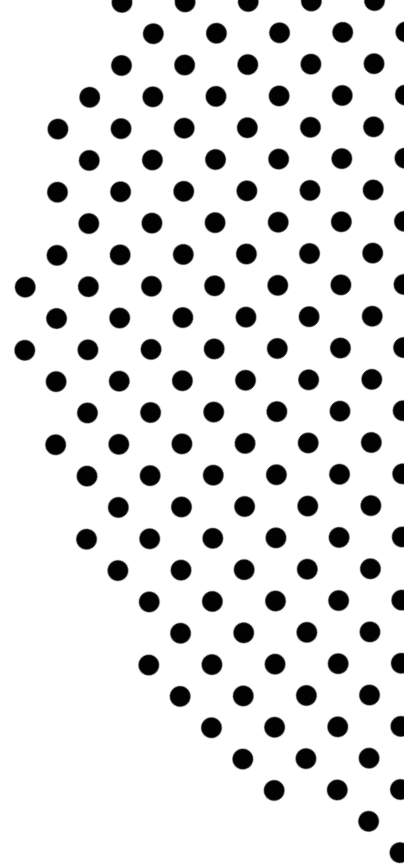


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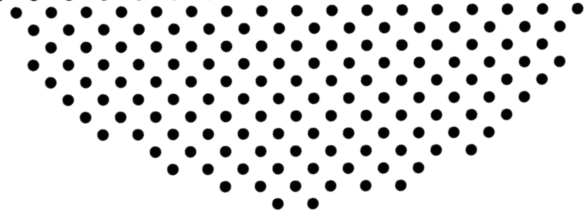
Digital Access, Usage,
and Experiences of the
LGBTQ+ Community

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Executive Summary



Technology acts as a vital conduit for the information and services relied upon in the modern era, from entertainment and communication to basic amenities like health care, education, and government services. Affordable and consistent access to devices, service, and digital spaces has proven a prerequisite for success in many spheres of life.

However, significant disparities in these areas persist and disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) individuals.

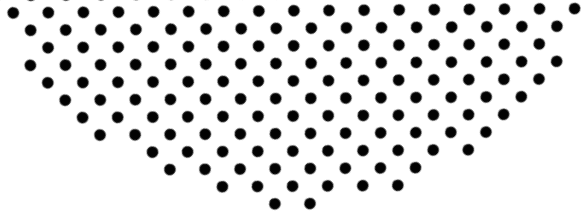
In the United States, LGBTQ+ individuals face enduring social, economic, and health disparities, worsened by record-breaking levels of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation across the states. They are more likely to experience poverty, housing instability, unemployment, and food insecurity. Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals often report worse physical and mental health outcomes compared with their straight, cisgender counterparts. Discrimination remains a pervasive issue, with LGBTQ+ adults encountering consistently high rates of discrimination in the workplace, in health care settings, and in other areas of daily life. These disparities are especially pronounced among transgender individuals and people of color within the LGBTQ+ community.

The digital age has introduced new challenges, with real-world inequities and prejudices manifesting on digital platforms. Despite these, the internet, coupled with access to devices and reliable connectivity, serves as a critical tool for empowerment and resilience for LGBTQ+ adults. It provides essential access to health care, educational resources, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, the internet offers a vital outlet for positive connections, community building, and self-expression, of particular importance for marginalized groups facing systemic discrimination.

Ensuring equal access to the internet, devices, and reliable connectivity for LGBTQ+ individuals is not just a matter of convenience, but a necessity for fostering equity and inclusion. As society increasingly relies on digital platforms for critical aspects of life, bridging the digital divide for LGBTQ+ adults becomes imperative. This access supports their health, education, and economic stability, while also enabling them to connect with supportive communities and express their identities freely and safely.

To better understand the way LGBTQ+ adults access and utilize digital tools, devices, and spaces, LGBT Tech partnered with Data for Progress to conduct a survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults (18 and over) nationwide. The results document how, where, and why LGBTQ+ adults access the internet and use digital and social platforms, gauge their levels of safety and openness in online spaces, and highlight a variety of both positive and negative experiences with social media.

Key Findings



An overwhelming majority of LGBTQ+ adults (96%) use the internet at least once a day, **demonstrating a strong reliance on digital connectivity.** LGBTQ+ adults also frequently access the internet in public spaces, such as in coffee shops, libraries, and, importantly, in LGBTQ+ community centers.

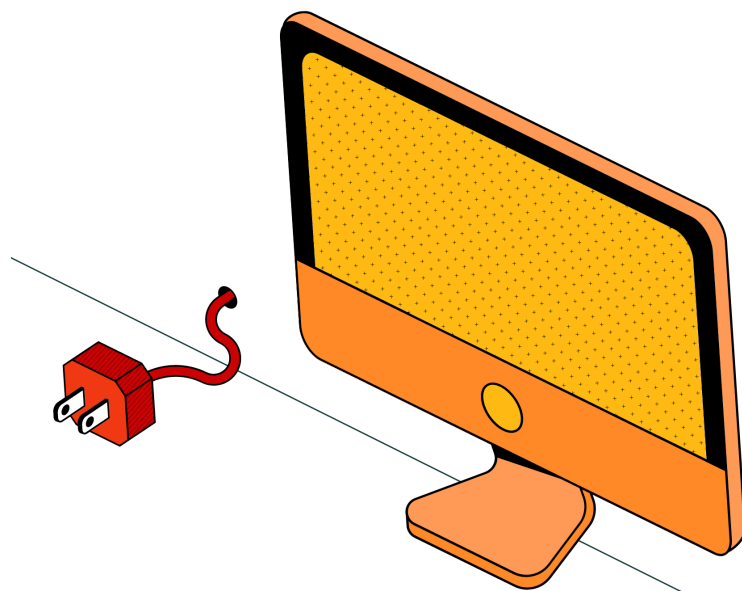
Many LGBTQ+ adults joined social media platforms before the age of 18, and their initial motivations for joining these platforms include **social connections and ways to express identity.** At least 77% of LGBTQ+ adults use the internet to express themselves creatively, explore new ideas and perspectives, and connect with friends and family.

