



Racism on social media 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report explores young people's experiences of racism on social media

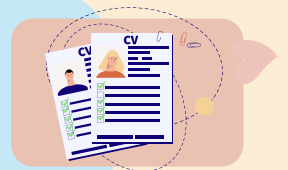


This is a multi-use document targeted at social media platforms and policy makers to inform them on user experiences of audiences that they might not be able to hear from normally. This document is also for social media users, so that they can understand how to safely use social media.



The data collected showed that racism was a prominent factor in social media however the racism experienced was covert and often disguised as banter or emojis that bots failed to detect.

Participants also mentioned influencer culture and covid as a factor in their online experiences. Data showed that there was a common fear surrounding disclosing their race online as it could impact employment possibilities.



All participant's highlighted that racism online was due to offline racism and participants called for a thorough educational understanding of racism on a deeper level.



Lastly, participants highlighted how the current reporting process was highly ineffective due to bot's being unable to pick up contextual details and flexible rules and regulations.



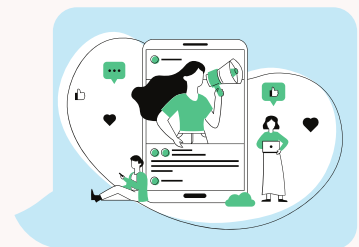
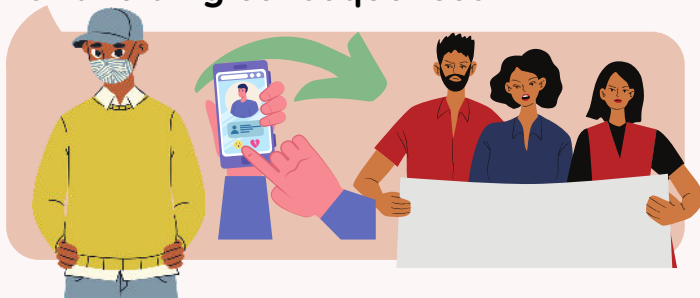
INTRODUCTION



In 2021, The Young Foundation, whose mission is to develop better connected and more sustainable communities across the UK, launched a research project into the role that social media plays in racism for young people of colour.

This was spurred on due to the major shift in discussions around racism as social media was an essential tool for political engagement by young people during covid.

As well as the online abuse faced by England football players as a result of the Euro-cup through various covert methods such as masking racism through memes, emojis and using fake online personas to spread hate whilst avoiding consequences.



Aim of report

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The aim of this report is to bring light to the experience of those between ages of 18 to 25 and their experience of racism on social media.



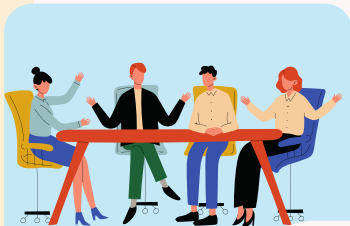
BACKGROUND



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Researchers all identified racism as an area of interest. After further discussions, social media and racism was identified as a field where more research could be done.



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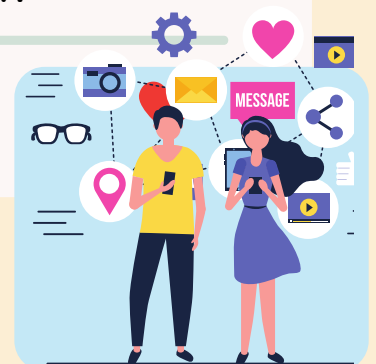
The peer researchers conducted a literature review revealing further gaps in the research which allowed us to narrow down our research objective and questions.



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The main research question curated was:
To explore the role that social media plays in racism for young people of colour.



LITERATURE REVIEW



Racism embedded in social media

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When researching into the given topic, it was clear that racism was covertly embedded into social media platforms

Racism is deep-rooted in the digital interfaces of social media design, which allows it to thrive through covert methods such as offensive memes, emojis and gifs (Matamoros-Fernández et al, 2021). Due to the anonymity of user profiles and the use of computer algorithms make it difficult for social media platforms to moderate and detect abuse online, as it relies on user options to determine the frequency of hate speech (Matamoros-Fernández et al, 2021).



However, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are self-regulated and function on their own rules and regulations (Newsround, 2021). They attract different demographics of people on their platforms, Twitter being one of the most popular among journalists and racial minorities online (Matamoros-Fernández et al, 2021). Studies show how this reflects capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy (Matamoros-Fernández et al, 2021). By ignoring that racism is defined as a social and institutional power plus racial prejudice, social media is a platform that uses its power upon historically marginalised groups through its design and governance policies (Matamoros-Fernández et al, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW



Inner and inter-group racism

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One emerging theme across the literature is inner and inter-group racism.

Young people of colour are constantly on the receiving end of hate online for their concept of self and culture (Brough et al, 2020). Participants in a study claimed this led to them presenting themselves differently on each platform based on how on their idea of how it's used from their social media designs (Brough et al, 2020). One participant followed this by saying that Instagram is for portrayed an 'idealized life', whereas a platform like Reddit is for expressing your opinions. Thus, suggesting a disparity in how transparent individuals are presented on social media platforms due to the nature of social media design, effectively leading individuals to feel that expressing their ethnic heritage on social media is not acceptable or rewarded (Brough et al, 2020).



This can be seen in recent news, where videos posted on social media showing elderly Asians getting attacked by Black assailants, news outlets and social media platforms were quick to conclude that there were historically complicated tensions between Black and Asian communities (Demsas et al, 2021). However, this spotlight completely failing to note that there has been a rise of an anti-Asian and anti-China narrative globally (Demsas et al, 2021).



LITERATURE REVIEW

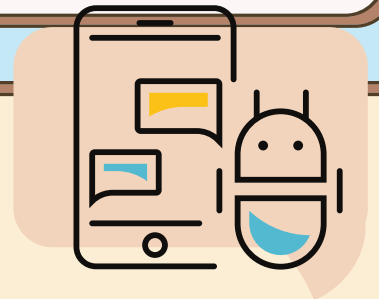
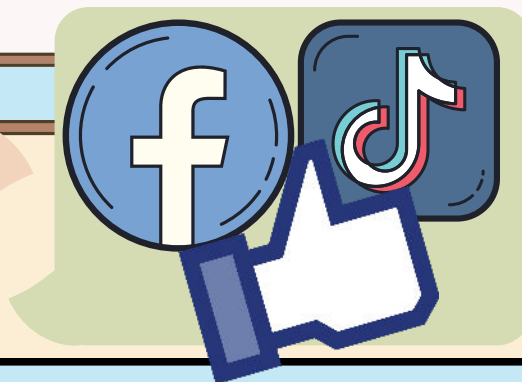


Social media design

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Social media design is also highlighted as a factor which influences online experiences of racism.

Recent events have led social media companies to be heavily criticised for failing to tackle abuse on digital platforms. An example is the abuse faced by Black football players in response to losing the Euros. Racist hate speech went undetected by bot moderators and unchallenged, which supported the notion that social media's design was not thorough enough when dealing with online hate. Content moderation is too overwhelming to be policed by hand so very rarely is content moderated by humans. Instead, it takes place in 3 phases: editorial review, algorithm detection and community flagging (Gillespie, 2018). Most digital platforms rely on algorithm detection of hate speech that goes against community guidelines.



However, due to the nature of artificial intelligence not being able to understand contextual details, a lot of online abuse goes unmonitored, such as the use of a monkey emoji when racially discriminating a Black person.

Moreover, content moderation bots were criticised for acting upon a racial bias as Black Instagram users were 50% more likely to have their accounts automatically disabled even if there was no evidence of violation of community guidelines (Carlson et al, 2019).

