful
- To understand how participants rank different pairs of factors that can make online hate potentially more harmful

Workshop objectives

- Further understand participants' experiences and reflections about online hate – including prevalence and what factors can make the impact more severe (including platform functionality)
- Reviewing the collated results of the online ranking exercise and using this to explore the different factors that can make online hate more and less harmful
- Understand the impact of online hate relative to other online harms, prioritising a comparison with hateful abuse
- Explore participant's priorities for addressing online hate

Individual Pre-workshop Activity

Length	15 mins	Topic	Capturing examples of online hate and ranking different factors that can impact on severity of harm
Format	Online	Objective/s	Gain an understanding of how severe participants deem specific examples of online hate to be
Activities			

The survey starts by <u>defining online hate</u>, including by saying what it is not (to avoid confusions with abuse) (NB. Hateful abuse experiences may / will impact views relating to online hate)

1. Online Hate – hateful content directed at a group of people on the basis of a particular protected characteristic (Examples of protected characteristics include disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or whether someone is transgender)

2. Hateful Abuse – hateful content directed at you personally on the basis of a protected characteristic you have or are perceived to have.

For the purpose of this questionnaire, we would like you to focus on online hate (hateful content that was not directed at you personally).

Q1. Please enter your name

Q2. Where and how often have you been exposed to online hate? Grid style question – frequency / platform Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. (having first established which platforms they use)

Q3. Could you describe an example of online hate that you have been exposed to that felt particularly harmful to you? (open ended)

We know that you provided examples during your interview, and we have made note of those. The purpose of asking for an example as part of this survey is to help you to focus on online hate (rather than abuse aimed at you personally) before we go into some scenarios to get your views.

We may also use these examples to encourage conversation during the online workshop, bringing different stories together to prompt discussion. We won't link examples to individuals but ask everyone in the workshop if they are willing to share any (and you can share if you are happy to do so). .

Please consider answering the following prompts:
- What platform was it on and when did it happen?
- What did you see/hear and in what format?
- Why was it particularly harmful to you?
- How many times have you come across this type of online hate?
- What kinds of impacts did the experience have on you?
- Did you take any actions?

Q4. Ranking exercise

Please indicate which of the following pairs of options relating to online hate feel potentially more harmful to you? If you are not able to select one option over another please use the open ended text box to explain why or to share any thoughts or reflections on the factor.

In each of these scenarios imagine that you have been exposed to this content. For example, you were a member of the 'closed group' or 'community website'.

A) Public vs private:

Option A: An account posts a hateful comment publicly on a video sharing platform (e.g. YouTube or Tiktok)
Option B: An account posts a hateful comment within a closed group on a video sharing platform (e.g. YouTube or TikTok)

Please explain your response:

B) Individual account vs multiple accounts:

Option A: One account posts 20+ hateful comments over a day on a social community website (e.g. Reddit or MumsNet)
Option B: Lots of accounts post one-off hateful comments over a day on a social community website (e.g. Reddit or MumsNet)

Please explain your response:

C) Known vs unfamiliar

Option A: An account of a well-known public figure posts some hateful content
Option B: An account of someone known to you posts some hateful content
Option C: An account of someone unknown to you posts some hateful content
Option D: An anonymous account posts some hateful content

Please explain your response:

D) Single vs multiple protected characteristics

As a reminder, examples of protected characteristics include disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or whether someone is transgender.

Option A: An account posts a hateful comment under an article on Facebook directed at people with several protected characteristics (e.g. religion + sexual orientation)
Option B: An account posts a hateful comment under an article on Facebook directed at people with a particular protected characteristic (e.g. religion)

Please explain your response:

E) Different formats

Option A: An account publicly posts a video where they say something hateful
Option B: An account publicly posts a written comment where they say something hateful
Option C: An account publicly posts an image that expresses something hateful

Please explain your response:

F) Humour vs serious

Option A: An account posts hateful content that that has a humorous tone
Option B: An account posts hateful content with a serious tone

Please explain your response:

G) Blindsided versus anticipated

Option A: An account posts hateful content in an unexpected setting
Option B: An account posts hateful content in a setting where there is already lots of similar content

Please explain your response:

Q5. And finally, do you think there are additional factors (e.g. platform functionality) that can make online hate more or less harmful? If yes please explain below.

