Film and Publication Board
Content Regulatory Authority of South Africa

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

TREND ANALYSIS ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ONLINE HARMS

REGULATORY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH ANALYSIS UNIT

31 March 2025

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

Contents

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

1. Introduction

Technological advancements have significantly transformed the media content landscape, leading to new ways of creating, distributing, and consuming media content. This has further significantly influenced media content regulation, providing opportunities for new enforcement tools and regulatory oversight while, also bringing to the fore new challenges that require meticulous regulations. **Balancing the benefits of technological advancements with the need to protect fundamental rights remains a critical task for regulators, including the Film and Publication Board (FPB).**

The Film and Publications Board (FPB) is a schedule 3A Public Entity established in terms of the Films and Publications Act, 65 of 1996. The objective of the FPB is to regulate the creation, production, distribution and possession of films, games and certain publications by means of classification, assigning age restrictions and providing consumer advice. Additionally, the Act protects children from exposure to disturbing and harmful materials and from premature exposure to adult experiences **(Section 2b)**.

The FP Act further "sanctions punishment for the use of children in and exposure of children to pornography" as well as criminalising "the possession, production and distribution of child pornography (referred to as Child Sexual Exploitation Material – or CSAM)" (Section 2c and 2d). This particular focus on children has been necessitated by the realisation that the public, and young children particularly, are increasingly active in various online platforms, generating, storing and distributing content, which signals susceptibility to a mixture of physical and online harms.

2. Problem Statement

Social media, including user-generated content, while beneficial in many ways, also proves to be one of the major challenges for the FPB. It has been proven over time that youth are increasingly becoming susceptible to the dangers emanating from social media. These challenges include inter alia cyberbullying, sextortion, online predators, screen time addiction and access to age-inappropriate content. To understand the impact of social media on the South African youth, it is essential for the

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

FPB to gain insights into the evolving dynamics of technology, and how they facilitate or accelerate the exposure of children to potentially harmful online experiences. This insight should be used to inform policy and/or government regulations to promote a safer digital environment and address the emerging challenges in youth social media usage.

The *convergence* of different forms of media, such as television, radio, and the internet, into digital formats blurs the lines between traditional media platforms. Thus, the proliferation of online content, including user-generated content on social media platforms, presents challenges for regulators across the world. Online media content regulation is complex and challenging with, technology changes almost every day with updates for some of these online technologies occurring frequently.

Emerging research on the impact of technology on media content regulation suggests that the age of information technology has witnessed countless unprecedented technological developments which signal for the articulation of succinct technological and/or regulatory capabilities that can match these cutting-edge technological trends[1]. These changes have impacted patterns in the production, distribution and consumption of media content, a space that the FPB is concerned with. Consequently, the FPB is keen to understand the nature and impact of these technological changes on media content regulation.

The rise of digital platforms and streaming services has created challenges for traditional media regulation. Platforms that fall outside the traditional regulatory frameworks governing television and film continue to highlight the inefficiencies in existing regulatory frameworks. Thus, the Film and Publication Board as mandated by the Films and Publications Act, no. 65 of 1996, as amended, provides binding provisions for commercial online distributors to register and submit their content for classification to ensure digital platforms adheres to local standards and regulations.

[1] FPB Research on The Impact of Technology on the Regulatory Mandate of the FPB. 2024. Regulatory Development and Research Analysis

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

3. Research Scope and Motivation

The current research exercise endeavours to:-

- Examine the effects of youth social media usage;
- Identify risk factors associated with youth social media usage in order to inform the South African legislative landscape;
- Contribute to the research currently undertaken in the South African context.

4. Research Objectives

The objective of the current study is to systematically assess and understand the effects of social media on the South African youth, including its influence on their behaviour, well-being and development. Thus the study seeks to:-

- Examine how social media usage influences various aspects of youth's lives, including their mental health, emotional well-being, self-esteem, relationships, academic performance, and overall development;
- Identify patterns, trends, and behaviours in youth social media usage, including frequency of use, types of content consumed and shared, platforms used, and motivations behind engagement;
- Identify risk factors associated with negative outcomes of social media usage among youth, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, exposure to inappropriate content, privacy concerns and addiction; and
- Generate evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, healthcare professionals, social media platforms, and youth themselves.

5. Methodology

This research study was quantitative in nature which relied on primary research data. The FPB Regulatory Development and Research Analysis unit developed a survey instrument which was administered in all nine Provinces in South Africa in the period April 2024 to March 2025. The survey was administered through a random sampling approach and, results where then captured and analysed to form this report. Additionally, a literature review on international trends of the effects of

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

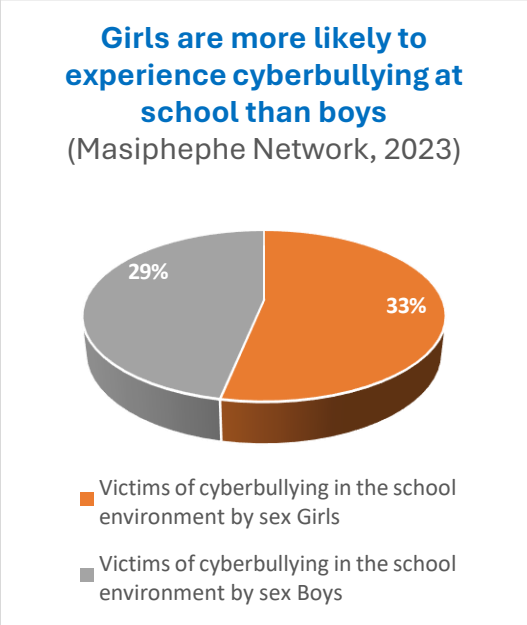
cyberbullying was conducted to guide the development and/or design of the survey instrument utilised in the research report.

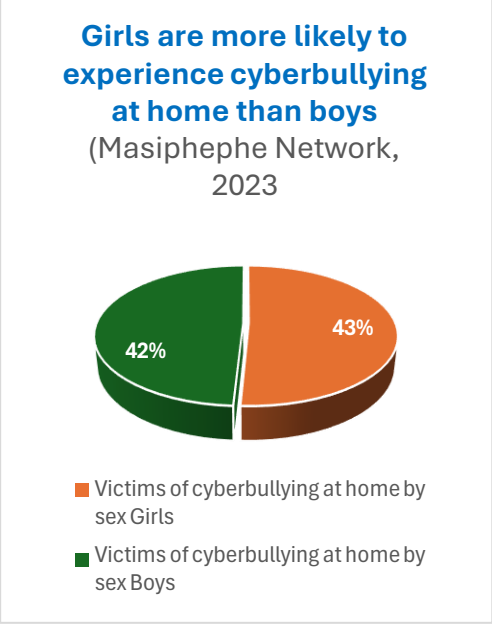
6. Study Limitations

At the time the study was being undertaken the South African National Treasury instituted nationwide cost containment measures for all government entities. This limited traveling to various provinces for data collection purposes. However, the FPB regulatory development and research analysis team did manage to the survey on social media platforms.

7. Literature Review

Studies suggest that South African girls are more susceptible to cyberbullying both at home (43.4%) and in the school environment (33.1%) compared to boys (42.4% at home and 29.3% at school.[2]





[2] Masiphephe Network (2023) *The impact of cyberbullying in South Africa March 2023 - Masiphephe*, *Masiphephe Network*. Available at: https://www.masiphephe.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/3.-Thematic-paper-cyber-bullying-in-SA_FINAL.pdf (Accessed: 28 January 2024).

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

7.1. Victims of Bullying Experience the Following:[3]

- Anxiety, tension and fear.
- Victims are unable to concentrate on their schoolwork, which often leads to a drop in school work performance.
- It affects the victim's self-esteem and gives rise to feelings of low self-worth and social withdrawal.
- The effects of bullying do not die out with age, as recent research has shown that adults who have experienced abuse as children are more likely to attempt or commit suicide than the people who did not (Hertz, M.C. et al: 2013).
- Research has shown that even after years after the bullying, victims have higher levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem than other adults (Cowie, H: 2013).
- In extreme cases cyberbullying has led to suicide. Bullycide – a word coined and used in Europe and the USA referring to teenage suicide caused by bullying, has been noted as the cause of death of over 4, 500 children in the United States.

Statistics on teen suicide as a result of cyberbullying have not been systematically collected in South Africa, with the South African Medical Research Council cautioning against exaggerating the extent of the problem. Often there are underlying factors associated with teen suicide, involving environmental situations, events in the life of the teen, and a predisposition to depression among others. This does not diminish the impact of cyberbullying, however, as a contributory factor, (Kootbodien, *et al*., 2020).

7.2. Level of Cyberbullying Awareness – Global Trends

The Ipsos 2018 Global Advisor survey on cyberbullying assessed the levels of awareness of this scourge. Among its key findings were the following:

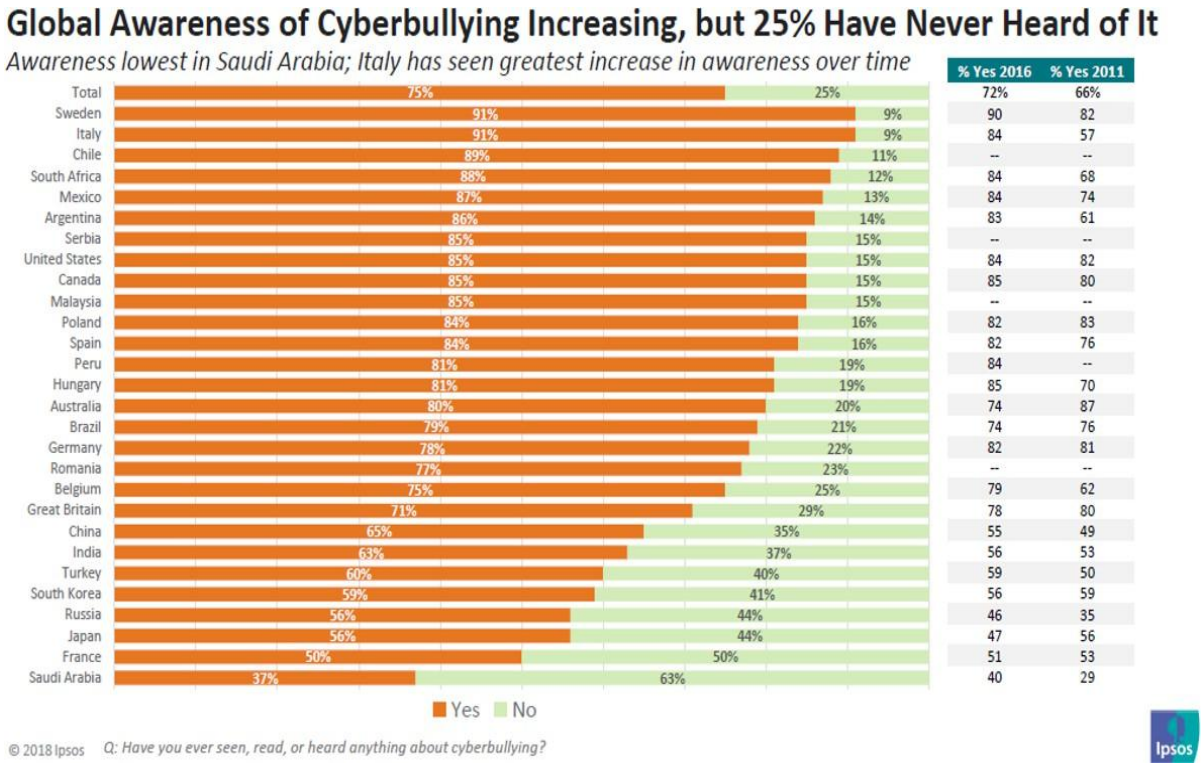
- 75% of adults globally have heard of cyberbullying, though 25% remain unaware.
- Awareness is highest in Sweden and Italy (91% each) and lowest in Saudi Arabia (37%).

[3] Kootbodien, T., Naicker, N., Wilson, K.S., Ramesar, R. and London, L., (2020). Trends in suicide mortality in South Africa, 1997 to 2016. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *17*(6), p.1850.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

- South Africa ranks amongst the top 5 surveys (88%)



Source: *Ipsos Global Advisor: Cyberbullying 2020*

7.3. Interventions from a Global Perspective

One-third of parents globally know a child cyberbullied in their community, whereas 15% of adults personally know someone who has been cyberbullied (Ipsos, 2020).

The Council of Europe's "Guidelines to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Rights of a Child in the Digital Environment," outline several areas of interventions. These call for an inclusive approach to online child protection, looking at children with disabilities and children from vulnerable environment (COUNCIL, 2018).

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

7.4. Empowering children for a safer digital experience[4]

The guidelines advocate for children to be heard, and to have their voices respected. **States are encouraged to provide children with information to their rights.** The FPB's Youth Online Safety Council is premised on the same principles. This should be done in a way that children can understand and which is appropriate to their maturity level. Children should be informed of:

- mechanisms and services providing adequate support
- procedures for complaints, remedies or redress should their rights be violated
- make such information available to parents and carers to enable them to support children in exercising their rights
- present these in a language that is accessible to children.

Critically, the guidelines urge states and other relevant stakeholders to actively engage children to participate meaningfully in:

- devising, implementing, and evaluating legislation, policies, mechanisms, practices, technologies and resources that aim to "respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment" (*Ibid*. p.13).

Concerning the digital environment, each State should apply such measures as may be necessary to require that business enterprises meet their responsibility to respect the rights of the child in all their operations within the State's jurisdiction, and, as appropriate, in all their operations abroad when domiciled in its jurisdiction. Furthermore, States should encourage and support by other relevant means business enterprises in understanding and respecting the rights of the child (*Ibid*. p.13).

7.5. The Right to Freedom of Expression

The guidelines point out that children, as creators of content in the digital entertainment, ought to be made aware of their right to freedom of expression, including the right to impart and receive ideas.

[4] COUNCIL, O.E., (2018) Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment. *Recommendation CM/Rec*, *7*.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

This impartation should include awareness of the need to balance this right with the right of others to dignity. The limitations of the right to freedom of expression should be emphasised, including the prohibition of incitement to hatred and violence (*Ibid.* p.14).

7.6. South African Laws and Commitments to Child Protection

The Bill of Rights in the constitution states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse and degradation. This is further enforced by the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005[5] and the Child Justice Act of 2008;[6] ensuring that all children are raised in caring and safe environments that promote optimal growth and development; and that all forms of abuse against children are punishable. This constitutional obligation gives everyone in our society the responsibility to play an active role in the care, support and protection of children.

Currently South Arica lacks a specific law directly defining and outlawing cyberbullying." There are several existing laws and policies that can be used to address it though. These include:
Main Legislative Tools:

- Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020:[7]
- Electronic Communications and Transactions Act 25 of 2002 (ECTA):[8]
- Film and Publications Act 65 of 1996 (FPA):[9] Classifies and regulates content, including online material.
- Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011:[10]
- This policy framework is found in the Department of Basic Education Policies, South African Police Service (SAPS), and the Independent Complaints Body (ICASA).

[5] South Africa, (2005). *Children's Act no 38 of 2005*. *Government Gazette*, (28944).
[6] South Africa, (2008). *the Child Justice Act of 2008* . *Government Gazette*, (28944)
[7] South Africa, (2020). *Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020*. *Government Gazette*.
[8] Coetzee, J. (2004). The Electronic Communications and Transactions Act 25 of 2002: facilitating electronic commerce. *Stellenbosch Law Review*, *15*(3), pp.501-521.
[9] The Films and Publications Amendment Act 11 of 2019
[10] The Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

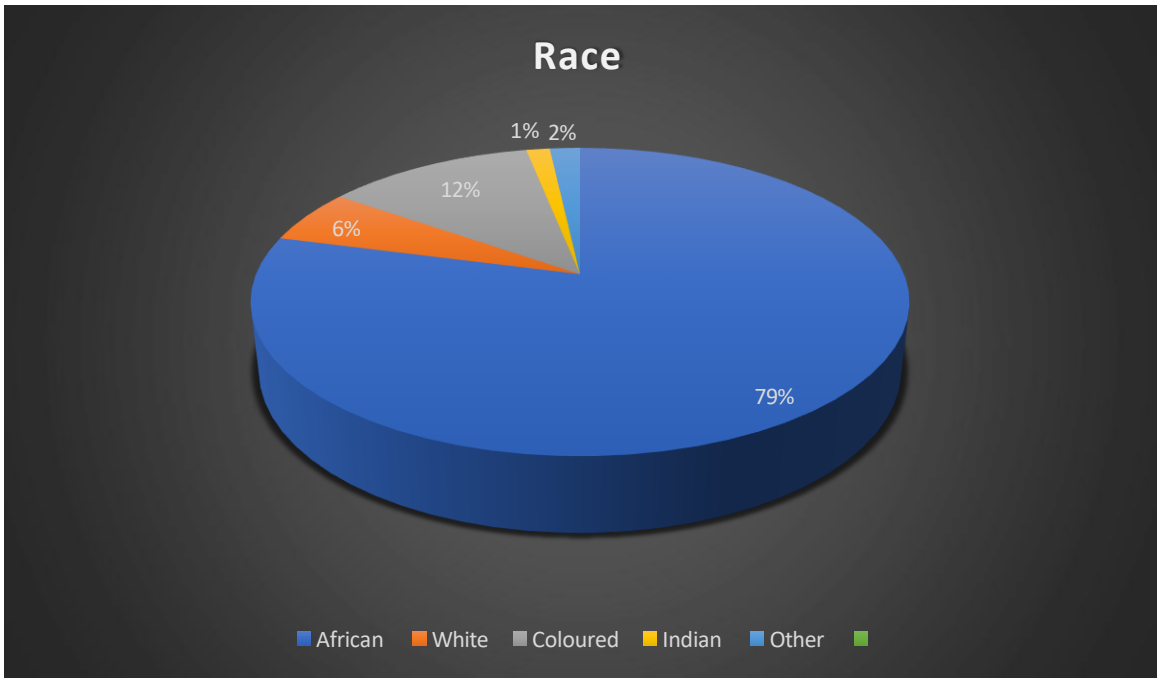
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

8. Results and Discussion

While beneficial in many ways, social media also proves to be one of the major challenges for the FPB. It has been proven over time that youth are increasingly becoming susceptible to online dangers, chiefly emanating from social media platforms. These online dangers include inter alia cyberbullying, sextortion, online predators, screen time addiction and access to age-inappropriate content. To understand the impact of social media on the South African youth, it is essential for the FPB to gain insights into the evolving dynamics of technology, and how they facilitate or accelerate the exposure of children to potentially harmful online experiences. This insight should be used to inform policy and/or government regulations to promote a safer digital environment and address the emerging challenges in youth social media usage.

Below are the findings from the FPB Trend Analysis on the Impact of Social Media on Online Harms Survey which was administered during the period April 2024 to March 2025.