Unfortunately, many LGBTQ+ adults experience harassment and misinformation online. This is particularly pronounced among transgender adults. **More than half of LGBTQ+ adults report experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ hate or harassment online,** with higher rates among transgender adults and younger LGBTQ+ adults aged 18-24; and three-fourths of LGBTQ+ adults have seen anti-LGBTQ+ misinformation online, highlighting the prevalence of harmful content.

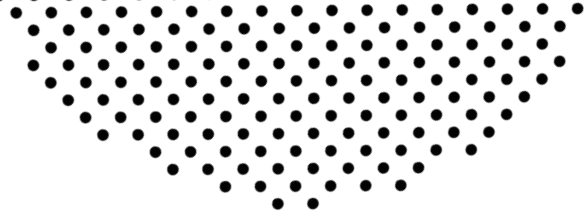
A substantial majority of LGBTQ+ adults utilize the internet for various essential services, such as searching for health information online (87%), telehealth services (61%), and finding LGBTQ+-friendly health care providers (44%).

Online spaces have had a profound impact on the identity and self-expression of LGBTQ+ adults. **Nearly three-quarters report that online spaces have had a significant impact on discovering or learning about their LGBTQ+ identity.** This impact is even more pronounced among transgender adults (90%), younger LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24 (87%), Latine LGBTQ+ adults (83%), and Black LGBTQ+ adults (81%).

Despite the challenges of harassment and misinformation, a majority of LGBTQ+ adults feel very safe or somewhat safe in online spaces. **This sense of safety is crucial for their continued engagement and expression in these digital environments.**



Digital Access and Device Usage

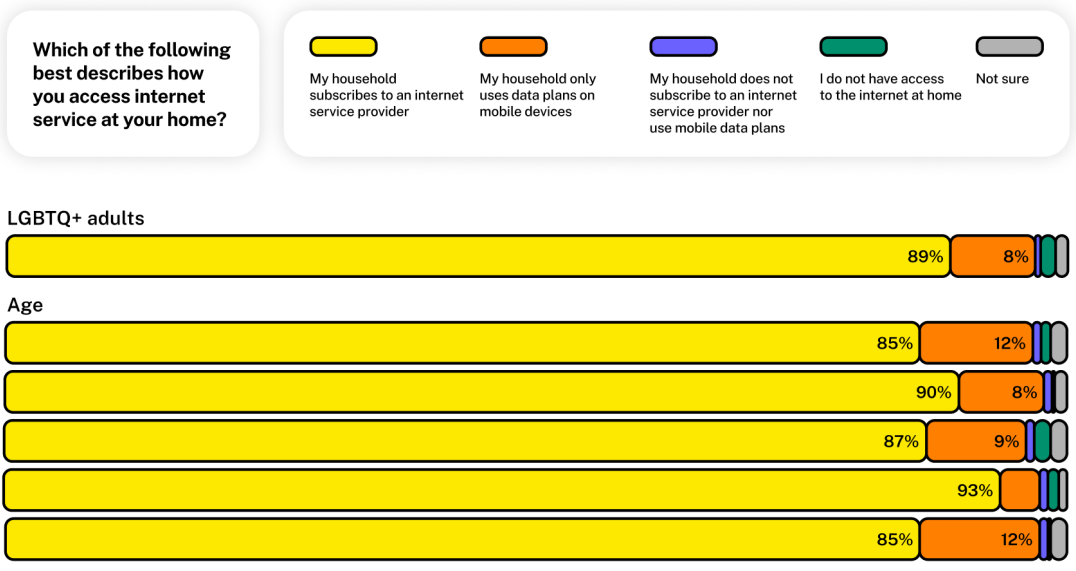


Inside and outside of households, LGBTQ+ adults rely on their access to the internet and devices that provide it.

Ninety-six percent of LGBTQ+ adults use the internet at least once a day, and this high frequency of usage is consistent across age groups, race/ethnicity, and gender identity. In terms of how LGBTQ+ adults access the internet, smartphones are the primary device, with 93% reporting they use a smartphone to access the internet, followed by laptop computers (69%), tablets (44%), and desktop computers (37%).

At home, the overwhelming majority of LGBTQ+ adults (89%) say their household subscribes to an internet service provider. When asked about which service they use, a majority say cable internet (63%), followed by fixed wireless (17%), and fiber, DSL, or other internet services (16%). Notably, LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24 use fixed wireless providers at a significantly higher rate (35%) compared with LGBTQ+ adults overall (17%). Furthermore, 8% of LGBTQ+ adults, including 12% of those ages 18-24, say their household only uses data plans on mobile devices.

