

**Navigating Online Hate: Experiences of Indian International Students at Kwantlen
Polytechnic University in British Columbia, Canada**

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Abstract

Indian international students in Canada are increasingly becoming targets of online hate, facing xenophobia, racism, and stereotyping across digital platforms. This research investigates how these hostile narratives shape students' self-perceptions, mental health, academic engagement, and social relationships. Using qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10 Indian international students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, the study highlights how digital hostility fosters emotional distress, academic disengagement, and feelings of exclusion.

Although international students are often framed as economic assets within higher education, their social integration is compromised by rising geopolitical tensions and the algorithmic spread of hate. Grounded in Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, this research addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on the specific, lived impacts of online hate rather than treating international students as a homogenous group. Thematic analysis reveals four interconnected themes: the platforms and prevalence of online hate; its emotional and academic toll; experiences of cultural exclusion and stereotyping and calls for change.

By amplifying student voices and real experiences, this study contributes to broader discussions on racism, digital culture, and educational policy. It calls for urgent action in reshaping institutional responses, strengthening campus support systems, and challenging reductive narratives about international students within Canada's multicultural framework. This work was conducted by Jasmeen Kaur- a fourth year Criminology student to meet the requirements of Criminology Honours Program at Kwantlen Polytechnic University under

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Navigating Online Hate: Experiences of Indian International Students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in B.C. Canada

Canada has long been celebrated for its multicultural values and its welcoming stance towards international students. With its reputation for high-quality education, Canada has become a preferred destination for students from across the globe, particularly from India. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2023), Indian students represent 41% of the international student population in Canada, reflecting a significant presence in the academic and cultural landscapes of the country. In 2022, international students contributed \$30.3 billion to Canada's GDP and supported 353,850 jobs (Statistics Canada, 2024). Despite these substantial contributions, Indian international students face challenges that extend beyond academic adjustment, including pervasive systemic racism, discrimination, and the rise of online hate.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2001) envisions an inclusive Canada, stating that the integration of immigrants and refugees is intended to "enrich and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of Canadian society, while respecting the federal, bilingual, and multicultural character of Canada." While this reflects Canada's ideal vision of inclusivity, the lived experiences of Indian international students often tell a different story, one marred by online hate and marginalization. The surge in online hate, fueled by harmful stereotypes and exacerbated by geopolitical tensions, has compounded the challenges faced by Indian international students. This form of hostility, which manifests in digital spaces where anonymity facilitates harmful behavior, targets individuals based on their race, nationality, and immigration status. Social media platforms, such as TikTok and Reddit, have become hotspots for discriminatory narratives, with Indian international students often scapegoated for systemic issues like housing shortages and strains on

the healthcare system.

A recent TikTok post celebrating the death of an international student, coupled with racist comments, and the rise of hate-filled rhetoric on Reddit about the South Asian community, exemplify the growing problem of online hate. Research indicates that such online hostility profoundly impacts students' mental health, social belonging, and overall well-being (Sinanan, 2024). Further, according to Statistics Canada, the number of hate crimes reported by police in Canada rose by 7% from 3,355 incidents in 2021 to 3,576 in 2022, with hate crimes targeting race or ethnicity rising by 12% and hate crimes against the South Asian population have increased by 143% from 2019 to 2022. This demonstrates that online hate does not exist in a vacuum, it manifests in real life through discrimination, exclusion, and, in the worst-case scenario, hate crimes.

In addition to online hate, major shifts in Canada's immigration policies are further complicating the experiences of international students. On November 8, 2024, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) halted the expedited study permit process for students from India and 15 other countries, reflecting a changing approach to international education. This shift, coupled with tightening permanent residency pathways, has created uncertainty for many students, with approximately 70,000 international students now facing the threat of deportation due to expiring work permits. The uncertainty surrounding immigration pathways has led to protests, particularly among South Asian students, who feel betrayed by the changing policies after paying higher tuition fees and contributing to Canada's labor market. These protests have, in turn, fueled a surge in online backlash and hate from the Canadian public, further marginalizing this group.

