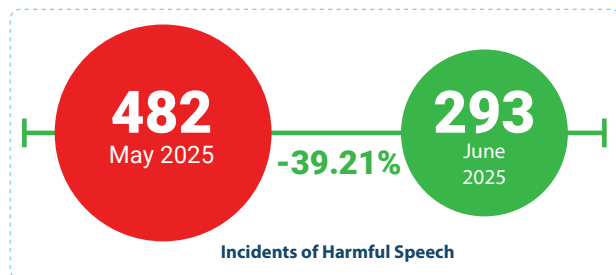


Harmful Speech in Sri Lanka

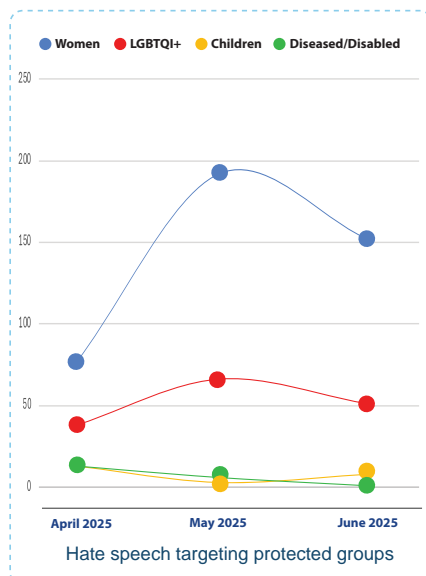
MONTHLY BULLETIN
JUNE 2025

Key Trends



Compared to May, there was a 22.72% decrease in the number of anti-LGBTQI+ content and a 20.83% decrease in content targeting women in June. Moreover, there was an 83.33% decrease in content targeting diseased/disabled groups. Monitors observed a two-fold increase in content targeting children in June.

Key events in June that led to harmful speech



HATE SPEECH INCIDENTS IN JUNE

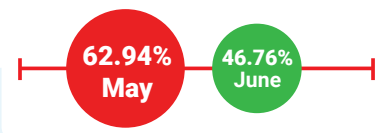
137

Tensions triggered by Pride month celebrations

June saw anti-LGBTQI+ targeting surrounding Pride parades and other queer events. Homophobic slurs were used to discredit the community, while some posts labelled LGBTQI+ individuals as mentally ill. Monitors also observed calls for violence against the community, with individual targeting of prominent queer activists. Moreover, the arrival of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sri Lanka prompted discussions on the legalisation of same-sex marriages, which received anti-LGBTQI+ backlash.

Tensions surrounding discussions on the Iran-Israel war

Social media monitors noted a rise in harmful speech targeting the Muslim community, following the increased military tension between Iran and Israel. Harmful content included dehumanising language and derogatory slurs across platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok. Some posts contained language that could incite hostility or violence against Sri Lankan Muslims.



DISINFORMATION INCIDENTS IN JUNE

45

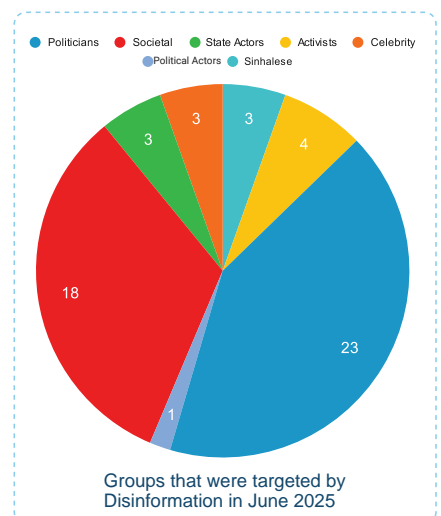


Disinformation using branding from trusted news sources

Social media monitors identified disinformation campaigns targeting political figures through fabricated posts designed to resemble content from established news organisations. These posts falsely claim that Riza Zarook had been elected as Mayor of Colombo, that MP Mujibur Rahman had left the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), and that MP Harsha de Silva had criticised party leadership for the party's defeat in the Mayoral election. By replicating the visual and editorial style of well-known and trusted news outlets, such as Hiru News and Ada Derana, the posts engage in disinformation aimed at misleading the public and influencing political discourse.