Nearly All LGBTQ+ Adults Subscribe to a Home Internet Service



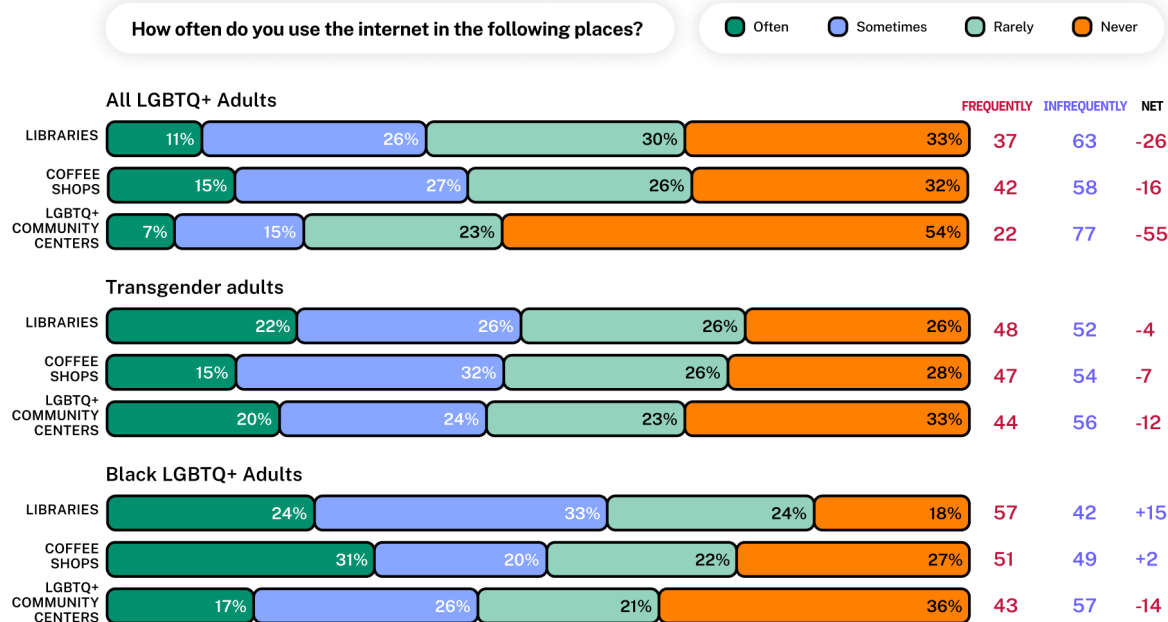
April 1-4, 2024 survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally



Outside of the home, more than one-third of LGBTQ+ adults say they use the internet “often” or “sometimes” in coffee shops (42%) and libraries (37%).

LGBTQ+ community centers also prove a resource, with 45% of LGBTQ+ adults reporting that they have relied on a center for internet access, and 22% reporting that they do so with some frequency. Adults who are younger, Black, and/or transgender report higher frequency rates for using the internet at coffee shops, libraries, and LGBTQ+ community centers, compared with LGBTQ+ adults overall. For example, 57% of LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24, 57% of Black LGBTQ+ adults, and 48% of transgender adults say they use the internet “often” or “sometimes” in libraries, compared with 37% of LGBTQ+ adults overall. Similarly, while 22% of LGBTQ+ adults overall say they use the internet “often” or “sometimes” in LGBTQ+ community centers, the rate is double for transgender adults (44%).

Forty-Four Percent of Transgender Adults Access the Internet Frequently at LGBTQ+ Community Centers

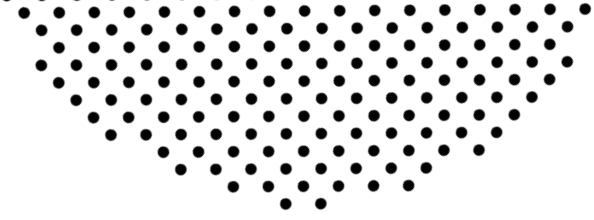


April 1-4, 2024 survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally



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Online Spaces as a Means for Healthcare, Education, and Employment



The survey also asked LGBTQ+ adults whether they use the internet for several actions related to health, education, and employment — and the findings underscore just how important access to the internet and online spaces is to the LGBTQ+ community.

Regarding their health, a majority of LGBTQ+ adults use the internet to search for information about their health (87%) and to access telehealth services (61%). Forty-four percent of LGBTQ+ adults also use the internet to find LGBTQ+-friendly health care providers.

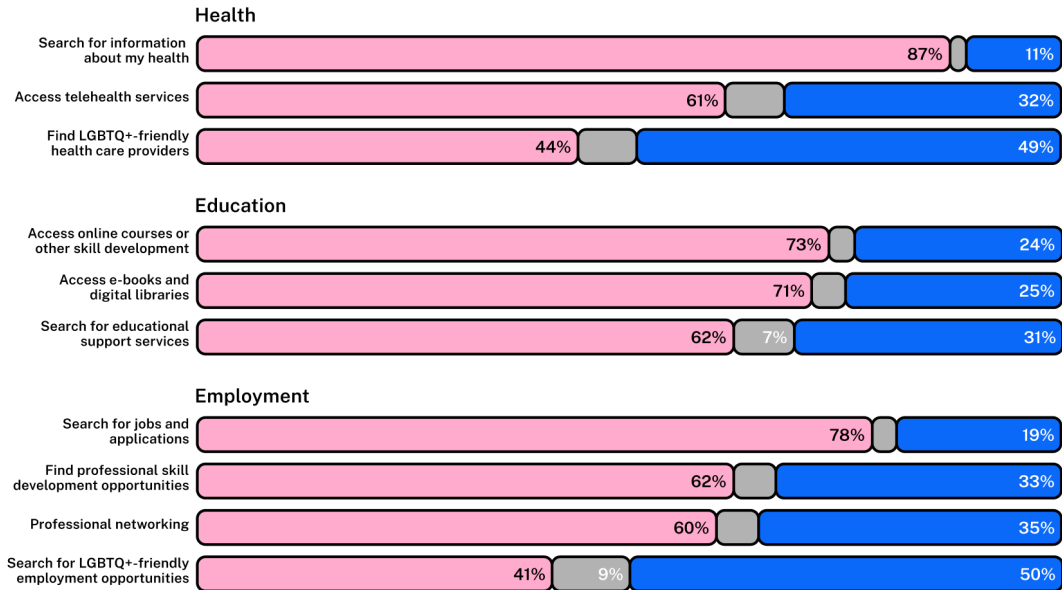
Within education, more than 70% of LGBTQ+ adults use the internet to access online courses or other skill development (73%) and e-books and digital libraries (71%), followed by 62% who use the internet to search for educational support services. This is especially true of LGBTQ+ adults who are younger and those who hold multiple marginalized identities. For example, 75% of Latine LGBTQ+ adults and 67% of Black LGBTQ+ adults use the internet to search for educational support services, compared with 57% of white LGBTQ+ adults.