This study situates itself within criminology by exploring the implications of online hate

as a form of social harm. It aims to examine how these experiences shape students' identities and interactions in a society that prides itself on multiculturalism, but whose policies and societal narratives often undermine this ideal. The research is timely, given the increasing reliance on digital platforms, where harmful narratives thrive, and the evolving political and social dynamics in Canada. My personal experiences as a former international student from India have led me to explore this topic in these times of rising hate. I believe that understanding the impact on Indian students' mental health, social belonging, and academic performance is critical to fostering inclusivity. As a former international student, I bring an insider perspective to this work, offering nuanced insights while engaging in reflexivity to maintain objectivity.

By focusing on the immediate and long-term impacts of online hate, this research aimed to contribute to academic literature, inform institutional policies, and enhance support structures for international students. The changing socio-political landscape, including inflation, the housing and healthcare crises, and the upcoming federal elections, further reinforces the urgent need for this study. As Canadians grapple with the growing challenges of a housing crisis, rising costs of living, and escalating inflation, hostility and intolerance have been on the rise (Al Mallees, 2023). In times of widespread hardship, it's often easier to direct frustration toward those who appear different, making international students' convenient scapegoats for complex issues that are far beyond their responsibility.

Indian students, as racial minorities and temporary residents, face a unique intersection of challenges that must be addressed through inclusive, supportive environments and informed institutional policies. Building on this context, this research will focus on how online hate narratives shape the perceptions of Indian international students in Canada and how these narratives contribute to their integration, discrimination, and marginalization. By exploring how

online hate impacts individual behavior, mental health, and social identity, this study seeks to expand our understanding of online harm in the digital age. These numbers highlight the urgent need to address the intersection of online hate and real-world violence. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on online harm, social exclusion, and the marginalization of Indian international students, offering a critical examination of the role of online hate in shaping their experiences in Canada.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study had two main objectives. First, to explore the ways in which online hate influences Indian international students' self-perceptions, social interactions, and mental health. Secondly, to assess the impact of online hate on students' academic engagement and integration into Canadian society. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do online hate narratives shape the self-perceptions and public images of Indian international students in British Columbia?
2. What real-life effects does online hate have on students' mental health, social relationships, and academic life in British Columbia?

These questions aimed to provide an understanding of the multifaceted impacts of online hostility on Indian students studying at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in British Columbia.

Central to this inquiry was understanding how online hate reflects broader systemic biases and perpetuates social exclusion. The goal of this project was to understand how online hate impacts this vulnerable group and to give voice to current international students, shedding light on the challenges they face today and supporting the development of policies that address their needs. The findings from this research will contribute to existing literature, inform changes

in

institutional policies, enhance student support services, and encourage open dialogue to create more inclusive environments for international students.

Key Concepts

This study explores several key concepts to understand the dynamics shaping the experiences of Indian international students. International students, as defined by Statistics Canada, are individuals who are not permanent residents but have obtained authorization to study in Canada (2010). For the purposes of this study, the term "Indian" refers to individuals whose country of origin. Online hate is defined as discriminatory language or actions targeting individuals based on identity markers such as race, ethnicity, or immigration status. Social media platforms like TikTok and Reddit are often rife with narratives portraying Indian students as economic threats or cultural outsiders, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes (Costello et al., 2021; Lebel, 2024). Examples of online hate may include racially charged comments, xenophobic posts, or other forms of digital harassment on social media.

Research Paradigm & Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a constructivist and critical paradigm to gain understanding of Indian international students' unique experiences in British Columbia. The constructivist paradigm allows for immersion in the subjective experiences of these students, aiming to uncover the “meanings” they attach to their encounters with online hate (Reid et al., 2017). By focusing on individual perceptions and interpretations, constructivism offers insights into how students “construct” their social realities within an unfamiliar cultural environment. The critical paradigm complements this approach by examining the broader power dynamics and social inequalities

that underlie these experiences. Through a critical lens, this study seeks to understand how structural forces, including racial and socioeconomic hierarchies, shape and exacerbate the marginalization of Indian international students, especially within digital spaces.