Lastly, social media platforms also allow users to report any racist or harmful content they see, this is referred to as community flagging. However, users felt that the process of reporting abusive speech was often tedious and more often led to nothing being done about it. In light of this, it could be argued that social media has reshaped structural oppression through the way it is designed (Bivens and Haimson, 2016)

LITERATURE REVIEW



Offline racism

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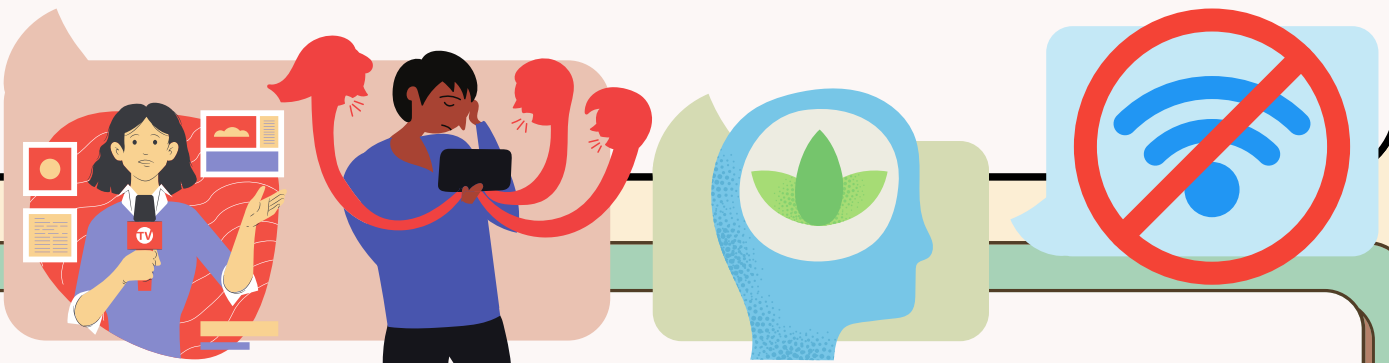
Racism in real life had a direct impact on how racism presented itself online as suggested in literature.



Monitoring of online racism is integral in maintaining safety for users as negative digital experiences can impact offline behaviour and experiences.

On one hand, Chan et al (2016) found a correlation between areas with high reports of offline racism and divide within a community with the recorded cases of hate related content on websites frequently used in that given area.

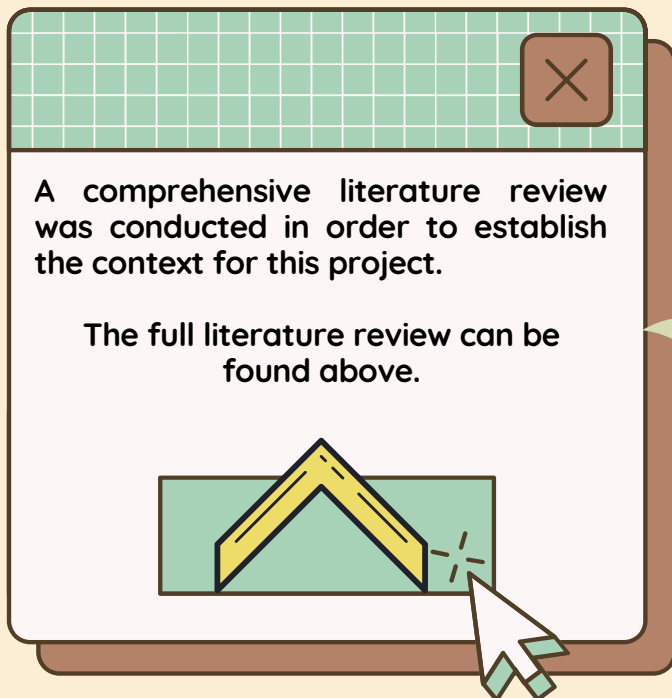
Similarly, recent studies support the notion that social media is now a significant factor in the stress experienced by people of colour. It was found that increased negative interactions with online racism led to increased mental health issues for many people of colour (Severance, 2021). The study also indicated that online experiences were more significant predictors of mental health outcomes than off-line experiences.



Whilst the impacts of social media on people of colour's offline experience are clear, it is also important to note that social media is also impacting the offline experiences of other ethnicities as it is a driving force in forming opinions. Teachers voiced concern about how social media sites promoted hateful speech in classes and due to remote learning, this influence was harder to challenge (Taylor, 2021).