Regarding employment outcomes, a majority of LGBTQ+ adults use the internet to search for jobs and applications (78%), professional skill development or certification opportunities (62%), and professional networking (60%). Forty-one percent of LGBTQ+ adults also use the internet for LGBTQ+-friendly employment opportunities.

The survey also identified key disparities in internet usage by gender identity. For instance, more than two-thirds of transgender adults use the internet to find LGBTQ+-friendly health care providers (70%) and to search for LGBTQ+-friendly employment opportunities (68%), while less than half of LGBTQ+ adults who do not identify as trans say the same about searching for health care providers (41%) and employment opportunities (38%).

LGBTQ+ Adults Use the Internet to Improve Health, Education, and Employment Outcomes

Do you use the internet or do you not use the internet for each of the following actions you may take regarding your [health/education/employment]?

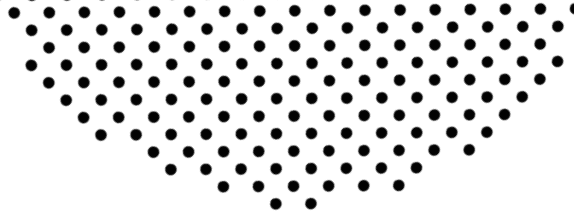


April 1-4, 2024 survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally



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Online Platforms and Social Media Usage



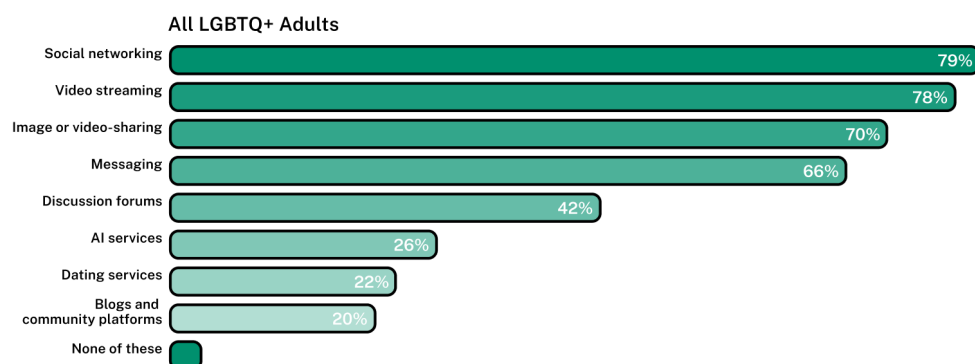
Access to online platforms and social media is crucial for LGBTQ+ individuals, who continue to face significant challenges in finding resources, support, and community in physical spaces. Digital spaces can serve as a powerful tool for empowerment, enabling LGBTQ+ people to access critical information and social support, and foster a sense of belonging and visibility that combats the isolation and discrimination many LGBTQ+ individuals encounter offline. The survey asked LGBTQ+ adults a series of questions about their behaviors on these platforms, and the results underscore how equitable access to these digital platforms is essential for the well-being and resilience of the LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ+ adults regularly use social media across a wide range of platforms, and rely on them to find community and information. Nearly 80% of LGBTQ+ adults use social networking platforms (79%), such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or X (formerly Twitter), and video streaming platforms (78%), such as YouTube or Twitch. A majority of LGBTQ+ adults also report using image or video-sharing platforms (70%), such as Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, or Snapchat, and messaging platforms (66%), such as Messenger, WhatsApp, or Telegram.

The survey finds apparent disparities between millennials and Generation Z, as more LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24 report using image or video-sharing platforms (85%) like Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, or Snapchat, than social networking platforms (69%) like Facebook, LinkedIn, or X (formerly Twitter), while the reverse is true for LGBTQ+ adults ages 25-39 (74% and 82%, respectively).

Social Networking and Video Streaming Platforms Are Used by Nearly 80 Percent of LGBTQ+ Adults

Which of the following digital or social platforms do you use, if any? Please select all that apply.