Grounding the research in Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a framework to analyze the intersections of race, nationality, and social status that uniquely affect Indian students. CRT is particularly suited to this study as it highlights the impact of systemic racism on individual experiences, revealing how race and power dynamics intersect within both digital and physical spaces. Additionally, the concept of intersectionality aids in exploring how multiple identities such as race, immigration status, and student identity intersect to produce distinct challenges for Indian students navigating online hate. This framework is essential to understanding the compounded effects of discrimination, as it considers how students' varied identity factors contribute to unique vulnerabilities.

CRT also enables this research to examine how online hate reinforces stereotypes and influences social perceptions. By critically analyzing these narratives, the study delves into how digital hostility contributes to broader racial discrimination, impacting Indian students' self-concept and their sense of belonging within Canadian society. Together, CRT and Intersectionality provide a strong theoretical foundation for exploring how online hate perpetuates social exclusion and affects students' identities, both in digital contexts and in their real lives.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Overview

This literature review examines the unique challenges faced by Indian international students in Canada, with an emphasis on the intersection of online hate and real-world discrimination. It begins by introducing the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, then exploring the academic, social, and financial struggles these students face, followed by an in-depth look at how racial and cultural stereotypes, both online and offline, shape their experiences. The review will also investigate the role of geopolitical tensions and social media in amplifying digital hostility and finally its impact on mental health, identity, and integration.

Further, it will address gaps in the existing literature, pointing to the need for a more focused, intersectional approach to understanding the compounded experiences of Indian students. By highlighting these issues, this review aims to set the stage for a deeper examination of how systemic and digital factors converge to create barriers for these students in the Canadian context.

Theoretical Frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

This study utilizes Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality to understand the complex experiences of Indian international students in Canada. These frameworks help explore how race, nationality, and digital environments intersect to shape students' experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. By examining systemic biases and overlapping identities, these theories offer a lens through which we can understand the compounded effects of online hate on students' social integration and well-being.

Critical Race Theory and Systemic Bias

Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits that "race is a social construct, and racism is deeply embedded within societal structures, influencing institutional policies and social norms" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This framework helps explain the experiences of students of color, particularly those from countries like India, who face more intense discrimination compared to their Western counterparts. As Lee and Rice (2007) note, non-Western students experience greater levels of discrimination, with racial hierarchies shaping perceptions of international students and their place in society. CRT reveals how online hate reflects broader societal biases, framing immigrants as threats to both economic and cultural stability. Stereotypes such as "job-stealers" and "unhygienic" are amplified through political rhetoric and social discourse, which target immigrant communities and exacerbate their marginalization (Liddar & Pallapothu, 2024). Social media platforms, in particular, serve as venues for these xenophobic narratives, offering spaces where such harmful stereotypes thrive without accountability.

For example, a TikTok post falsely claimed that Indian immigrants were defecating on a beach in Wasaga, Ontario, sparking a wave of hateful comments, including "deport them all" (Liddar & Pallapothu, 2024). The post was later debunked by the Mayor of Ontario as misinformation (Lebel, 2024). The amplification of such false narratives highlights how fabricated content can amplify hate and reinforce negative perceptions. Platforms like 6ixbuzz, which regularly posts hateful content targeting the Indian community, particularly those from Brampton, contribute to this broader pattern of exclusion (Liddar & Pallapothu, 2024). While these posts are often baseless, they provoke severe reactions, and their systemic nature is illuminated through CRT, showing how these discriminatory perceptions are not isolated incidents but part of a larger, recurring cycle of exclusion.