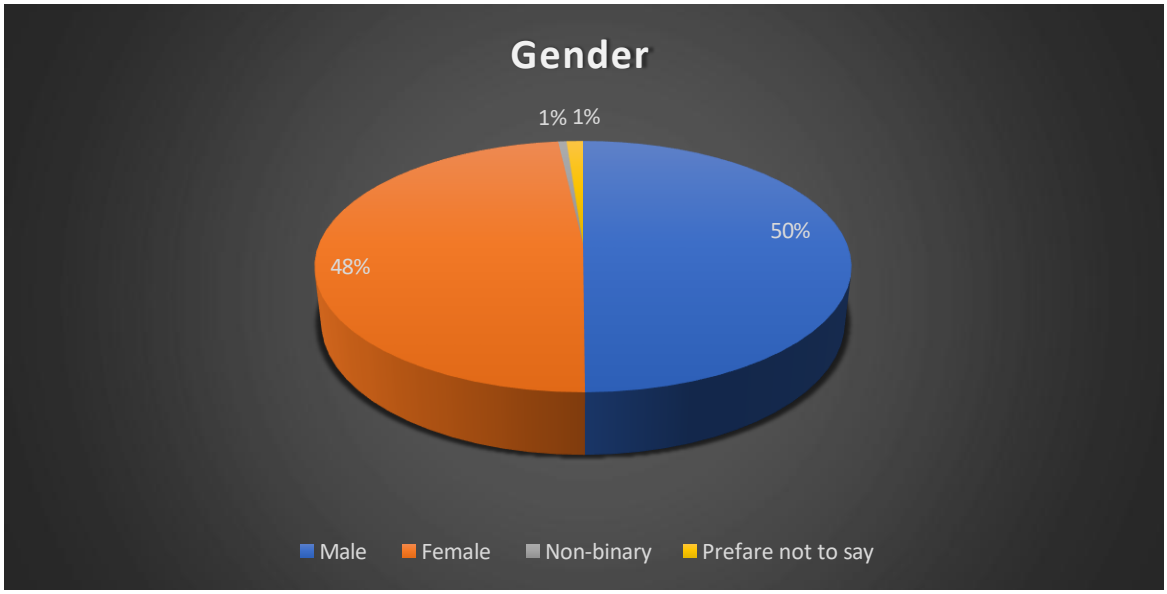
8.1. Demographic Information



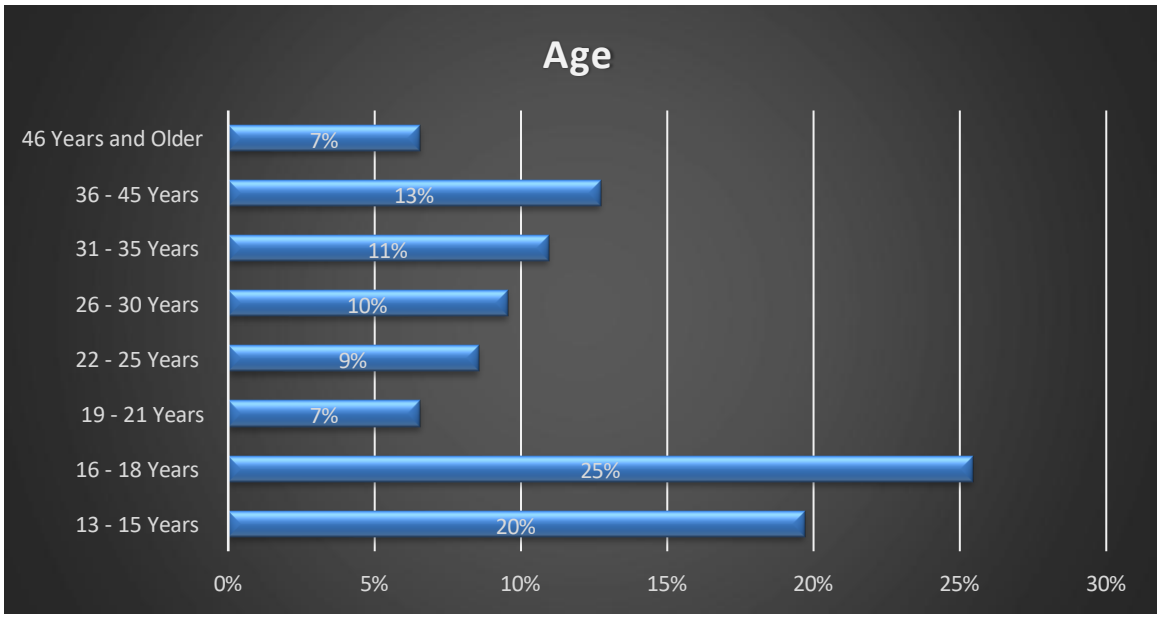
The above chart reveals that the majority of participants who participated in the survey were Black (79%), followed by Coloureds with 12% and Whites with 6%.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za



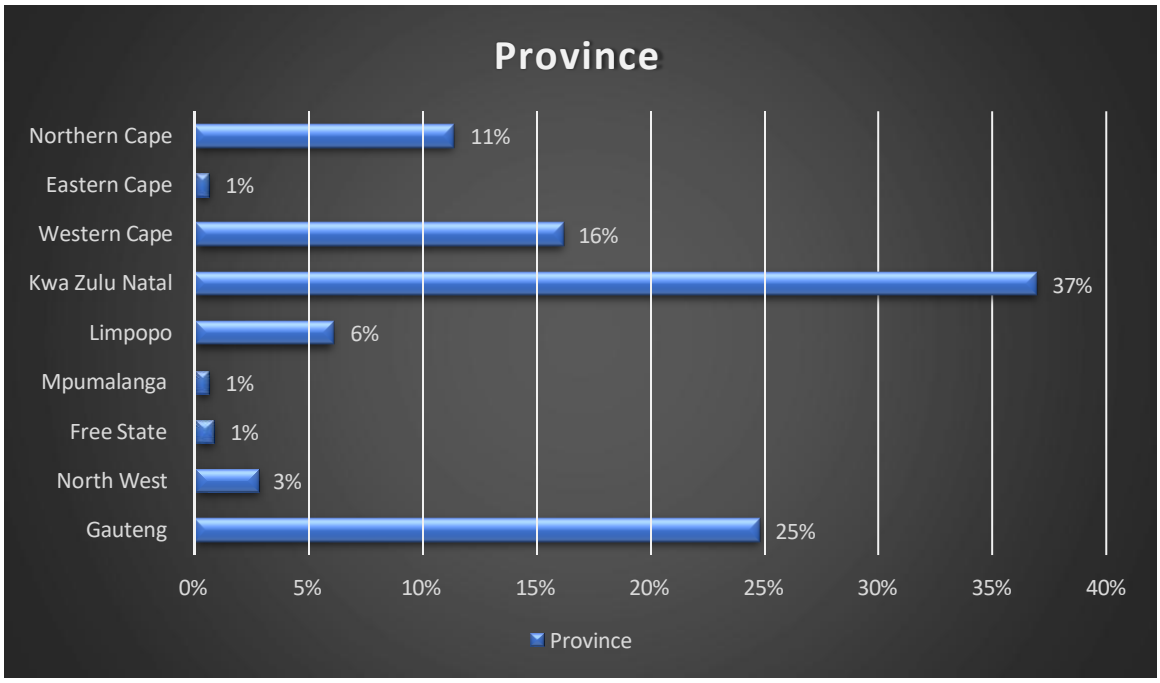
The graph above shows that the majority of survey participants were male at 50% and followed by female at 48%.



The chart above reveals that the majority of survey respondents (25%) were within the 16-18 years old age group, followed by 13-15 years old age group at 20% and 36- 45 years age group at 13%.

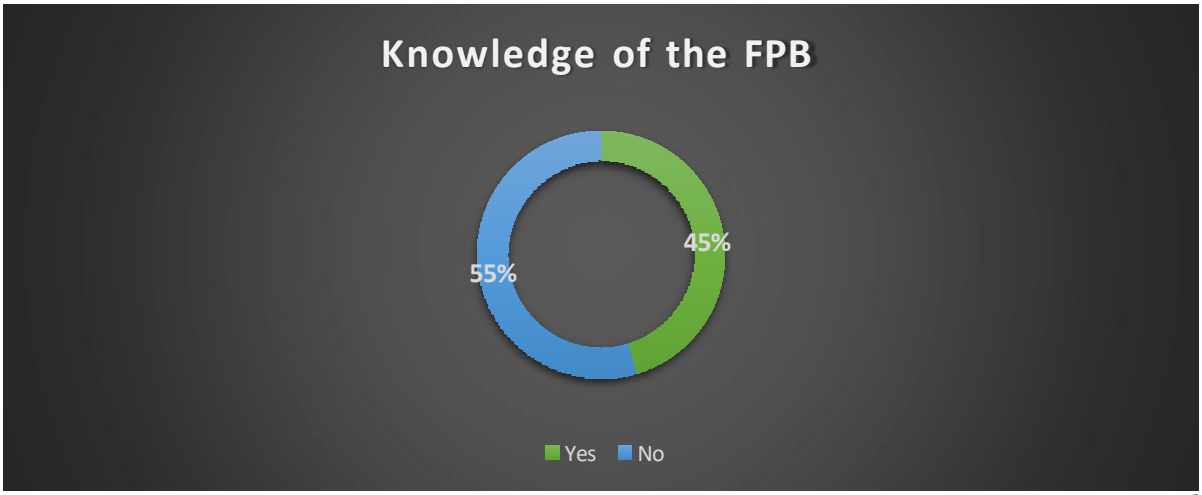
ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za



The chart above shows that KwaZulu Natal received the highest number of participants (37%), followed by Gauteng (25%). Provinces which with the participation rate below 20% were Western Cape (16%), Northern Cape (11%), Limpopo (6%), North-West (3%) while, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Free State each received 1% of the total survey participants.