GAPS IN LITERATURE



The gaps found in the literature were used to form the research questions for this project

One of the main gaps in the literature is the role of social media and its impact on young people's experience with racism online, which we aim to address in this project.



Age

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There seems to be little evidence discussing how different age groups have experienced or witnessed racism on social media. With a focus on young people in education, UK studies fail to examine the experience of those above sixteen.



Intersectionality

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Most UK research fail to discuss factors such as gender, socioeconomic background, disability, and sexual orientation impact young people's experience with racism online. Fixated on the experience of women online, there is little discussion on other intersectional identities.



Education

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UK studies in the past have reported evidence on the experience of young people in mainstream education and their experience with racism online, excluding individuals in alternative methods of education such as alternative provision and home education.

METHODOLOGY



Recruitment and sampling

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Recruitment was done through various social media platforms. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Participants sampling criteria included:

- Being aged between 18 to 25
- Users of social media
- Those who experienced racial abuse online or witnessed it on social media.



Reasoning

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Surveys were selected as:

- They have a high response rate, allowing a larger population to be represented.
- Allowing participants to complete the questions in their own space could minimise the distress.
- Remove any researcher bias
- Maximises the likelihood of collecting factually accurate data as anonymity will be maintained throughout.



Data collection and analysis



Data was collected through in-depth surveys that had a total of 16 open-ended questions. Each section included 3-4 questions with relevant prompts.

The survey was designed to cover 5 main areas of research:

- How does racism play out on social media,
- What are POC's experiences with inner group online racism and what role does social media play in it.
- How does intersectionality play into POC's experiences with racism
- How has the expansion of social media had an impact on widespread offline racism?
- Are social media platforms doing enough to combat racism on their sites?

Data was thematically analysed to create codes and sub-themes which were later grouped into larger themes.

LIMITATIONS



Racism on social media 2021 Potential limitations of the study



Whilst the chosen method of surveys had many positive aspects, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. The lack of interaction between the researcher and respondent is a limitation as questions maybe misinterpreted or participants may fail to provide detailed answers.

Moreover, an unexpected limitation came up during the recruitment stages of the study. The method of recruitment was through social media platforms, one being Facebook. However, recruitment materials were removed from the site under the means of being too 'political'. This once again brings to light the flaws in social media rules and regulations.

One other limitation that emerged during the study was the small number of responses received from the survey. The sample of 16 participants means the data is unlikely to be representative of a wider population as it is small set of data, this increases the margin of error within the findings.



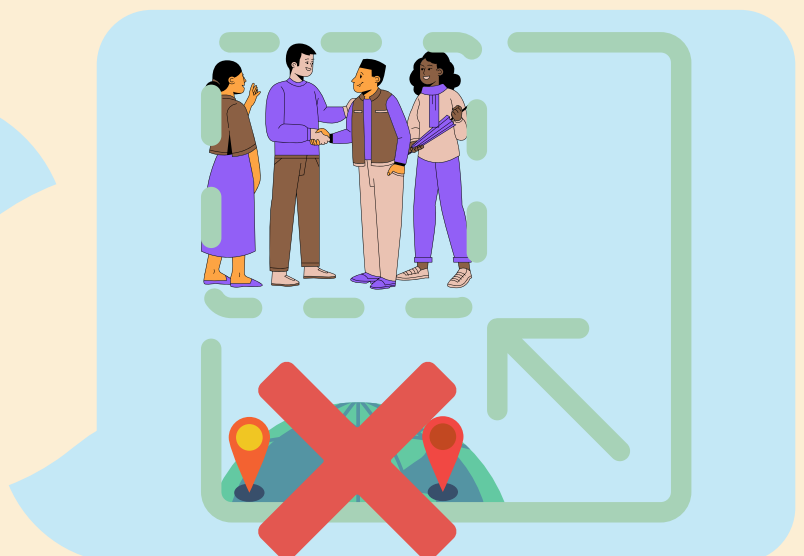
Like



Comment



Share



FINDINGS

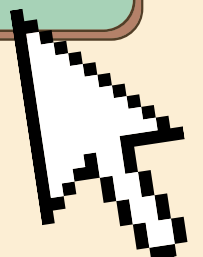
Covert experiences of racism

Inner and inter-group experiences

Ineffectiveness of online reporting

Greater need for education

Fear of disclosing identities



COVERT EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

Participant

"I think it comes down to two things. One is that there is no consequences or major consequences. Like at most you will get your account deleted but that is nothing cause anyone can make another account."