April 1-4, 2024 survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally



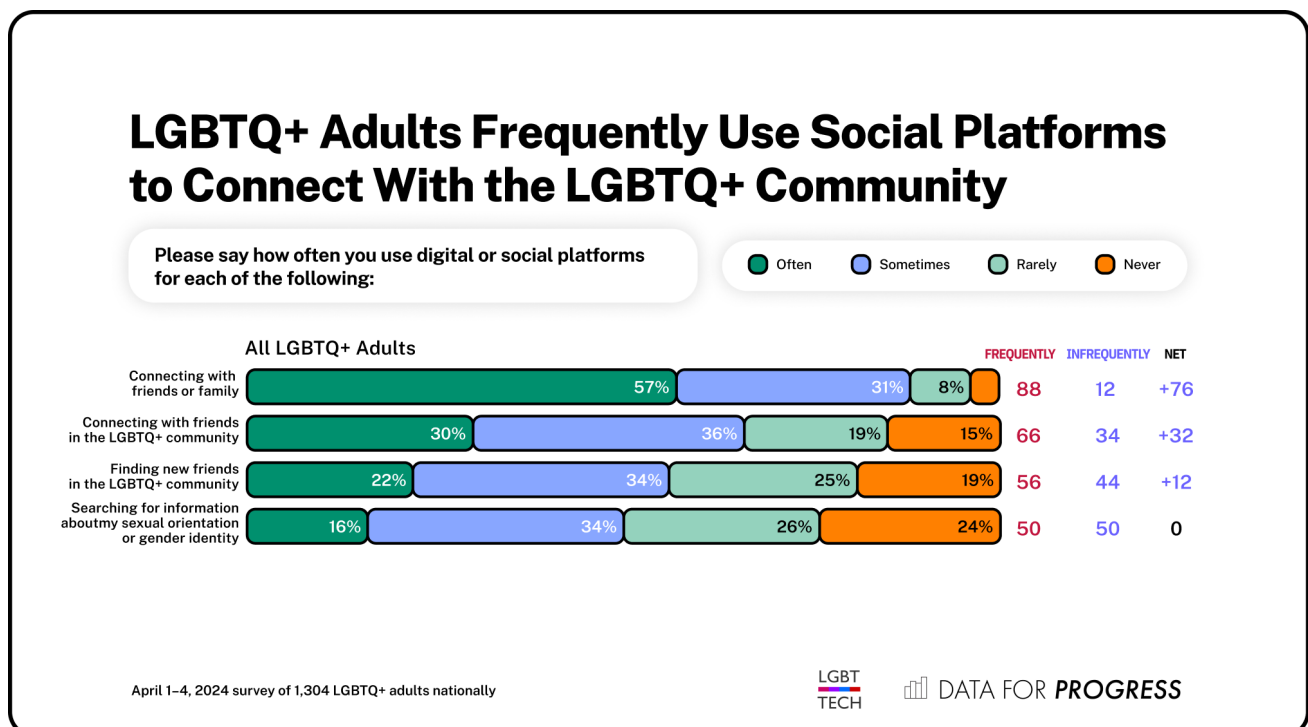
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Findings from this survey underscore the importance of preserving young people’s access to online platforms as Congress and state legislatures across the country increasingly debate restrictions on access. The survey finds that a majority of LGBTQ+ adults (64%), including 79% of transgender adults, first joined digital or social platforms when they were 18 or under.

Importantly, most LGBTQ+ adults also say they first joined social media to connect with others, express and educate themselves, and find LGBTQ+ resources. LGBTQ+ adults identify the following potential uses as having been important to them when they first joined digital or social platforms:

- Connecting with friends and family (87%)
- Exploring new ideas and perspectives (80%)
- Expressing themselves creatively (77%)
- Staying updated on current events (66%)
- Meeting new people (65%)
- Accessing LGBTQ+ resources and information (55%)
- Finding support and community related to LGBTQ+ issues (54%)

When asked about current platform usage, LGBTQ+ adults report using social media for many of these same reasons, especially community and connection. A majority of LGBTQ+ adults say they use digital or social platforms “often” or “sometimes” for connecting with friends or family (88%), connecting with friends in the LGBTQ+ community (66%), and finding new LGBTQ+ friends and communities (56%).

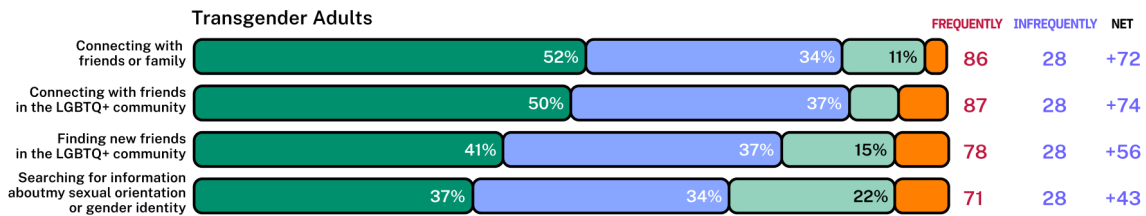


While half of LGBTQ+ adults say they use digital or social platforms “often” or “sometimes” to search for information about their sexual orientation or gender identity, this frequency rate is significantly higher among LGBTQ+ adults who are Black (59%), ages 18-24 (64%), and/or transgender (71%). LGBTQ+ adults who are younger, Black, and/or transgender also report using social media more often than LGBTQ+ adults overall to connect with LGBTQ+ friends and find new LGBTQ+ friends and community.

Transgender Adults Frequently Use Social Platforms to Find New LGBTQ+ Connections and Research Their Identity

Please say how often you use digital or social platforms for each of the following:

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

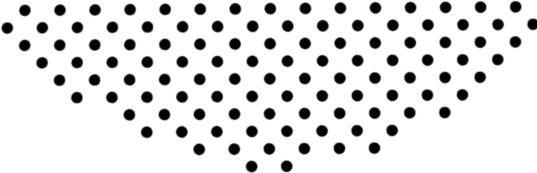


April 1-4, 2024 survey of 132 transgender adults nationally

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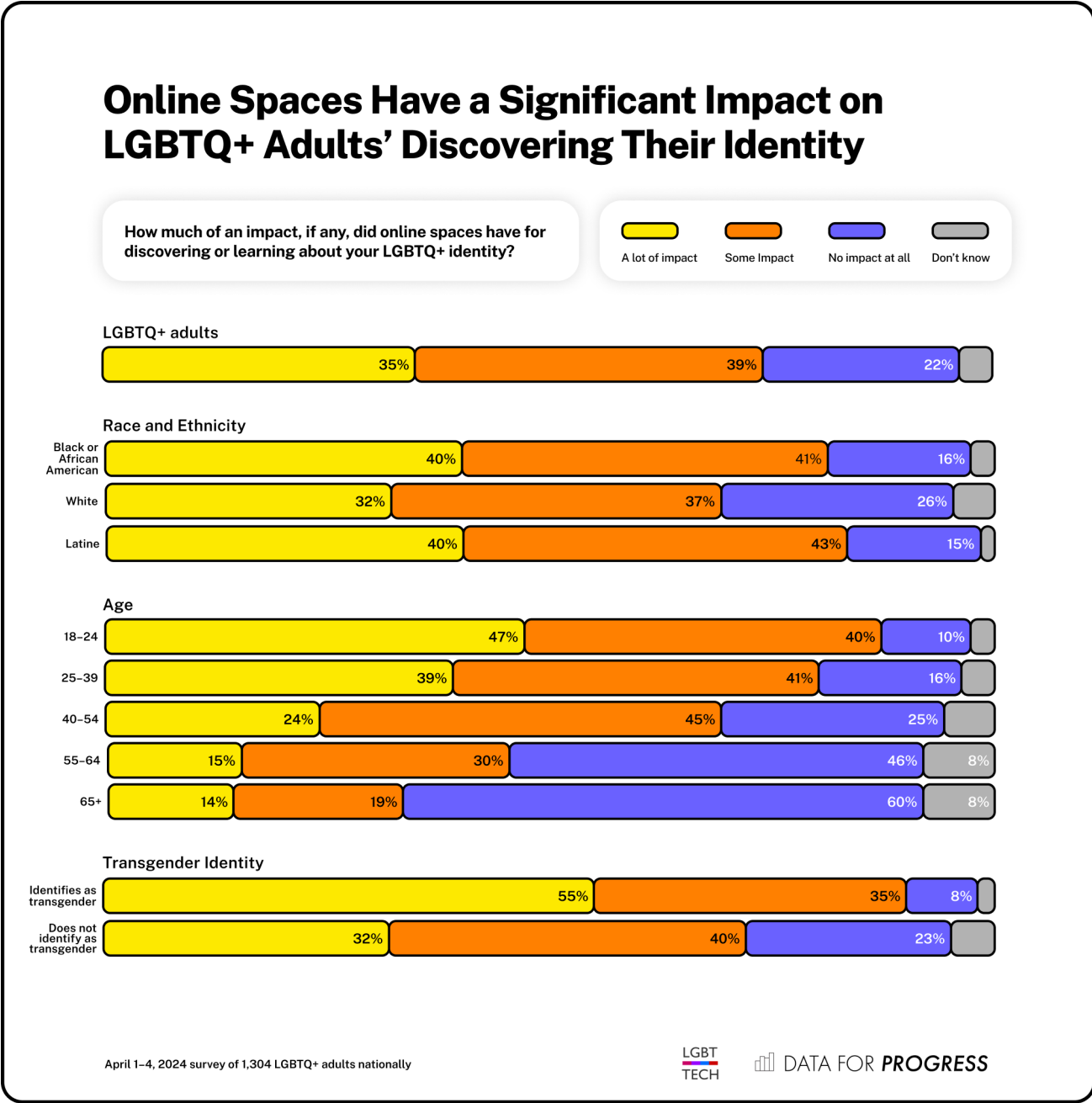
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Identity and Online Expression



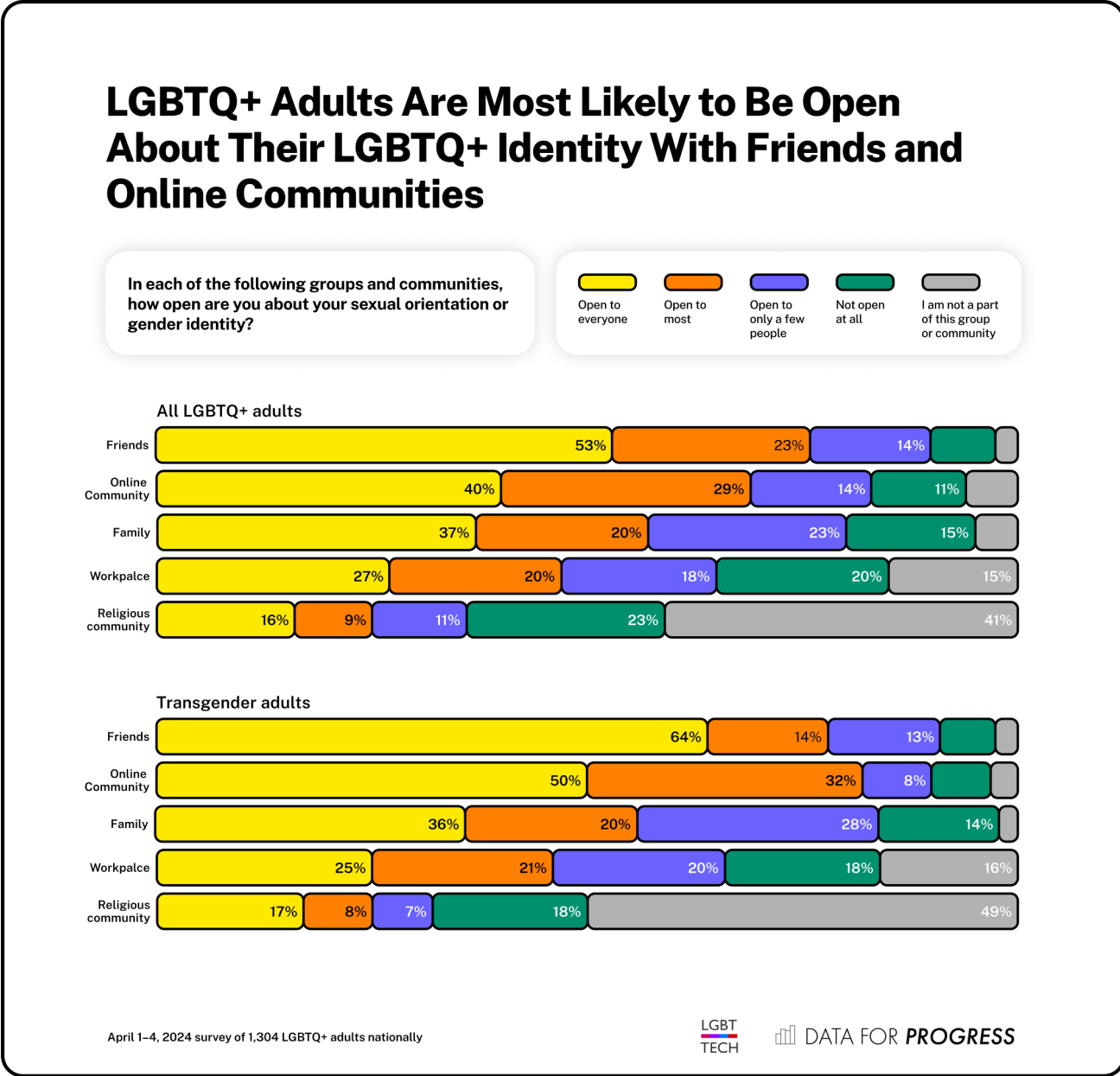
For LGBTQ+ adults, online spaces have had a significant impact on discovering and learning about their LGBTQ+ identity. In a world where bullying, harassment, and discrimination are the reality for many LGBTQ+ people, especially young people, online spaces can serve as a haven where they can explore and be themselves. This data highlights the tremendous impact online spaces have had on LGBTQ+ adults in terms of discovering, learning, and being open about their LGBTQ+ identities.