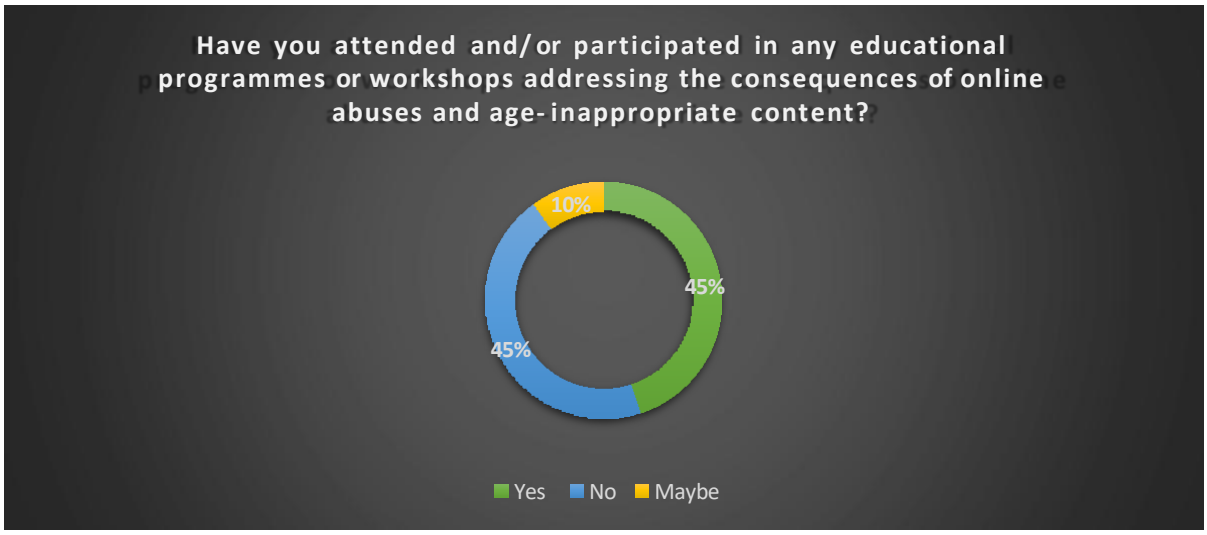
8.2. Knowledge of the FPB



ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

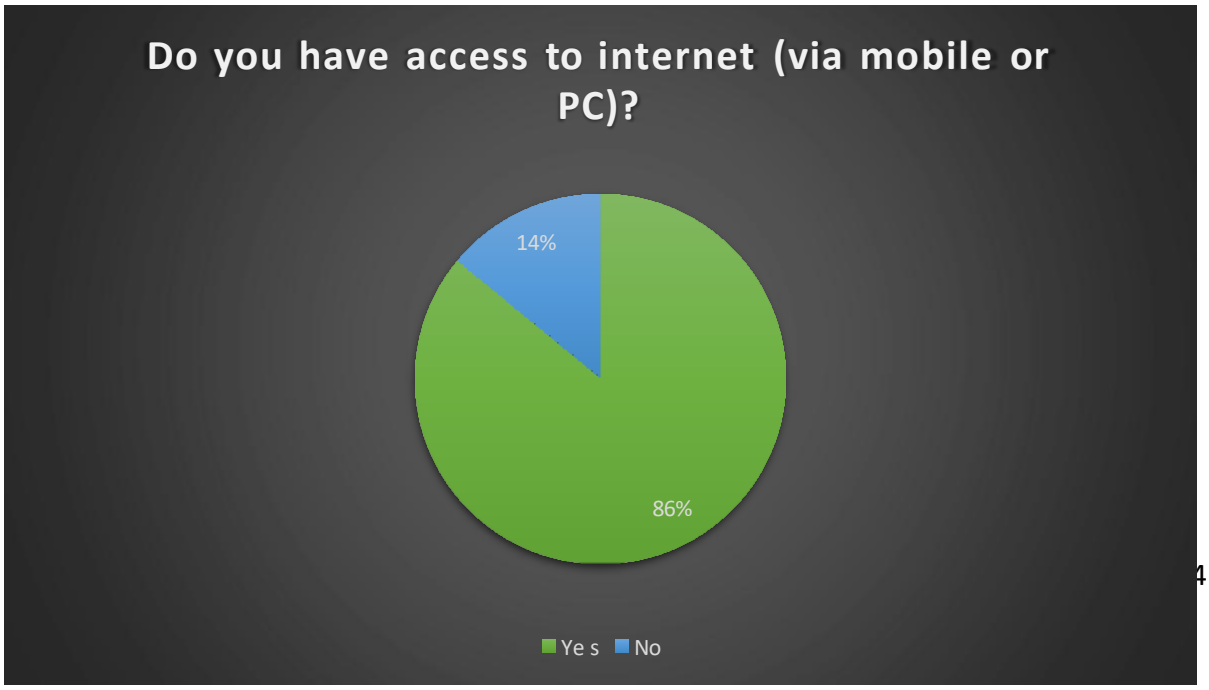
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

The chart above shows 55% of the total survey participants knew the FPB while, 45% didn't know about the FPB.



The chart above reveals that 45% of the total survey participants have attended a workshop or seminar focusing on the Impact of Social Media and Online Harms, while 45% only attended a workshop or seminar for the first time while the survey was administered and 10% were not sure.

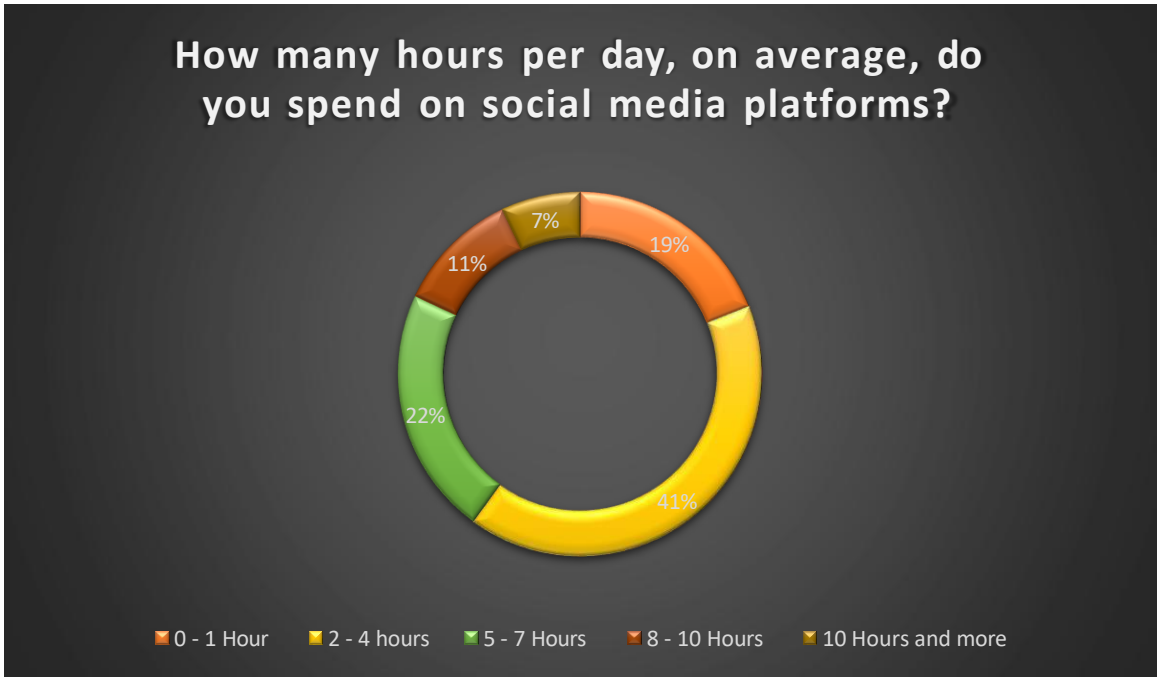
8.3. Internet Access



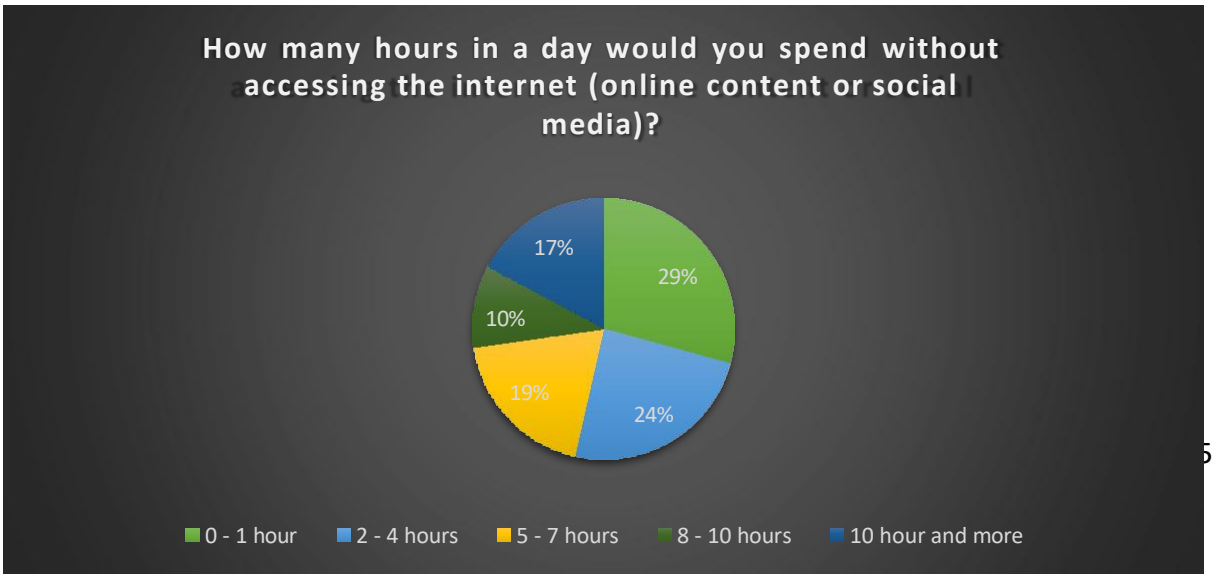
ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

The chart above shows that the majority of survey participants at 86% had access to the internet while 14% did not have access to the internet.



The chart above shows that the majority of survey participants at 41% spend 2 – 4 hours per day on social media platforms, followed by 22% spending 5 – 7 hours per day on social media platforms. 7% of participants spent the least hours (1 hour per day) on social media.