Historical and Systemic Racism

The challenges faced by Indian international students are deeply rooted in Canada's history of racial exclusion. The 1910 Immigration Act, which legally sanctioned racial discrimination, is a prime example of the country's "Keep Canada White" policies. The Act prohibited the entry of immigrants from races deemed unsuitable for Canadian society, particularly South Asians (Thobani, 2007). Though such overtly discriminatory policies have since been repealed, their legacy continues to influence societal attitudes towards racial minorities, especially those of Asian descent. This historical context plays a significant role in shaping the contemporary experiences of Indian international students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, racialized immigrants were disproportionately affected by increased discrimination, where South Asians and Chinese immigrants felt heightened levels of prejudice (Newbold et. al, 2022). Currently, discrimination is mirrored in the experiences of Indian international students, who often encounter negative stereotypes and are blamed for systemic issues such as housing shortages and job competition (Liddar & Pallapothu, 2024).

Phrases like "driving up rent" and "stealing Canadian jobs" were commonly found in online spaces, contributing to the marginalization of Indian students in academic and social contexts. These stereotypes persist not only offline but are also amplified in digital spaces, intensifying the challenges these students face as they attempt to integrate into Canadian society. Furthermore, the legacy of Canada's racialized immigration policies is evident in the present day, where Indian students often encounter prejudice based on both their racial identity and their immigrant status. The continuation of these racial biases, whether in the form of direct discrimination or through online hostility, highlights the importance of addressing both historical and contemporary forces in understanding the struggles of Indian international students.

Geopolitical Tensions, Diaspora Politics, and Online Hate

Geopolitical tensions between India and Canada have significant effects on Indian international students, particularly those of Sikh descent. The Khalistan movement, which advocates for a separate Sikh state, has heightened tensions, especially following the assassination of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023. This event, which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged involved the Indian government, has escalated hostilities (Shamim, 2024). Indian students particularly Sikhs are often unfairly blamed for political unrest. Despite the fact that most students have no connection to the Khalistan movement, symbols of their faith, such as the turban, are frequently targeted on social media, perpetuating stereotypes of radicalism. This creates an environment of exclusion, making it more difficult for Sikh students to integrate into Canadian society. These geopolitical dynamics are further compounded by the influence of online hate, which shapes public perception and marginalizes Indian students.

The city of Surrey is home to Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), where my study is situated. It has one of the largest South Asian populations outside of India (Statistics Canada, 2024), and it was also the site of Nijjar's assassination. With the Sikh community's strong presence in the city, including at the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, the region provides an important context for this study. The intersection of political conflict, religion, and online hate influences the experiences of Sikh students, who face additional challenges due to their religion and identity. This study explored how the overlapping identities such as nationality, and international student status shape their experiences in Canada through an intersectionality framework.

Intersectionality: The Compounded Effect of Identity Factors

Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), reveals how various identity factors

such as race, nationality, gender, and class intersect to create unique forms of discrimination. Indian students are subjected to prejudice not only as international students but also as racialized individuals from a specific ethnic background. The intersection of these multiple identities amplifies their experiences of discrimination, making their challenges more complex. Crenshaw (1989) argues that intersectionality uncovers forms of discrimination that traditional frameworks may overlook.

International students from India form a highly diverse group, shaped by various factors such as their region of origin, language proficiency, financial background, skin color, and religious affiliations. These aspects contribute to unique personal experiences, influencing how they navigate and adapt to life abroad. The interplay of these factors makes the experiences of Indian students abroad distinct and multifaceted. Further, gender plays a critical role in determining how international students experience discrimination in Canada. As Avenido (2023) observed, female international students reported feeling isolated and excluded because of their race, gender, and language. This highlights the importance of considering how gender interacts with race, nationality and immigration status in shaping the experiences of international students. Although international students are often viewed as a homogeneous group, the reality is that their experiences are highly individualized, shaped by a range of intersecting factors. The next few sections will reveal how unique aspects of international students compound to create their experiences in Canada.