Misuse of GMOA branding in support of arrested doctor

A fake banner circulating online falsely attributed a statement to the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA), suggesting support for the release of Dr. Maheshi Wijeratne who was arrested by the Bribery Commission. The banner misused the GMOA's official logo and name to mislead the public.



1. Harmful speech includes hate speech, dis/misinformation, harassment and incitement to or glorification of violence.

2. The [UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) defines hate speech as, "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."

3. While there is no universally accepted definition of disinformation, the Report of the [UN Secretary-General on Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) defines disinformation as, "information that is inaccurate, intended to deceive and shared in order to do serious harm".

RESPONSIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

June 2025

Key Observations

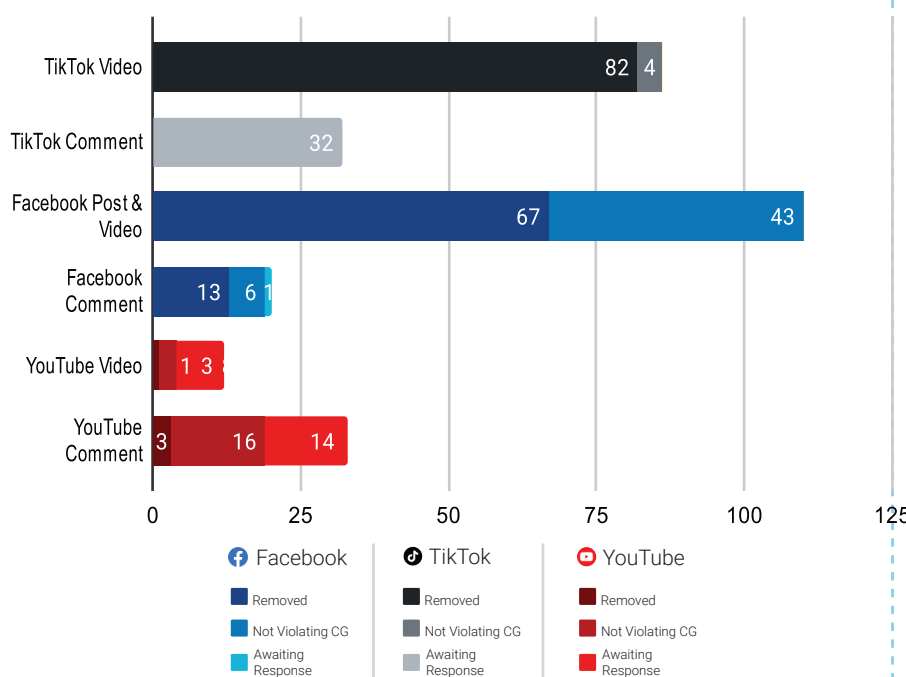
In June, 293 incidents of harmful speech were reported to social media platforms. Of these, 130 were reported to Facebook, 118 to TikTok, and 45 to YouTube. This month, TikTok had the highest removal rate at 69.49%, followed by Facebook at 61.53%. YouTube's removal rate was 8.88%.

Of the content reported to Facebook, 37.69% was found not

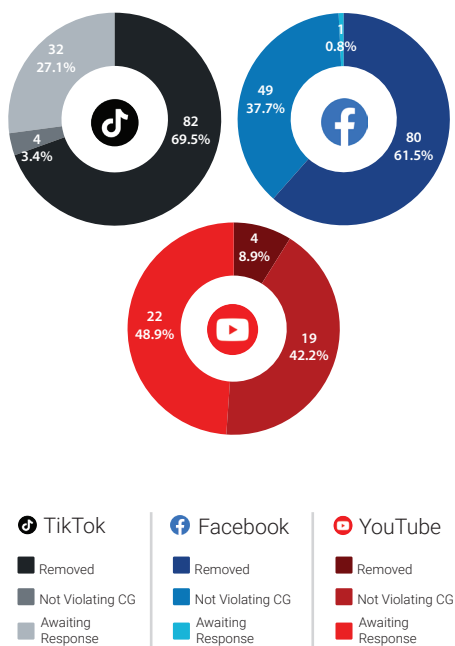
to violate its community guidelines — a reduction of 29.59% from last month's figure of 53.53%.