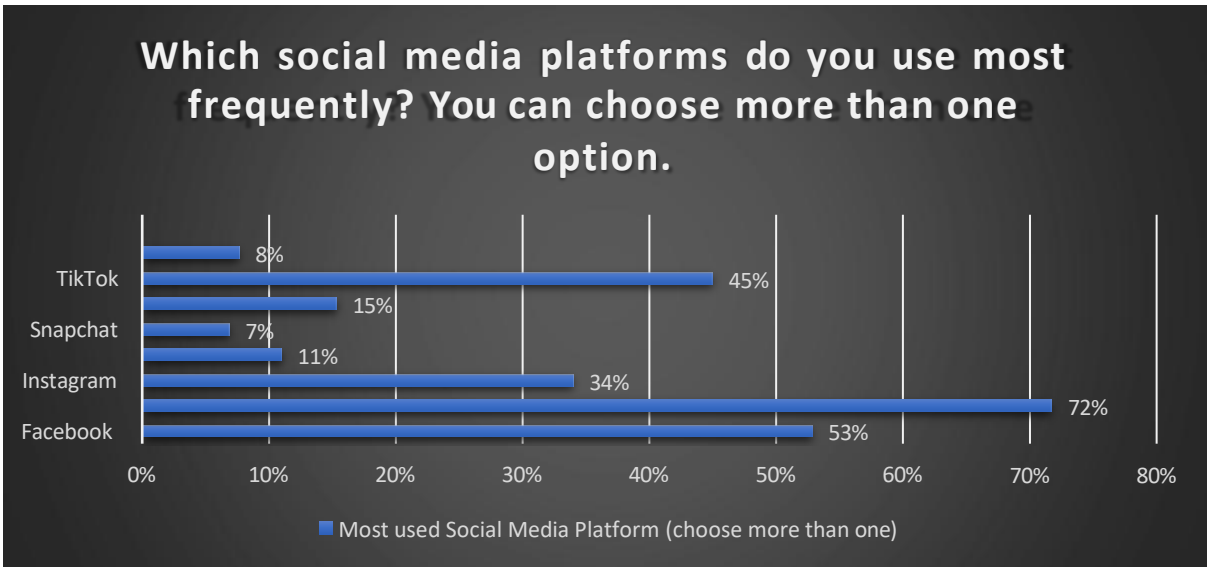


ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

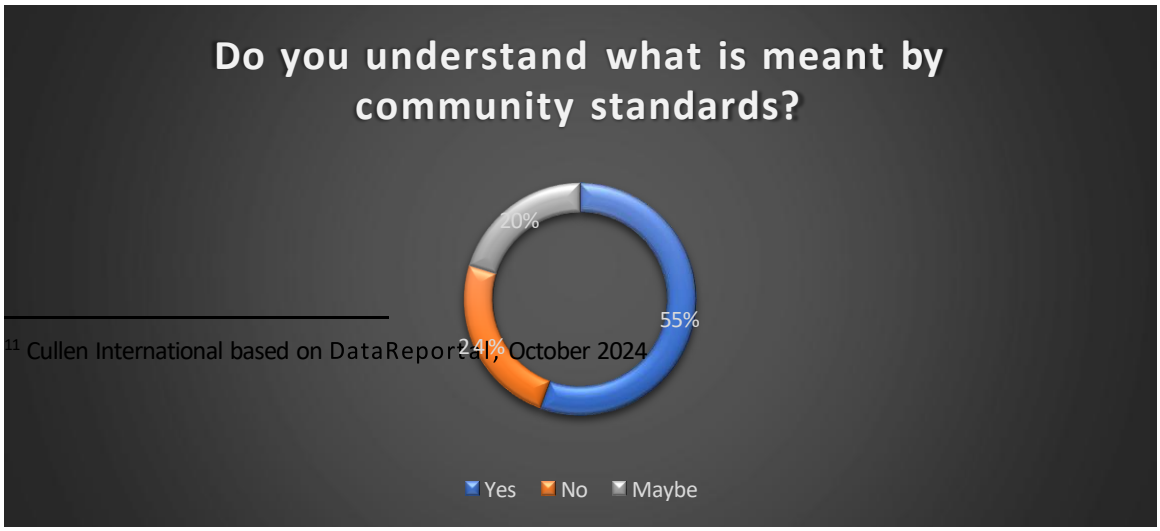
T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

The chart above reveals that the majority of survey respondents (29%) submitted that they could spend at least an hour without internet access, followed by 24% who could spend 2 – 4 hours and 19% who could spend 5 – 7 hours. The least percentage of participants at 17% could spend 10 and more hours and 10% could spend less than 10hours without internet access.

8.4. Most social media platform used



The chart above revealed that WhatsApp is the most popular social media platform used by respondents (72%), followed by Facebook (53%), TikTok (45%), Instagram (34%). Twitter (15%), LinkedIn (11%), and other social media platforms (8%), Snapchat (7%) were the least used social media platforms. However, in terms of the Cullen Global Social Media Rapport published in October 2024, TikTok is considered as the most used social media platform.[11]



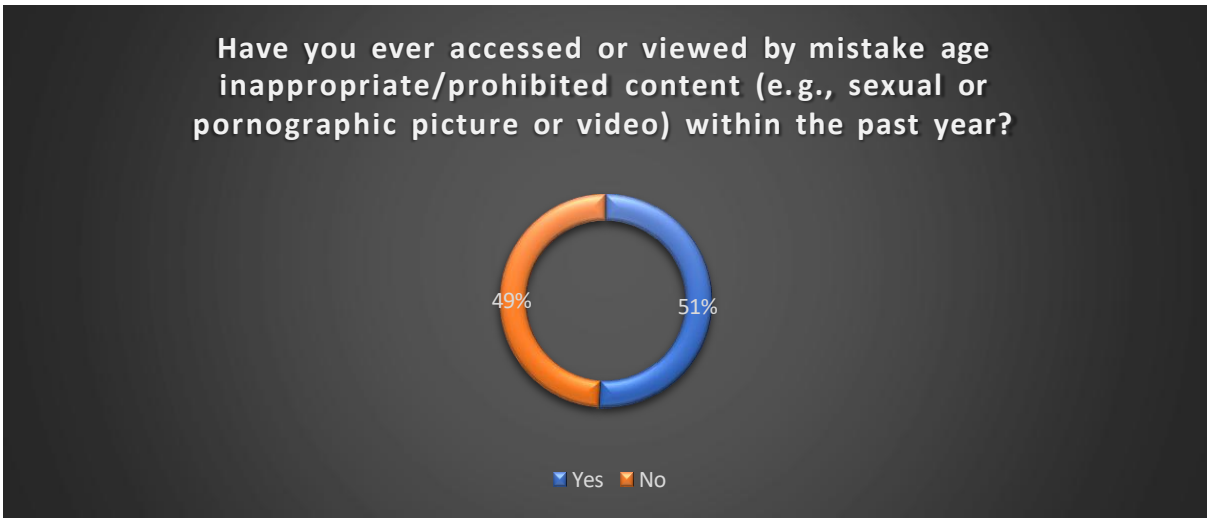
[11] Cullen International based on DataReportal, October 2024

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

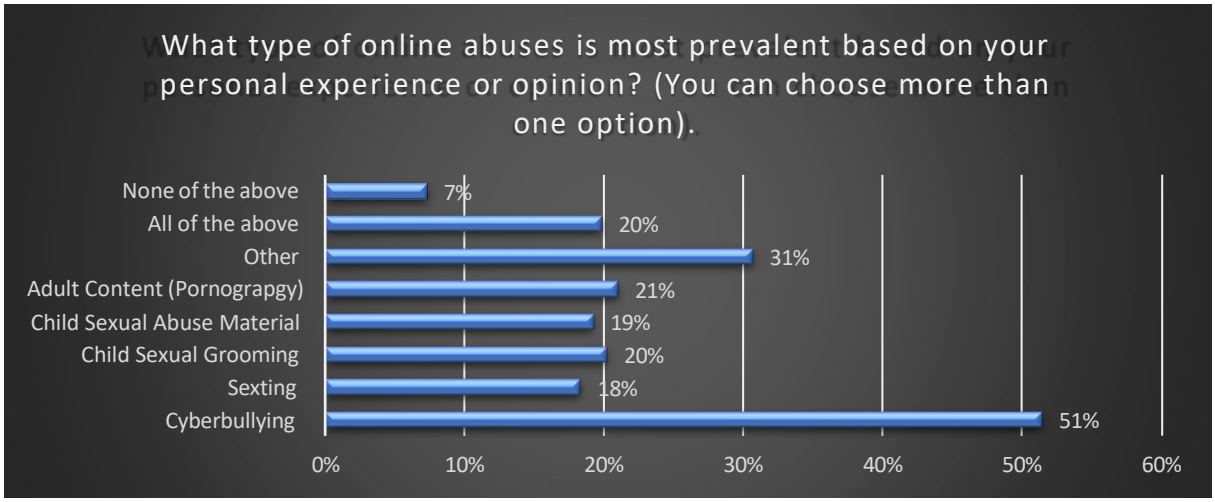
The chart above shows that most survey respondents (55%) understand what community standards are while, 24% didn't know what community standards are and 20% are not sure what are community standards.

8.5. Access to X18 Content



The chart above shows that most respondents (51%) have accessed pornographic/sexual content by mistake while 49% have never accessed pornographic/sexual content by mistake.