Internationalization of Higher Education

The internationalization of Canada's higher education system has brought significant economic benefits, with Indian students playing a critical role. Their high tuition fees help offset

declining public funding, making them essential revenue sources for universities (Statistics Canada, 2022). However, this financial reliance has led to the commodification of international students, who are often seen as economic assets rather than valued members of the academic community (Marom, 2023). Immigration Minister Mark Miller criticized this exploitation, comparing some institutions to “puppy mills churning out diplomas” (Viswanathan & Jacob, 2024). This commodification reinforces feelings of exclusion among international students, as universities prioritize financial gains over students' academic and social well-being (Houshmand et al., 2014; Marom, 2023).

Indian students are often attracted to Canada by promises of high-quality education and pathways to permanent residency. Policies, such as the 2021 announcement to grant permanent residency to 40,000 international graduates, aim to acknowledge their contributions. However, these policies also highlight a significant gap between the number of students seeking residency and the limited opportunities available (Stacey, 2021). Minister Marco Mendicino’s statement that while international students hold “temporary” status, their contributions are “permanent,” set high expectations (Stacey, 2021). These expectations were further fueled by relaxed immigration policies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, many students find these expectations unmet. They often invest their families' life savings in the hope of securing Canadian residency, only to face sudden policy changes and a competitive immigration system. This disconnect between expectations and reality leaves students financially and emotionally vulnerable. These unique challenges, particularly for Indian students highlight the exploitation many face in trying to navigate pathways to permanent residency. Combined with high tuition fees and inadequate institutional support, these factors expose Indian students to social exclusion and online hate. The commodification of Indian

students and misleading immigration narratives highlight the need for greater transparency and better support systems for international students, ensuring their academic success and well-being.

The challenges faced by Indian international students in Canada are deeply interconnected, stemming from issues related to language barriers, finances, social integration, and acculturative stress. These difficulties create a broader sense of alienation and isolation, which are compounded by racial and cultural biases encountered both online and offline. A thorough review of the literature highlights the following primary challenges:

Language and Academic Integration

Language barriers represent one of the most significant challenges for Indian students in Canada. While many arrive with strong academic qualifications, adapting to Canadian linguistic and academic expectations often proves difficult. Chen (2009) found that international students who struggle with English face academic and social exclusion, which intensifies their sense of isolation. Indian students frequently report that language challenges hinder their ability to engage in class discussions, interact with professors, and form friendships with Canadian peers (Andrade, 2006). The Canadian education system's emphasis on experiential learning and active participation contrasts with the more traditional teaching methods that some Indian students are accustomed to (Russell et al., 2010). This pressure to quickly adapt leads to heightened academic stress, with students feeling inferior when they struggle to meet Canadian academic standards (Avenido, 2023). As a result, language barriers not only hinder academic success but also contribute to a deeper sense of disconnection from Canadian society.

Financial Barriers and Economic Pressures

Financial strain is another significant challenge for Indian international students. These

students pay considerably higher tuition fees than domestic students and often lack access to financial aid or scholarships (Crosby, 2010). To cover living expenses, many students seek part-time employment, but they are sometimes perceived as economic competitors, exacerbating negative stereotypes that they are "taking jobs away" from Canadians (Sharma, 2018). These stereotypes are particularly prevalent on social media, where derogatory comments about South Asian students amplify hostility and exclusion.

Economic pressures are compounded by Canada's rising cost of living, placing additional burdens on students. A participant in Avenido's 2023 study reported feeling anxious and guilty for spending their family's savings on tuition, with international students in some institutions paying up to seven times the tuition of domestic students. Marom (2023) noted that international students, especially those in for-profit institutions, are often treated as financial assets rather than valued community members. According to the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (2005), some institutions take advantage of international students by charging exorbitantly high tuitions without providing adequate services. This perception of international students as "cash cows" further isolates them, reinforcing their alienation within Canadian society. Even after spending triple the tuition than those of domestic students, contributing to economy via income, taxes etc, they are still viewed as 'competitors for limited resources.

