



New GPAHE Report Reveals Conversion Therapy Disinformation Remains Widely Available Online, Particularly in Non-English Languages

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Anti-LGBTQ+ groups continue to exploit the internet to disseminate harmful “conversion therapy” health disinformation, particularly in non-English-speaking regions, while social media platforms lag behind in implementing robust content moderation and improving their algorithms.

[The Global Project Against Hate and Extremism](#) (GPAHE) today released a special report titled, "[Conversion Therapy Online: The Ecosystem in 2023](#)," a comprehensive follow-up to its [2022 research](#) that found harmful conversion therapy disinformation thriving online.

Conversion therapy is the practice of trying to change one’s identity or orientation, a practice that has been described as “akin to torture” by the United Nations, condemned by most reputable medical associations, and outlawed in at least 26 countries. This groundbreaking report underscores the ongoing challenge of anti-LGBTQ+ conversion therapy material's proliferation online, particularly on social media and search engines, with a particular focus on non-English languages and global regions.

Building on the findings of its [2022 online ecosystem study](#) and its [2022 conversion therapy providers report](#), GPAHE extended its research on conversion therapy disinformation to Brazil, Mexico, four West African countries, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Ivory Coast, and South Africa, revealing a disparity in content moderation and the prevalence of harmful materials in non-English contexts, especially in Africa. GPAHE also revisited the US results in English and Spanish. 2022 countries were Australia, Ireland, Germany, Kenya, Colombia, and the US.

Key findings of the report highlight that, despite search engine and social media companies like Bing and TikTok taking action on conversion therapy material after GPAHE’s initial research, considerable challenges remain. Little progress has been made in non-English languages allowing for the growth and spread of harmful



disinformation. Platforms such as YouTube have been largely recalcitrant in their refusal to address the spread of this anti-LGBTQ+ content.

An important finding is that while tech companies have, for the most part, adequately incorporated the term “conversion therapy” into their algorithms, though mostly in English or major languages, they have all failed to address the most common term used by conversion therapy providers globally to avoid content moderation and the negative connotations now associated with conversion therapy – “unwanted same-sex attraction.” This finding was also specifically highlighted in 2022.

This research includes a detailed country-by-country [analysis](#), emphasizing the nuances and specific challenges faced in each region. The findings serve as a critical reminder of the global context of conversion therapy, including its legal status, the devastating effects of this practice, and the strength of the global anti-LGBTQ+ movement. The report calls for increased responsibility and action from social media platforms and search engines in combating the spread of harmful conversion therapy disinformation.

"The persistence of conversion therapy material online, especially in non-English languages, is a stark reminder of the work still needed to protect LGBTQ+ people globally, especially as legislative attempts to dehumanize and roll back rights for the LGBTQ+ community skyrocket," said Wendy Via, GPAHE's co-founder and CEO. "Our report not only sheds light on this issue but also provides easily actionable recommendations for platforms to create a safer and more inclusive online environment."

Key Platform Updates

Best results - TikTok: TikTok banned the promotion of conversion therapy on its platform following advocacy efforts spearheaded by GLAAD employing GPAHE's 2022 research. This ban appears to be effective, as searches for terms related to conversion therapy, including "ex-gay therapy" and "conversion therapy," returned a page indicating that these terms may be related to hateful material. This indicates a significant investment by TikTok in enforcing its ban on conversion therapy terms.

Most improved - Bing: Bing has made noticeable improvements to its search algorithms in English. For the term "same-sex attraction," Bing's search results were as



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problematic as Google's, if not worse, with the first two pages mostly promoting anti-LGBTQ+ views. However, for the term "conversion therapy," Bing showed surprisingly authoritative results, unlike in 2022, including official sources and news articles condemning the practice. A Bing-generated flag at the top of the page added to the authoritative nature of these results. Despite these improvements, a knowledge box on the third page of search results contained information supporting conversion therapy.

Least improved - YouTube: YouTube's handling of conversion therapy content is the least effective among major platforms. Despite claims by YouTube of labeling conversion therapy content with a banner and prohibiting content that demeans individuals based on sexual orientation, the application of these measures is inconsistent, if done at all. GPAHE's research found the information label only on specific searches and usually only in English, indicating a lack of comprehensive enforcement of YouTube's content policies regarding conversion therapy and a lack of commitment to the safety of the LGBTQ+ community. Many videos purporting the effectiveness of conversion therapy are still monetized on the site.

"Our research findings show that tech and social media platforms have a long way to go to protect their users from harmful conversion therapy medical disinformation, but the example of TikTok and the improvements on Bing show it can be done given the will," said Heidi Beirich, co-founder and chief strategy officer for GPAHE. "It is imperative that users find authoritative information about this dangerous practice and that policymakers are aware of why conversion therapy is harmful. The online space could provide those accurate results."

Information and specific examples of harmful material on all major platforms and the extent to which conversion therapy thrives online can be found in the [report](#).

Recommendations

- All companies must use common sense when evaluating whether content violates rules on conversion therapy and remember that it is dangerous, and sometimes deadly, to allow pro-conversion therapy material to surface. It is quintessential medical disinformation.
- All companies must invest in non-English, non-American cultural and language resources. The disparity in the findings for non-English users is stark.



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- All companies must incorporate “same-sex attraction” and “unwanted same-sex attraction” into their algorithm that moderates conversion therapy content and elevates authoritative content.
- All companies must elevate authoritative resources in the language being used for the terms found in the appendix.
- All companies must create or expand the use of authoritative information boxes about conversion therapy, preferably in the language being used.
- All online systems must keep up with the constant rebranding and use of new terms, in all languages, that the conversion therapy industry uses.
- All companies must refrain from defaulting to English content in non-English speaking countries where possible, and if this is the only content available, it must be authoritative and translatable.
- All companies must avail themselves of civil society and subject matter experts to keep their systems current.
- Additional [recommendations](#) from previous GPAHE research.

For more information about this report, or to arrange an interview with Wendy or Heidi, the authors of the GPAHE report, please contact Kindred Motes at kindred@globalextrémism.org.

2022 GPAHE Research

[Conversion Therapy Online: The Ecosystem](#)

[Conversion Therapy Online: The Players](#)