When asked how much of an impact, if any, online spaces had on discovering or learning about their LGBTQ+ identity, nearly 3 in 4 LGBTQ+ adults (74%), say online spaces have had “a lot” or “some” impact. This rate is even higher among LGBTQ+ adults who are transgender (90%), ages 18-24 (87%), Latine (83%), and/or Black (81%).



Online spaces are some of the places where LGBTQ+ adults are most likely to be open about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

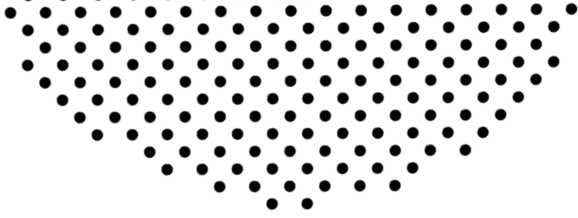
Sixty-nine percent of LGBTQ+ adults say they are open to “everyone” or “most” of their online community about their sexual orientation or gender identity. While more LGBTQ+ adults report being open to all or most of their friends (76%), fewer LGBTQ+ adults report being open to all or most of their family (57%), workplace (47%), and religious community (25%).



Conversely, transgender adults are the most open to their online community (82%), followed by their friends (78%), family (56%), workplace (46%), and religious community (25%).

The survey also examined LGBTQ+ adults’ digital habits and participation in LGBTQ+ trends. For example, 47% of LGBTQ+ adults, including 80% of transgender adults and 72% of LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24, include their pronouns in their online profile or bio on digital or social platforms.

Anti-LGBTQ+ Harassment and Misinformation Online



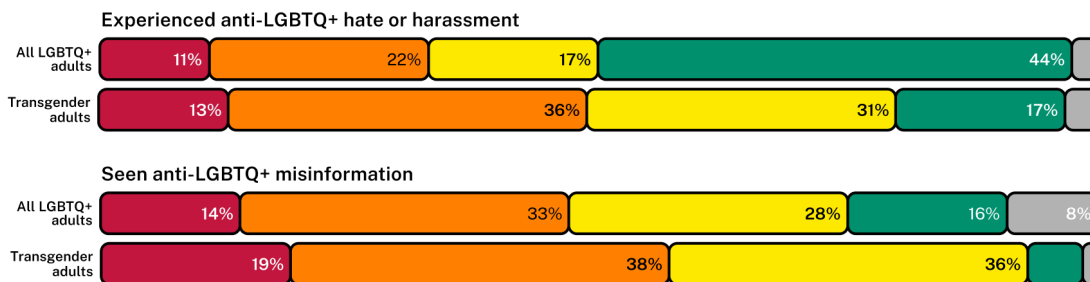
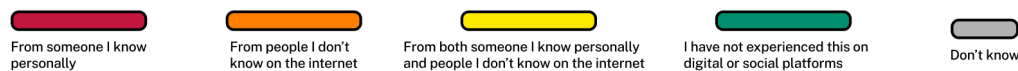
Additionally, at least 40% of LGBTQ+ adults say they “often” or “sometimes” use the internet to search for specific LGBTQ+ trends (46%) and to participate in specific LGBTQ+ trends online (42%). In both cases, transgender adults report a significantly higher frequency rate than LGBTQ+ adults overall (67% and 58%, respectively). Unfortunately, while online spaces are a source of joy, safety, and positive connection for many LGBTQ+ adults, they can also be a source of hate, harassment, and misinformation.

LGBTQ+ adults who are transgender and/or ages 18-24 report higher rates of anti-LGBTQ+ experiences compared with LGBTQ+ adults overall. For example, 80% of transgender adults say they have experienced anti-LGBTQ+ hate or harassment online either from people they know, people they don’t know, or both. In comparison, only half of LGBTQ+ adults overall, including 48% of LGBTQ+ adults who do not identify as transgender, report the same.