Cultural Adaptation and Social Integration

Sociocultural adjustment refers to the process of adapting to the social structures of the host country (Yang et al., 2006). As adapting to a new country and its educational system can be difficult, particularly for international students from countries with vastly different academic cultures. These students may experience a sense of alienation, feeling as though they don't fully belong to the new academic environment (Rendón, 1996). Social relationships in education are

thus essential, and for many international students, postsecondary education offers a valuable opportunity to build these connections. But cultural adaptation remains a significant challenge

for Indian students, many of whom experience cultural dissonance when adjusting to Canadian societal norms and values both in academic and larger social world. Avenido (2023) found that racialized students from non-Western backgrounds face heightened difficulties in social integration. Baas (2014) notes that racial discrimination and stereotyping undermine Indian students' sense of belonging, making them feel valued primarily for their economic contributions rather than as equals in society. Stereotypes such as being “job-stealers” or “unhygienic” further marginalize these students, impeding their integration into Canadian society (Sharma, 2018; Liddar & Pallapothu, 2024).

Prejudice and Social Exclusion

Indian international students experience prejudice both online and offline, with stereotypes and misinformation fueling negative perceptions. Baas (2014) elaborates on how Indian students globally experience racial and cultural biases, sometimes leading to violence and hostility. Houshmand and Spanierman (2014) note that these students often feel excluded on campus, where they are viewed more as economic assets than valued members of the community. Language barriers and accents can further hinder their social engagement, and as Aggarwal and Çiftçi (2021) found, experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion increase stress levels and foster feelings of alienation. These dynamics contribute to a hostile environment, making it harder for students to feel connected to their academic community.

Many international students also experience exclusion in interactions with local students.

Ee (2013) found that international students in the United States are often excluded from

group activities, with locals perceiving them as inferior due to language or cultural differences. These experiences reinforce feelings of isolation and inferiority. Inman et al. (2015) observed similar dynamics among first-generation Asian Indians in the U.S., where physical characteristics like skin color contributed to perceptions of "otherness" and led to discriminatory experiences. This social exclusion often leads to homesickness, which negatively impacts students' academics and overall well-being.

Mechanisms of Online Hate: Anonymity, Othering, and Amplification

Anonymity and Online Hate

The anonymity provided by online platforms like Reddit, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok plays a significant role in facilitating the spread of online hate. It shields users from accountability, creating an environment where harmful content can thrive. Jane (2018) argues that this sense of anonymity fosters detachment, encouraging individuals to engage in behavior they might avoid in person. For Indian international students, this anonymity often results in encounters with racist and xenophobic content, which they are unable to directly confront or mitigate. Without the ability to engage with detractors, students become passive recipients of hostile messages, further reinforcing harmful stereotypes about their identity.

Anonymity also encourages trolling, where users intentionally provoke others to dominate conversations or spread negativity. Such trolling, whether subtle or overt, contributes to the digital culture of hostility that Indian students face. Walther (2022) notes that anonymity enables users to create multiple accounts, allowing them to spread hate more easily and engage in coordinated campaigns. These dynamics make it difficult for students to escape harassment, as they are constantly exposed to damaging content about their identity and culture. It is therefore

important to understand the real-life impacts of such experiences on the well-being of Indian international students. As recognizing the real impact of such experiences on Indian international students' well-being is key to creating a more supportive environment, my study will aim to take the step towards bridging this gap.

Othering and Stereotypes

Another central mechanism of online hate is othering—the process by which certain groups are marginalized and viewed as outsiders. Indian international students, particularly those from rural backgrounds or with strong cultural identities, often experience such exclusion. On platforms like TikTok and Instagram, these students are depicted as foreigners who are culturally incompatible with Canadian values, which exacerbates their feelings of alienation. Yao et al. (2018) describe how othering creates a barrier to integration, leaving students isolated from mainstream society. Stereotypes about Indian students often portray them as economic threats, such as “job stealers” or “housing competitors”. These narratives are amplified by social media algorithms, which prioritize sensational content that appeals to users' biases. Pariser (2011) argues that these algorithms reinforce filter bubbles, where users are repeatedly exposed to content that confirms their pre-existing views, including negative stereotypes about immigrants. This not only alienates Indian students but also makes it harder for them to integrate into Canadian society, which directly relates to my research questions exploring how systemic exclusion and online hostility affect the social integration and well-being of Indian international students in Canada.