Facebook and TikTok responded to 86.69% of the content within a week of escalation. YouTube, however, took more than a week to respond to 48.88% of the escalated content.

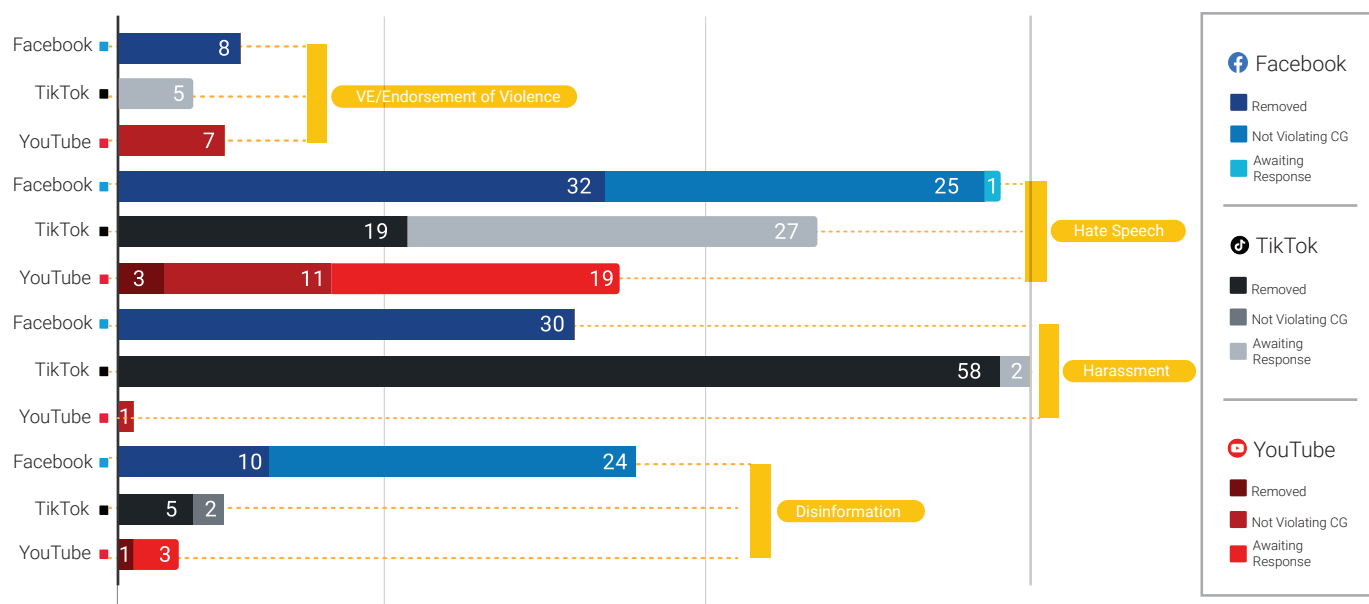
RESPONSE BY THE PLATFORM FOR EACH TYPE OF CONTENT



OVERALL RESPONSE BY PLATFORMS



RESPONSE BY CATEGORY



4. The ability to monitor Facebook was negatively impacted by the retirement of Meta's CrowdTangle tool on 14 August 2024.

5. The UN in Sri Lanka relies on trusted external fact-checkers to independently monitor dis- and misinformation. Actual levels of dis- and misinformation may be higher than reported due to monitoring capacity constraints.