Workshop (95 mins)

Length	95 mins	Topic	Online hate
Format	Online workshop (Teams/Zoom)	Session objective/s	Share initial findings and gain feedback from participants.
Participants	15 participants – aiming for a demographic mix, targeting those who have experienced online hate, in particular those who rate the experience/s as severe in terms of impact		

Outline agenda

Arrivals, welcome and context (10 mins)	18:30
Introductions (5 mins)	18:40
Exploring experiences of online hate (35 mins)	18:45
Break (5 mins)	19:20
Exploring severity (25 mins)	19:25
Exploring responsibility/addressing online hate (15 mins)	19:50
Thank you and close	20:05

Time	Activity	Materials	Activity objective
(10 mins)	<u>Arrivals, welcome and context</u> ■ Welcome and introductions from Traverse staff ■ Ground rules – Respect other people's views – and help us create a safe and supportive space – Be compassionate, considerate and empathetic. – Disagree with an opinion, not a person (this means considering why someone might have expressed a view you disagree with - what is behind that view? Have they had different experiences that might be informing their view?) – Make sure everyone has a chance to contribute. – Be careful not to interrupt when someone else is speaking. – Please switch off mobile phones or turn to silent. – Ask questions when something is not clear (you're probably doing someone else a favour)! – There are no silly questions or wrong answers. ■ Reminder that feedback and participation is anonymous, but we will ask for consent for the session to be recorded for note-taking purposes ■ Reminder that they can take a break or leave the session at any time without reason ■ Reiterate the support in place for participants taking part in this research (sign posting information, counselling)	Slides, facilitator guide	Introduce the participants to the workshop and objectives

	■ Objectives from the project overall (above) ■ Objectives and for this workshop (above) ■ Run through the agenda for this workshop on slides		
(5 mins)	<u>Introductions</u> ■ Give each participant the opportunity to introduce themselves (if they want to) ■ Use an icebreaker question such as: – If you weren't at this workshop right now, what would you be doing? – What is your favourite thing that you did in the last week? ■ Traverse facilitator/s should also introduce themselves and give some background information to balance the power dynamic	Facilitation guide	Allow participants to introduce themselves and make them feel at ease
(35 mins)	<u>Exploring experiences of online hate</u> ■ Facilitator to define online hate (highlighting how it is different from online abuse) – What sorts of online hate might you / have you been exposed to in different contexts / on different platforms? (With the aim of co-producing a list of 6-8 examples that will be scribed on a template that all participants can see) • Ask participants to think individually and then share with the group – probing for details about format, context, who is sharing it, frame question in the third person to make it less sensitive	Slides, facilitation guide	An opportunity to further understand participants' experiences and reflections about online hate – including prevalence and what factors can make it more harmful (including platform functionality)

	- How prevalent are different types of online hate in your experience? What is more or less common to see in different places? - What types of online hate have the potential to be more or less harmful? - Discuss different platform functionalities on slides and discuss how they may present/enable online hate - Platforms you can use with and without a profile - Like and other 'reaction' functions - Ability to block people - Ability to share or duet posts - Ability to block comments on posts - Broadly speaking, how does it impact people to see these types of hateful content? How does it impact on people's wellbeing? Their mental state? Their behaviours? - Facilitator to gentle tease out comparisons of impacts between different PCs - What sorts of actions might you/others take (if any e.g. reporting) when you see something you consider to be online hate? How does this vary depending on the type of online hate content?		
(5 mins)	Break	-	-
(25 mins)	Exploring severity (in small groups) ■ Share the summarised findings from the online activity and interviews on slides	Slides, facilitation guide	Reviewing the collated results of the online ranking exercise and using this to explore the different factors that can make online hate more and less harmful

	■ Discuss the collated ranking results given by participants and high-level summary of the "please explain" answers
	
	– Are these ranking results what you would have expected?
	
	– Facilitator to explore factors that have high and low consensus in terms of how participants ranked them
	
	■ How might you rank the different factors that were explored in the ranking exercise in terms of harm? E.g. is public vs. private less of an issue than who is sharing the content or what format?
	
	■ Broadly speaking, how harmful do you think online hate is when compared with other online harms?
	
	– Identity theft, accounts being hacked, online stalking, harassment etc.
	
	– How does online hate related to protected characteristics compare with other types of online hate in terms of impact? For example:
	   • Hateful abuse (PRIORITY TO EXPLORE IN COMPARISON WITH ONLINE HATE)
	   • Sports teams (not including sectarian abuse)
	   • Physical appearance
	   • Lifestyle decisions (vegan, home-schooling children, relationship)
			Understand the impact on online hate relative to other online harms including hateful abuse

(15 mins)	Exploring responsibility/addressing online hate (in small groups) ■ Share summarised findings about the actions that could or should be taken by different actors o Does this feel like a comprehensive list? What's missing?	Slides, facilitation guide, (mural?)	Explore participants priorities for addressing online hate

	o Which actions are more and less important? ■ If you could give online platforms one piece of advice in terms of tackling online hate, what would it be? – Each group to agree on 2-3		
(5 mins)	Thank you and close (whole group) ■ Thank participants for taking part in the project – Reminder of payment – Reminder of counselling available and other sources of support ■ Next steps – including follow up online task – Inform participants on how their input will be used by Ofcom moving forward ■ Close		Thank participants for their time