More than one-third of LGBTQ+ adults (38%) say they have “often” or “sometimes” experienced anti-LGBTQ+ bullying or harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity online. This rate is higher among LGBTQ+ adults who are transgender (62%) and/or ages 18-24 (47%).

Transgender Adults Are More Likely to Have Experienced Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate Than All LGBTQ+ Adults

Have you [seen anti-LGBTQ+ misinformation / experienced hate or harassment] while using digital or social platforms, either from people you know personally or people you don’t know on the internet?



April 1-4, 2024 survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally



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Half of LGBTQ+ adults — including 80% of transgender adults — say they have experienced anti-LGBTQ+ hate or harassment online, either from people they know, people they don't know, or both. Additionally, 75% of all LGBTQ+ adults and 93% of transgender adults have seen anti-LGBTQ+ misinformation online.

While these rates of anti-LGBTQ+ experiences in online spaces are alarming, LGBTQ+ adults also face similar challenges in physical spaces. Thirty-one percent of LGBTQ+ adults, including 52% of transgender adults and 36% of LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24, say they have “often” or “sometimes” experienced anti-LGBTQ+ bullying or harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in person.

A Majority of LGBTQ+ Adults Feel Safe Online

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, how safe or unsafe do you feel online?



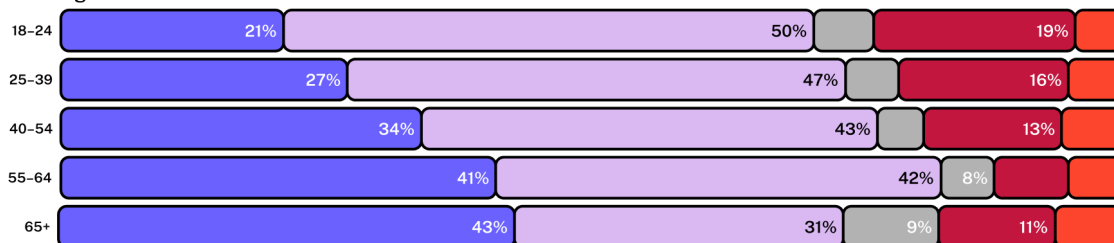
LGBTQ+ adults



Race and Ethnicity



Age



Transgender Identity

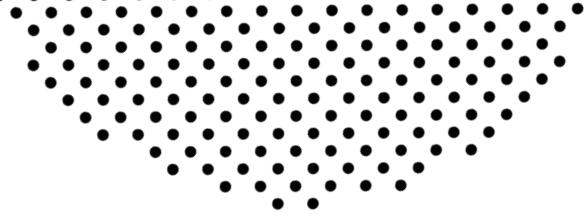


April 1-4, 2024 survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally



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Conclusion



While experiences with misinformation, hate, and harassment online remain unacceptably high, a majority of LGBTQ+ adults (75%), including 67% of transgender adults and 71% of LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-24, say they feel very or somewhat safe online. This includes 29% of LGBTQ+ adults who say they feel “very safe” online.

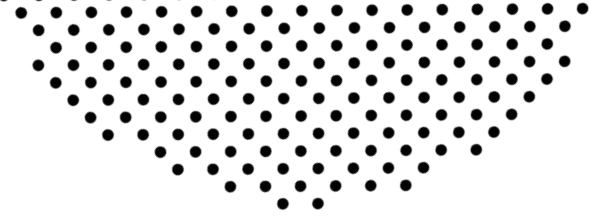
The findings from this comprehensive survey highlight the critical role that digital access and online spaces play in the lives of LGBTQ+ adults. In the face of significant social, economic, and health disparities, including pervasive discrimination and high rates of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, LGBTQ+ individuals rely heavily on the internet for essential services and community support.

Digital platforms provide LGBTQ+ adults with indispensable tools for accessing health care, education, and employment opportunities. They also serve as vital spaces for connection, self-expression, and community building, particularly for those who face systemic discrimination and isolation in physical spaces. This reliance on digital access underscores the necessity of ensuring equitable internet access and reliable connectivity for LGBTQ+ individuals to foster their well-being and inclusion.

However, the digital age also brings challenges, including exposure to misinformation, harassment, and hate online. These negative experiences are particularly acute for transgender individuals and younger LGBTQ+ adults. Despite this, many LGBTQ+ adults continue to find online spaces where they can safely and openly explore their identities and connect with others.

Maintaining and improving access to digital platforms is imperative for supporting the health, education, and economic stability of LGBTQ+ adults. It is also crucial for enabling them to connect with supportive communities and express their identities freely. At the same time, addressing and mitigating the harms of online harassment and misinformation is essential to ensure that these spaces remain safe and empowering.

Methodology



Bridging the digital divide for LGBTQ+ adults is not merely a matter of convenience, but a fundamental aspect of promoting equity and inclusion. By supporting digital access and fostering safe online environments, we can help LGBTQ+ individuals thrive and fully participate in all aspects of modern life.

From April 1 to 4, 2024, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,304 LGBTQ+ adults nationally using web panel respondents. Respondents were defined as LGBTQ+ if they identified as LGBTQ+, transgender, a sexual orientation other than straight or heterosexual, or a gender identity other than male or female. The sample was weighted to be representative of the adult LGBTQ+ community by age, gender, education, race, and income. This sample is also weighted to account for an oversample of transgender adults to ensure proportional representation of the LGBTQ+ adult population. The survey was conducted in English.

Estimates of the proportion of the national LGBTQ+ adult population come from cycles 62-65 of the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey (HPS), collected between September 20, 2023 and March 4, 2024.