Algorithmic Amplification and Rage Bait

Social media algorithms play a crucial role in amplifying online hate. These algorithms

prioritize content that provokes strong emotional reactions, such as anger, outrage, and fear. Digital spaces create what are called echo chambers and filter bubbles, where users are primarily exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs (Bakshy et al., 2015; Pariser, 2011). This feedback loop reinforces biases, as individuals are repeatedly shown anti-international student content that excludes alternative perspectives (Nickerson, 1998). This amplification drives the spread of rage bait posts designed to provoke outrage and increase engagement which further fuels digital hostility directed at Indian students. As such posts gain traction, they distort public perceptions, framing Indian students as problems to be solved rather than individuals with unique experiences. This cycle of amplification reinforces stereotypes that Indian students are foreign invaders rather than valued members of Canadian society. The increasing engagement with such content makes it harder for students to escape negative narratives, fostering an environment where their identity is continuously questioned and vilified. It would be important to study the impact of such narratives on the general well-being of Indian international students in my study.

Psychological Impact and Identity Formation

The psychological toll of online hate on Indian international students is profound.

Continuous exposure to negative content about their identity, culture, and immigration status can lead to feelings of alienation, shame, and self-doubt. Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma helps explain how students internalize these negative stereotypes, which then shape their self-perception and interactions with others. When Indian students are targeted by hate speech or misinformation, it reinforces their feelings of being unwelcome, contributing to their sense of isolation. Moreover, the compounded stress of adjusting to a new cultural environment while facing online hostility significantly impacts students' mental health. This acculturative stress is exacerbated by the constant exposure to discriminatory messages, which often leads to anxiety,

depression, and emotional distress. Yeh and Inose (2003) found that international students who developed strong social support networks were better able to cope with these stresses, but the ongoing online hostility makes it difficult for them to access such networks.

Impact on Self-Perception and Cultural Identity

The intersection of online hate and cultural identity affects how Indian students perceive themselves. Social Identity Theory (Levine & Hogg, 2010) posits that individuals derive a sense of self from their group affiliations, making hostile online content particularly damaging for students whose identities are tied to their ethnicity or nationality. The digital hostility reinforces negative stereotypes, making it harder for students to embrace their cultural heritage and feel accepted in Canadian society. Furthermore, the stigmatization of Indian students as “outsiders” or “foreigners” contributes to their feelings of alienation. This exclusion can lead students to downplay or even hide aspects of their cultural identity in order to fit in, resulting in a weakened sense of self and emotional strain. Thus, it would be worthwhile to understand the impact of recent rise in online hate on promoting the feeling of exclusion among Indian international students.

Long-Term Effects

The long-term effects of online hate on Indian students are significant. Constant exposure to negative stereotypes and discriminatory content can severely impact students' academic performance, social engagement, and overall well-being. The emotional toll of digital harassment creates a barrier to integration, making it harder for students to fully participate in Canadian society. Moreover, the stigmatization of Indian students as cultural and economic threats adds another layer of complexity to their experience. While these students are often valued as

financial contributors to the Canadian higher education system, they are simultaneously perceived as unwelcome outsiders by some members of the public. This contradiction exacerbates their feelings of alienation and exclusion making it more difficult for them to successfully integrate into Canadian life. Thus, the goal of my study would be to understand the real-life impact of rising online hate on the mental well-being of international students.