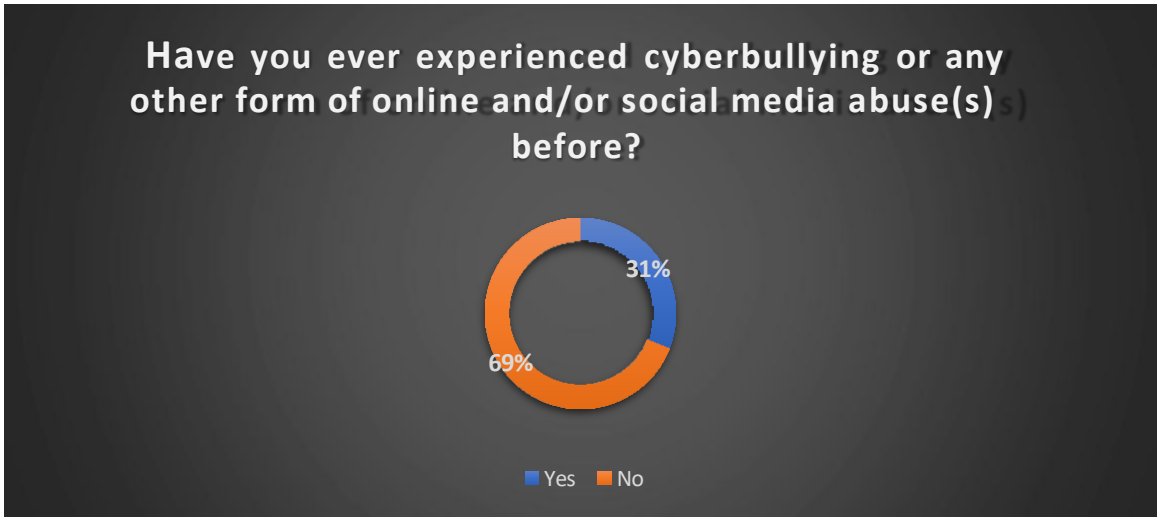
8.6. Most prevalent online abuses



ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

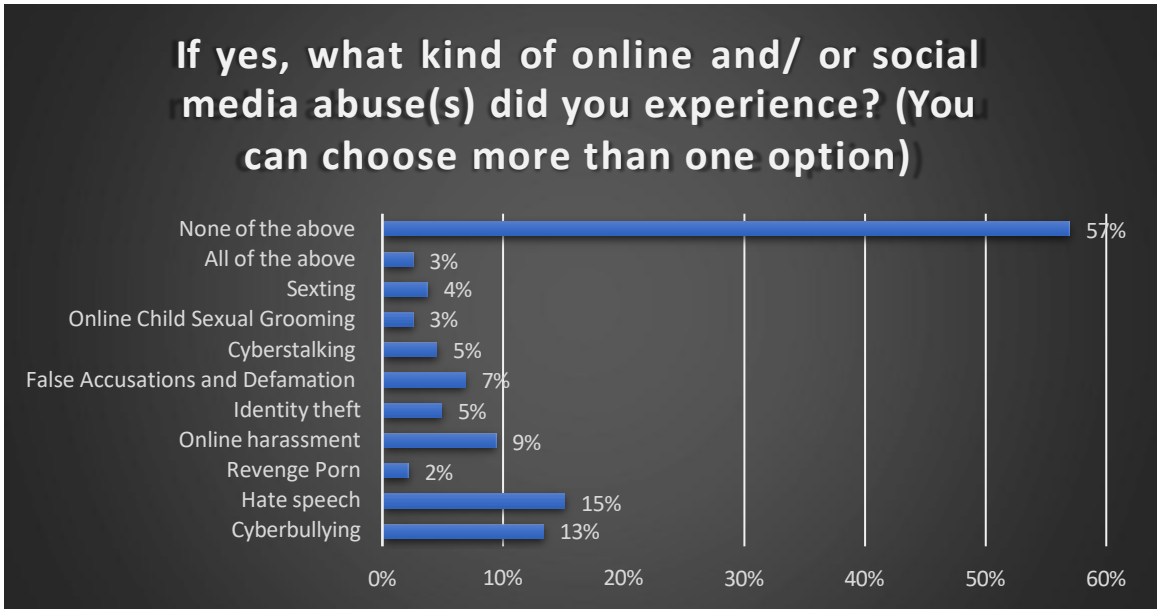
The chart above shows that the most prevalent online abuse occurs through cyberbullying (51%), followed by other online abuses (31%), accessing adult content (21%), child sexual grooming (20%). When it comes to child sexual abuse material 19% was recorded and sexting recorded 18%. Whilst 20% of respondents have experienced all the above (meaning every other), only a small percentage of 7% have not experienced any of the above online abuses.



The chart above reveals that most of the survey respondents have not been cyberbullied (31%) before while, 31% have experienced cyberbullying.

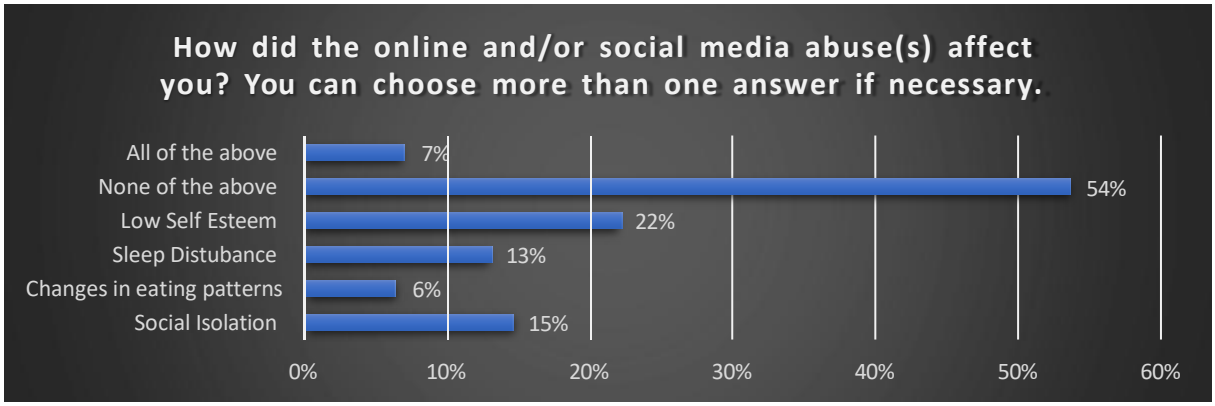
ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za



The chart above shows that whilst 57% of the survey respondents have not experienced any of the above online abuses, however, the type of online abuses experienced by the majority of respondents was hate speech (15%), followed by cyberbullying at 13% as well as online harassment (9%) and false accusations and defamation (7%). The type of online abuse that was experienced by the least survey respondents were: identity theft (5%), cyberstalking (5%), sexting (4%), child sexual grooming (3%) and revenge porn (2%). It is also critical to note that 3% of respondents experienced all the above.

8.7. Effects of Online Abuses

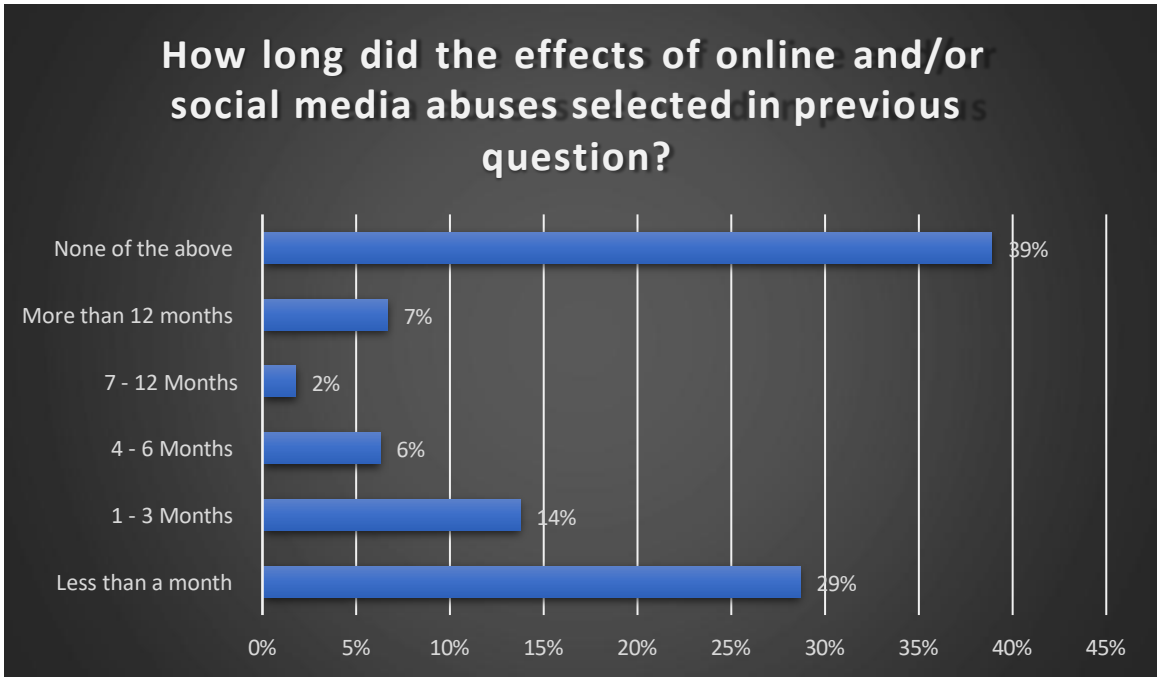


The chart above reveals that the online abuses bear with them various effects as this can be attested by the majority of respondents submitting that they experienced low self-esteem (22%), followed by

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

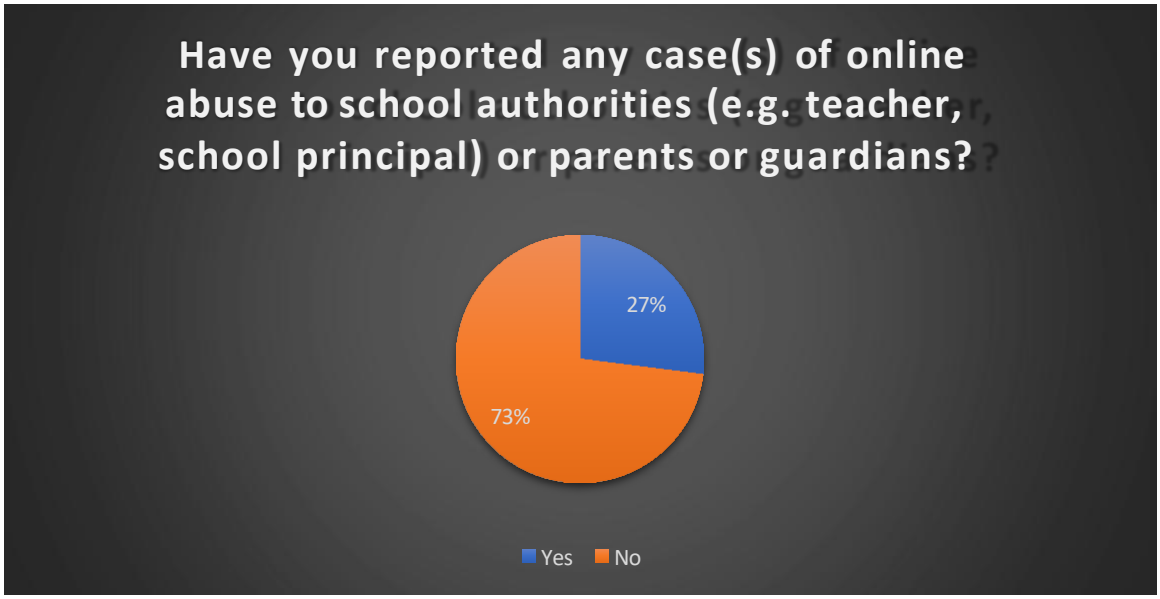
social isolation (15%), and sleep disturbance (13%). However, a fewer respondents revealed that they experienced changes in eating patterns (6%), whereas 7% have experienced all the above effects. It is important to note that 54% of respondents have not experienced any effects since they had no prior experience of any online abuses.