Participant

"I think it's more apparent on twitter cause you use your words to take part. So you have more of an opportunity to really put your opinions out there."

Some participants were concerned that blurred distinction between free speech and hate speech allows individuals to mask racist views as their opinion on social media platforms.

The majority of participants felt that anonymity makes it easier for users to be openly racist on social media as there are little to no consequences behind their actions.



Participant

"On tiktok you can find racially implied jokes or ignorant comments."

Participant

"They called me racial slurs because they could tell I was black from my voice."

TikTok, Twitter and Instagram seemed to have the most impact on participants, with significant reference to racial abuse towards users under comment sections.



Participants reported to have experienced being racially profiled or stereotyped through racially implied jokes and microaggressions. Perpetrators calling it 'banter'.

INNER AND INTER-GROUP EXPERIENCES

Inner group racism mostly influenced by; influencer culture, colourism and beauty standards. However, there were also external factors such as the impact of Covid which seemed to cause more hate directed towards minority groups.

Participant

"I read once that due to the algorithms of instagram, light-skin girls and white influencers were having there content promoted more in comparison to dark skin influencers. That led to a lot of online hate."

Participant

"Social media plays a role as many people are fighting to fit the beauty standard. For example, light skinned people fit the beauty standard and to maintain this, dark skinned girls are often scapegoated to highlight the beauty of light skin girls."

Participants believed that social media had a role in perpetuating Eurocentric beauty standards, which caused inner group racism, directed at those who did not meet those standards.

Participants also stated that influencer culture had an important part in inner group racism as social media was promoting influencers who were closer to Eurocentric beauty standard.



Participant

"When BLM protests were happening we saw more hate towards black people online and when asian crimes were rising, we saw more asian people being attacked online."

Participant

"When '*stop asian hate*' was trending there were so many arguments and fights between asian online users and black online users. Minorities need to come together to help one another not try and one up each other."

Covid was another factor highlighted by participants that caused inter-group racism, as the pandemic led to a raise in xenophobia. During the pandemic there was also a peak of the Black Lives Matter movement.



There was a consensus that social media mirrored real life events. As different groups were being targeted offline, they were often targets of online abuse which caused tension between minority groups.

INFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE REPORTING

Participant

"Even when reported, the accounts aren't removed or receive any penalty hence believe they can continue with their actions".

There is a greater need for updating and enforcing stricter rules and regulations. Some participants reported that policy makers need to be actively updating rules and regulations online to prevent online racism



Participant

"It takes mental energy to report because then you are engaging with it and that weighs on me. Sometimes a post will get removed and then they'll just upload it again."

Some participants said they have given up reporting accounts due to it not being dealt with or its racist content being reuploaded again.

Participant

"I posted something on my instagram story about Palestine, it wasn't removed but had less views compared to my other stories. So many people noticed the same happen with them and everyone knew it was to do with Insta's algorithm trying to not spread awareness. I feel like less is done to prevent racism but more is done to prevent awareness."

One participant highlighted that social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram were trying to stop the spread or exposure of political content to other users on their platforms.

Participant

"They would still use monkey emoji's and the annoying thing is it was never taken down cause it was just emojis to them."



Bot moderation and algorithms fail to pick up covert methods of racism such as offensive meme, gif or emoji use.

GREATER NEED FOR EDUCATION

Participant

"Think people have a skewed image of racism, such as saying the N word only, people are less aware of subtle forms of racism like micro aggressions."

