

## Social Media Users' Willingness to Report Cyberhate to the Police: An Exploratory Study

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### Abstract

Cyberhate has emerged as a significant problem primarily manifesting on social media platforms in Kenya. Among the most exposed to cyberhate are young people, especially university students, due to their extensive social media usage. Although the country acknowledges cyberhate as a criminal offence, there is a concerning trend of underreporting such incidents to the police. The precise reasons behind this underreporting phenomenon are unclear, despite the well-documented detrimental effects of cyberhate on individuals and society. While studies have shown the impact of crime type on reporting decisions, there has been insufficient attention given to studying cyberhate reporting specifically. It is on this premise that the present study aimed at investigating social media users' willingness to report cyberhate to the police, discern the reasons for non-reporting, and explore alternative reporting options beyond the police. In this descriptive survey, we utilised a quantitative approach to investigate undergraduate students at a public university in Kenya. A sampling frame comprising 5,121 undergraduate students was constructed from this population by concentrating on three specific faculties. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation from all strata within this frame. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire administered to a randomly selected subset of 378 respondents, of whom 261 returned completed questionnaire. Participants in the study displayed neutral feelings when it came to willingness to report cyberhate to the police. The study identified the perception of inaction by police as the primary obstacle to reporting cyberhate. Respondents also favored alternative options such as reporting to social media companies or confiding in friends and family. The study recommends targeted awareness and education initiatives involving law enforcement, social media

companies, and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission to address cyberhate on social media platforms in Kenya and establish a user-friendly national reporting mechanism. Further research using qualitative methods with diverse social media users is advised to understand the reasons behind neutrality in willingness to report and strengthen efforts to combat cyberhate. The study explored the implications of this finding for law enforcement institutions and suggested directions for future research.

**Keywords:** Cyberhate, police, reporting, social media, victimization.