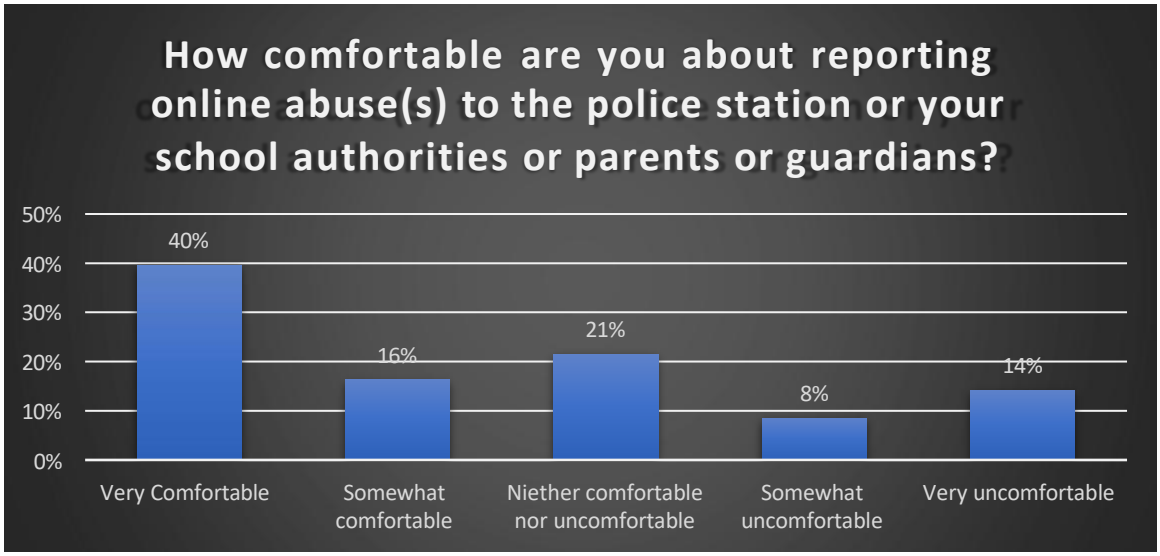
The chart above shows that the majority of the survey respondents interviewed had the effects of online abuses lasting for less than a month (29%). However, a considerable number of respondents of 14% endured the effects for 1 – 3 months. While a lesser percentage of respondents (7%) suffered the effects for more than 12 months and 6% enduring respondents for 4 – 6 months.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za



The chart above shows that the majority of learners have not reported cases of online abuse to their school authorities as it has been evidenced by 73% of respondents reporting having not reported any case(s) of online abuse to the school authorities.

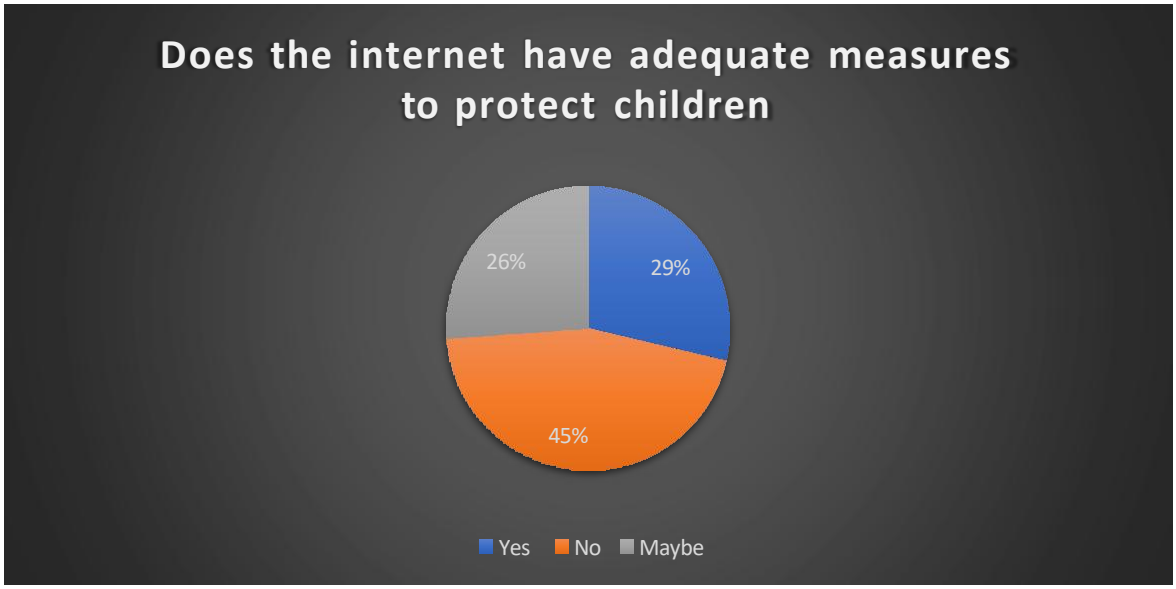


The chart above shows that the majority 40% of respondents are very comfortable with reporting online abuses, whilst 21% are not sure. A minimal 8% of respondents are somewhat uncomfortable and a reasonable 14% of respondents are not comfortable.

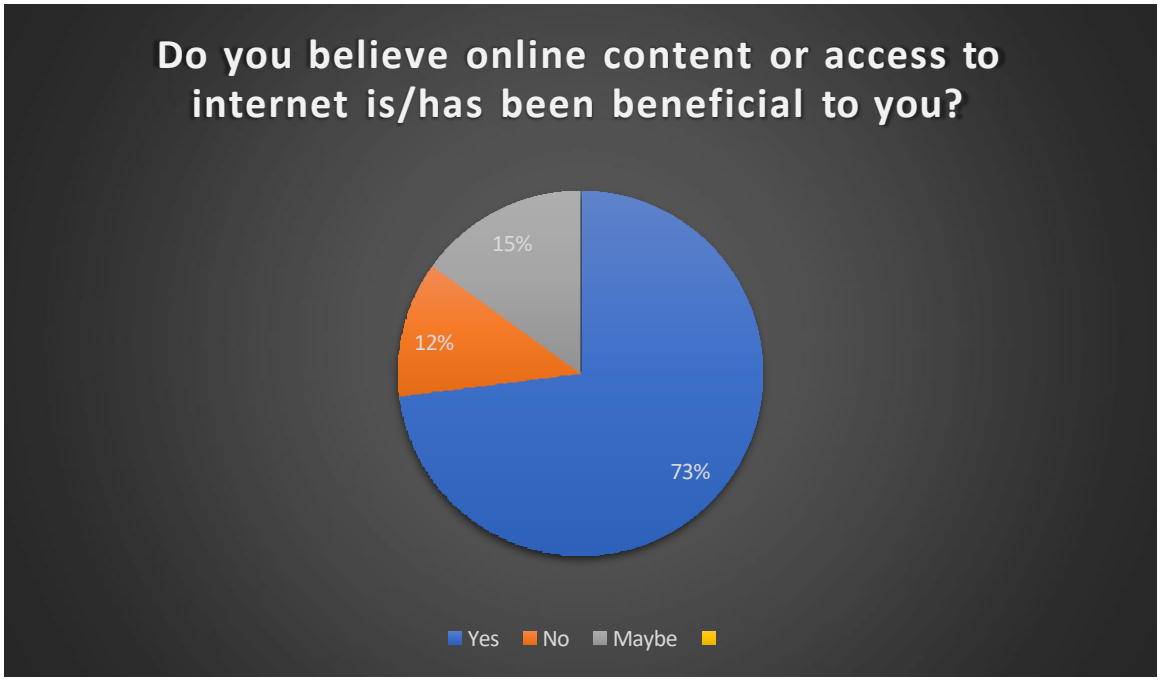
ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

8.8. Benefits of the Internet



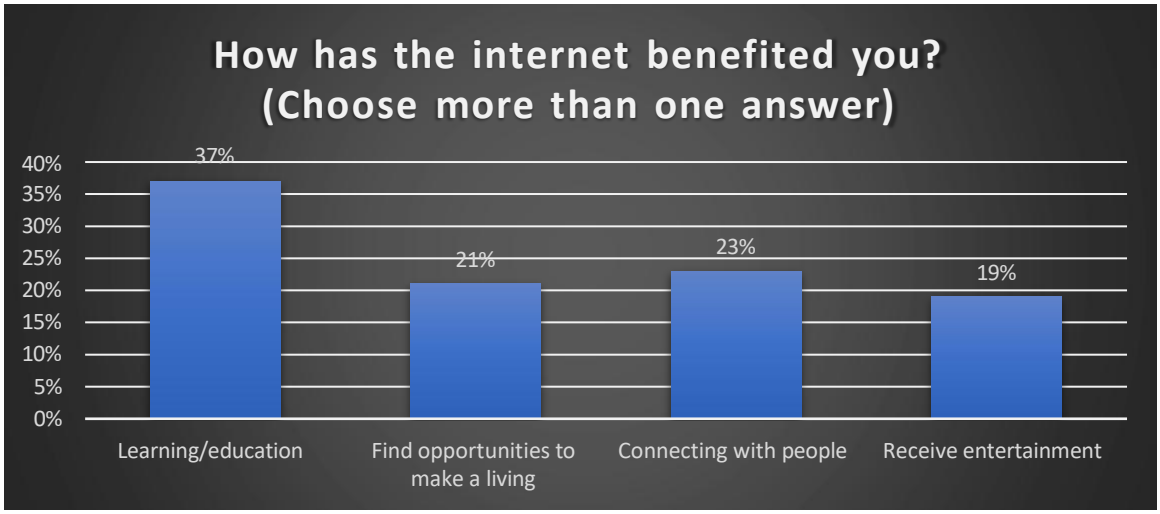
The chart above shows that the majority of respondents (45%) do not believe that the internet has adequate measure to protect children. Whereas on the other hand 29% of respondents were in the affirmative.



ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

The chart above reveals that the majority of survey respondents (73%) have benefited from the internet, while 12% have not benefited from the internet.



The chart above reveals that the internet has benefited the majority of respondents (37%) by way of learning/education opportunities, followed by 23% benefited by connecting with people, and 21% by by mainly finding opportunities to make a living. The least but sizeable participants (19%) responded that they benefited mainly in terms of receiving entertainment.

9. Summary of findings and implications for the FPB

Survey Area	Finding	Impact and Implications for the FPB
Demographic Information	**Race**: African = 79%, Coloured 12%, White 6%, Indian 1% and other 2% **Gender**: Male 50% and females 48%	Majority of respondents were male and from the African ethnic group. Majority of responses were received from KZN (37%), followed by Gauteng (25%) and Western Cape (16%).