Participant

"The cause of online racism is the racism which permeates society offline. Social media provides a platform for those who hold racist views and cannot express them publicly in real life."

A lot of participants reported concerns revolving around a lack of awareness on covert forms racism among young people and teachers.

There is a common acknowledgement among participants of online racism stemming from racists in real life.



Participants emphasised how there's many levels to racism in real life. Whilst many education and workplaces are targeting racism on the surface, there is still a lot more that needs to be addressed such as representation.

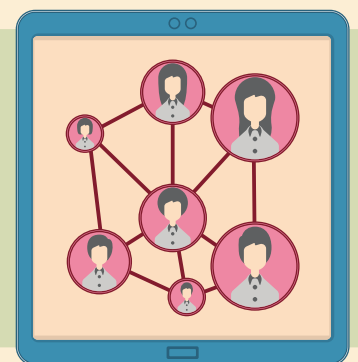
Participant

"You can stop saying the N word etc, but how are you talking about Black people in your class or around you? How are they represented in your school or organisation, that stuff, it still needs a lot of work."

Participant
"They need to create more awareness as youngsters aren't realising how their action can damage other physically and mentally.".



Participant also emphasis the importance of raising awareness of how damaging online abuse can be for young people who use social media



FEAR OF DISCLOSING IDENTITY

The majority of participants reported feeling uncomfortable talking about their race and more comfortable discussing other aspects of their identity.

Participant

"Race is probably the biggest thing I can get anxious about sharing because it really changes how people see you."

Participant

"Being a female has always been hard, like no matter what online group I'm a part of either I leave because of sexist jokes or I feel like people ignore my opinions if it's a male heavy group."

Female participants highlighted how they faced discrimination and sexism from male users when joining groups online.



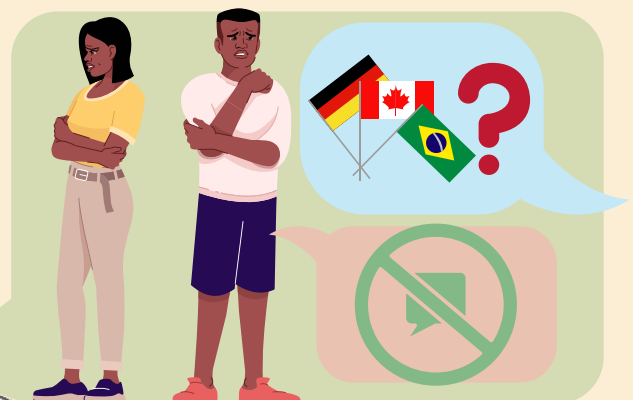
Participant

"I only reveal my gender online on public platforms. On private accounts however my age, gender and sexuality is displayed."

Participant

"Patronised for age, abused cos of gender, questioned about sexuality."

One participant stated that they refrain from disclosing their sexuality to others as there are no safe LGBTQ spaces for Travellers online.



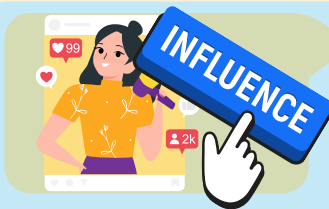
RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations
for online experiences

Recommendations
for offline experiences



Update platform guidelines: give a time frame in which the report will be investigated. Even if content is not removed, a written summary should be provided to the person who filed the complaint, so they know what steps were taken.



Reviewing content by influencers prior to it being posted online in order to minimise any unconscious bias being perpetuated in influencer posts.



Removing any post that has been reported whilst it is being investigated to minimise any possible discomfort caused. The post can be reinstated once it is clear that it is not abusive.



Creating online events with speakers that allows young people to share their experiences and collaboratively discuss the issues they are facing.



In-depth workshops at schools and workplaces for everyone that cover all aspects of racism; micro-aggression, cultural appropriation, colourism, sharing experiences of those been targeted online, and the consequences of perpetrating racism onto others.



More representation (diversity, inclusion policies too) within the curriculum, and the workplace.