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

	Province: Gauteng = 25% North West = 3% Free State = 1% Mpumalanga = 1% Limpopo = 6% Kwa Zulu Natal (KZN) = 37% Western Cape = 16% Eastern Cape = 1% Northern Cape = 11%	
Knowledge of the FPB	Yes = 55% No = 45%	Majority of the respondents were aware of the mandate of the FPB. While 45% could be regarded as significant in terms of respondents who are aware of the FPB mandate, however, the ideal situation to improve the potential of increasing the public complaints of online abuses to the FPB.
Attendance of Online Abuse Educational Programme	Yes = 45% No = 45% Maybe = 10%	45% of participants reported that were not exposed to online abuse educational programmes while likewise 45% were exposed to such educational programmes. This means that almost 55% of participants might not be aware of online harms and abuses (i.e. dangers of using the internet).

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

		In order to close the above gap, a study conducted by the FPB on the Impact of Technology on Online Social Harms recommends that the FPB needs to host live Q&A sessions on media literacy and FPB's role, run Radio and TV campaigns in multiple languages, featuring real stories of content regulation and its impact.
Internet access and Time Spend online	**Internet Access** Yes = 86% No=14% **Hours spend online per day** 0 – 1 hour = 19% 2 – 4 hours = 41% 5 – 7 hours = 22% 8 – 10 hours = 11% 10 or more hours = 7% **Days without internet** 0 – 1 hour = 29% 2 – 4 hours = 24% 5 – 7 hours = 19% 8 – 10 hours = 10% 10 or more hours = 17%	Majority of respondents (86%) do have access to the internet, and they spend most of their time online. Generally, the high rate of access to internet could means increased susceptibility to online harms but also increased potential to internet benefits. The study conducted by the FPB on Effective Classification of Games suggests that excessive screen time (access to social media) could hold a potential for a child to receive a gaming link which in turn could make them susceptible to harmful gaming experiences, as unsupervised gaming may carry gambling elements, violence and sexual elements. The proportion of time spent online is the proportion of time spent away from offline physical activities. Studies say that this could be detrimental

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

		to child development both cognitively, mentally, physically, etc. Therefore, the question the FPB should be asking is what type of data is being shared on various online platforms. For instance, do the respondents know that if you are under the age of 18 and take a nude picture of yourself you are creating child pornography?
Types of Social Media Platform	**Frequently used social media platform:** Instagram = 34% Twitter (X) = 15% TikTok = 45% WhatsApp = 72% Facebook = 53% Understanding community standards: Yes = 55% No = 24% Maybe = 21%	Community guidelines developed by platform owners might not be understood by respondents of the survey. Majority of respondents use WhatsApp and TikTok, respectively. Which means that most online abuses are likely to be experienced on WhatsApp and TikTok than any other Social Media Platform. Therefore, the FPB may have to target these two platforms in terms of platform monitoring and compliance enforcement. WhatsApp is the most popular application used with 72% of the respondents submitting that they use this app and therefore the most potentially fallible platform. This implies that online platform owners ought to play a bigger role in reinforcing online safety.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

Personal Experience of online abuse	**Mistakenly accessed age inappropriate or prohibited content:** Yes = 51% No = 49% **Personal experience of cyberbullying or other forms of social media abuses:** Yes = 31% No = 69% **Types of social media abuses experienced:** Sexting = 18% CSAM = 19% Online Child Grooming =20% Cyberbullying = 51% **Effects of social media abuses:** Changes in eating habits = 6% Low self-esteem = 22% Sleep disturbance = 13% Self-isolation = 15% **Duration of the effects of social media abuses:** Less than a month = 29% 1 – 3 months = 14%	Respondents of personal experience of cyberbullying provide the highlight on challenges associated with online harms for children active online. This signals the need for more outreach programmes to be undertaken by the FPB. 31% of respondents have experienced some form of cyberbullying or other forms of social media abuses before, with cyberbullying being the highest social media abuse. Studies have shown that this may lead to changes in eating habits, low self-esteem, sleeping disturbance, feeling of shame and self-isolation. Additionally, these effects that are caused by the social media abuses which last longer sometimes, with a minimum of one (1) month and maximum of twelve (12) Months. Over half of respondents have mistakenly accessed age-inappropriate content. This could imply that platform owners' internet security tools for children are not tight enough to prevent these kinds of incidents. FPB may need to develop stricter child-based online access safety rules. This implies that online platform owners ought to play a bigger role in supporting online safety.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

	4 – 6 months = 6% 7 – 12 months = 2% More than 12 months = 7%	This also calls for the development and deployment of effective age-verification systems for online users (particularly children). Additionally, the FPB Age Verification research report reveals that weak age verification systems have made it easier for children to access prohibited and harmful content, which poses significant risks to their mental health and overall development.
Reporting online abuses	**Measures put in place by platform owners:** Yes = 29% No = 45% Maybe = 26% **Reporting accessing age-inappropriate content to relevant authorities:** Yes = 27% No = 73%	45% of the respondents did not believe that the internet has adequate measures in place to safeguard children online. This could mean that children feel like it is easy for them to be exposed to social media abuses. Gaps in cyber-safety awareness among respondents might be one of the reasons why they did not report accessing age-inappropriate content to school authorities. Most respondents (73%) have never reported social media abuses. If the reasons for not reporting were due to inability/unwillingness to report, this may potentially have a detrimental impact on their healing/well-being journey. This implies that online platform owners ought to play a bigger role in strengthening online safety.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

Benefits of the internet	**Benefits of using the internet:** Yes = 73% No = 12% Maybe = 15%	73% of participants felt that access to the internet has benefited them, which means having access to internet is contributing into their growth and development. Implication: Internet is not all bad. Our messaging about online experiences must take this into account, while revealing to children and parents online dangers for safer online experiences. Improved Communication: Technology has made it easier than ever to connect with people all over the world. With the rise of social media and messaging apps, we can now communicate with friends, family, and colleagues in real-time, regardless of where they are located. Therefore, it is important for the FPB to also take advantage of the educational positive effects of social media in promoting the FPB brand and its mandate.

10. Recommendations

- It was encouraging to note that 55% of the survey participants knew who the FPB was however, **more work on the ground needs to be done by the FPB in terms of ramping up its outreach programmes and probably consider partnering with the department of Basic Education for purposes of reaching schools in South Africa** and soliciting ethical clearance to

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

engage school going children. This will assist the FPB in getting a deeper understanding of the various online harms permeating in South African schools.

- The analysis indicated that 45% of the participants did not know of the FPB or have never heard of the FPB before. **This requires the FPB to conduct more educational outreach and awareness campaigns on the FPB mandate, particularly the FP Act. However, Social media campaigns might be a solution considering the institutional budgetary constraints currently in place.**
- Since the results of the survey indicate that at least 31% of the participants have experienced cyberbullying or online abuse, **it is recommended that the FPB strengthens its relationship with online platforms in order to work effectively together in tackling cyberbullying/online abuses, i.e. when it comes to removing a certain harmful content online.**
- The interest in the child's internet behaviour assists in the fight against children accessing age-inappropriate content and possibly becoming a victim of online harms. It is recommended that parents and caregivers should continue monitoring their child's online behaviour and share information on the dangers of using the internet recklessly

11. Conclusion

Technological advancements, particularly the rise of the internet, social media, and streaming platforms, have drastically increased the volume and reach of media content. People can now create, share, and access content from virtually anywhere in the world. Regulators find it difficult to monitor and control the vast amount of content being generated across different platforms (social media, blogs, YouTube, etc.).

This makes it harder to enforce traditional content regulations such as the classification of content and/or providing age ratings, especially when content crosses borders and may be subject to different legal standards.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

The objective of the FPB conducting an impact study on social media usage in South Africa was to systematically assess and understand the effects of social media on young individuals, including its influence on their behaviour, well-being, cognitive development, and overall outcomes.

The primary aim of such a study was to generate evidence-based insights that will ultimately inform policy, practice, and interventions aimed at promoting positive outcomes and mitigating potential harms associated with youth engagement with social media platforms.

Additionally, the aim was also to contribute to the research gaps emanating within the field. There is a need to investigate the impact of social media on youth within the South African context considering the evolution of the digital environment and the reliance on social media for communication and entertainment purposes.

Online abuses bear with them various effects as this can be attested by respondents submitting that they experienced low self-esteem (22%), social isolation (15%), sleep disturbance (13%), changes in eating patterns (6%) and 7% have experienced all the above effects. 54% of respondents have not experienced any effects presumably because of not experiencing any online abuses.

Finally, and most critically is it anticipated that the findings of this study will encourage and guide the FPB Programmes to refocus their online safety and regulatory projects in general around the problematic areas of social media impact mainly outlined in the section on the summary of findings and implications for the FPB.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za

12. List of References

Coetzee, J. (2004). The Electronic Communications and Transactions Act 25 of 2002: facilitating electronic commerce. *Stellenbosch Law Review*, *15*(3).

COUNCIL, O.E., (2018) Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment. *Recommendation CM/Rec*, *7*.

Cowie, H., "The immediate and long-term effects of cyberbullying," in *Bullying: Experiences and discourses of Sexuality and Gender,* 2013, Rivers, I and Duncan N (eds.), Routledge.
INHOPE, *What is NCII*, https://inhope.org/EN/articles/what-is-ncii#:~:text=This%20refers%20to%20any%20intimate,the%20content%20online%20without%20consent.

Ipsos. (2020) *"Ipsos Global Advisor: Cyberbullying 2020".* Ipsos.

Kootbodien, T., Naicker, N., Wilson, K.S., Ramesar, R. and London, L., (2020). Trends in suicide mortality in South Africa, 1997 to 2016. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *17*(6), p.1850.

Masiphephe Network (2023) *The impact of cyberbullying in South Africa March 2023 - Masiphephe*, *Masiphephe Network*. Available at: https://www.masiphephe.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/3.-Thematic-paper-cyber-bullying-in-SA_FINAL.pdf (Accessed: 28 January 2024).

Securly (2023) *The 10 types of cyberbullying*, *Blog*. Available at: https://blog.securly.com/10/04/2023/the-10-types-of-cyberbullying/ (Accessed: 31 January 2024).

South Africa, (2005). *Children's Act no 38 of 2005*. *Government Gazette*, (28944).

South Africa, (2008). *the Child Justice Act of 2008*. *Government Gazette*.

South Africa, (2020). *Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020*. *Government Gazette*.

ECO Glades 2, 420 Witch Hazel Ave
ECO Park, Centurion, 0169
Pvt Bag X31, Highveld Park, 0169

T +27(0) 12 003 1400
F +27 (0) 83 000 1100
www.fpb.org.za