FURTHER RESEARCH AND REFLECTIONS



Further research could be done through:



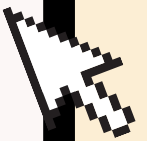
Using different recruiting strategies to achieve a larger sample size. This would allow a more accurate representation of views.



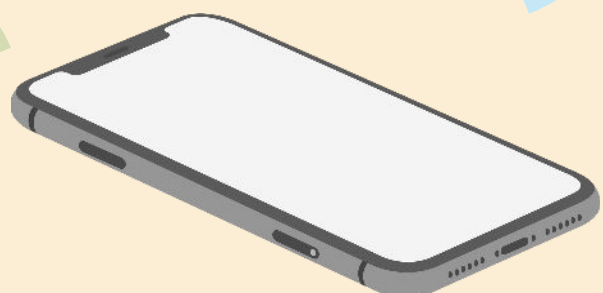
Holding in-depth interviews along side surveys to generate detailed and rich data.



Influencer culture seemed to come up a lot in data as a factor that caused divide with minority groups, so further research into this topic could strengthen understanding about individual's overall experiences.



The researchers involved in the study understood the importance and the need for a study that looked at people of colour's experiences with online racism as they were all from minority groups and had various experiences that they felt needed to be represented in research. Whilst collecting data, researchers came across a response that essentially denied the existence of online racism and undermined the harmful impacts it could have on users. The responder argued for freedom of speech and hypersensitivity of users whilst remaining anonymous. This instance further supported the researcher's findings regarding online anonymity and lack of consequences whilst also showing that further research needs to be done in order to address the negative aspects of digital spaces.





CONCLUSION



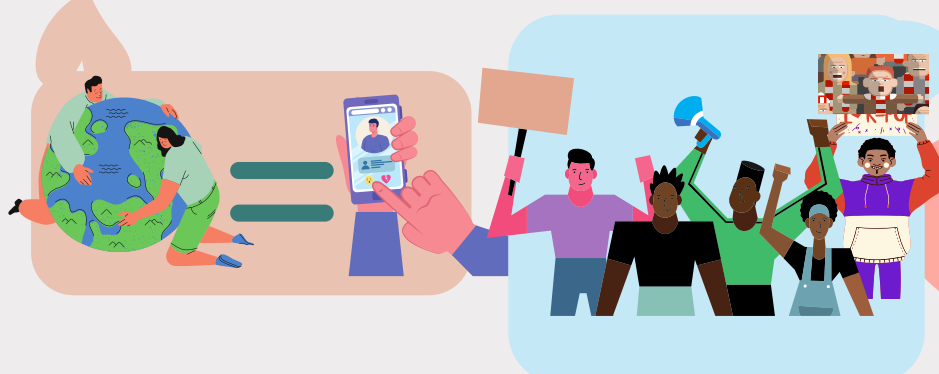
This qualitative report aimed to highlight the challenges faced by young people of colour in regards to racism on social media.

The data collected emphasised the shortcomings of social media designs as it was ineffective against covert racism. Participants also felt like reporting was ineffective due to the flexible rules and regulations that ultimately has no severe consequences for racist users.

Other aspects that were prominent in participant's experiences included influencer culture and covid. Both aspects created further divide within and amongst minority groups.

It was also clear that online racism was a reflection of real life racism and so in order to tackle online racism, it was essential to address and correct offline experiences.

Even though this study has brought to light experiences of those who are missing in traditional literature, it is clear that when it comes to tackling racism, both online and offline, there is still a lot left to be done.





Acknowledgements



We would like to give a special thanks to:

Those who took part in the survey sharing their experience with racism online.

Sent at 14:37

The Young Foundation, Chelsea McDonagh, and Angela Broadbridge for the support they gave throughout this project.



And the Peer Researchers who worked on this project:



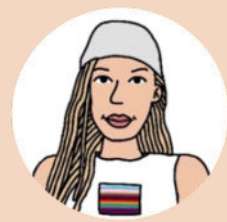
Disha Das



Jonah Celestin



Nora Zia



Sharpay Salazar-Turner



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