Gaps in the Literature

Although a large body of literature explores the experiences of international students, there is limited research specifically addressing the unique challenges faced by Indian students in Canada. Most studies generalize findings across diverse international student populations, overlooking the distinct cultural, social, and economic factors that shape the experiences of Indian students. These factors often include specific stereotypes, cultural adjustments, and economic pressures, as well as the changing socio-political landscape in Canada, all of which are uniquely relevant to Indian communities. Additionally, while online hate has been broadly recognized as a phenomenon affecting marginalized groups, research on its specific impact on international students especially those from India remains understudied. Given the importance of digital spaces in modern social life, understanding how online hostility influences the well-being, social integration, and academic success of Indian students in Canada is increasingly crucial.

Existing research frequently fails to account for the compounded experiences of Indian students in relation to digital hostility and systemic issues such as racism and prejudice. While studies by Yao et al. (2019) and Marom (2023) offer intersectional insights into discrimination experienced by international students, there is a need for more focused exploration of how online hate uniquely impacts the well-being, identity, and integration of Indian students in Canada.

Baas' (2014) examination of social exclusion experienced by Indian students in Australia contributes to our understanding of these challenges on a global scale; however, more research is necessary to understand the specific Canadian context, where online hate and in-person discrimination intersect in unique ways.

Additionally, few studies apply an intersectional approach to examine these issues in depth. Intersectionality offers a valuable framework for understanding how multiple aspects of identity such as race, nationality, gender, and language combine to create unique forms of discrimination. However, intersectional analyses of the international student experience remain rare, leading to a limited understanding of how Indian students navigate these intersecting challenges. Finally, although Critical Race Theory (CRT) is commonly used to explore systemic racism, its application in digital contexts remains underdeveloped. This gap in the literature leaves unexamined how online hate speech both reflects and perpetuates the structural biases embedded in Canadian society, particularly for international students on temporary visas, who face unstable social and economic conditions. Thus, bridging these gaps is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the specific challenges faced by Indian international students.

Justification for Research

This study directly addresses the identified gaps by focusing on the unique experiences of Indian international students in the Lower Mainland, British Columbia, Canada, with particular emphasis on online hate. British Columbia, with its significant Indian diaspora and international student population, provides a key context for examining the intersection of digital and real-world challenges faced by these students. The research will explore how online hostility, combined with societal prejudice, impacts the well-being, identity, and academic success of

Indian students. Given the growing role of digital platforms in shaping public discourse, understanding their effects on Indian students' integration and mental health is increasingly crucial.

Building on the intersectional analyses by Yao (2019) and Avenido (2023), this study will investigate how digital hostility and real-world discrimination compound the experiences of exclusion and marginalization among Indian students. The findings will offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by these students, informing educational institutions and policymakers about the need for improved support systems. By focusing on the compounded effects of online hate and societal exclusion, this research aims to highlight the importance of creating more inclusive environments in post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, by applying CRT and intersectionality, this study provides an analysis of the systemic and intersecting factors contributing to discrimination against Indian students, specifically in the digital sphere. These insights are vital for the development of targeted measures to protect this vulnerable group of international students and promote inclusivity within Canadian higher education systems.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Design

Grant and Osanloo (2014) argue that a theoretical framework serves as the foundation of a research study by guiding data collection and enabling the researcher to uncover meaningful insights. Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality, this study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of Indian international students who encountered online hate in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. These frameworks allowed the research to examine how systems of race, power, and identity shape students' encounters with digital discrimination.

A constructivist paradigm guided the methodology, prioritizing the participants' own meanings and interpretations of their experiences (Reid et al., 2017). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth, narrative accounts of participants' experiences.

This method allowed for open-ended responses while also offering flexibility to follow up on key issues raised by the participants.

A critical paradigm also informed the design of the interview questions, enabling an examination of the broader societal structures and institutional forces that perpetuate inequality for international students (Reid et al., 2017). The study employed a phenomenological approach, which is particularly effective for uncovering emotional and subjective experiences (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Similar qualitative methods were successfully used in related studies by Avenido (2022) and Marom (2023), further reinforcing the appropriateness of this design.

Context and Interview Setting

The study was conducted in Surrey, a city in British Columbia with one of the highest concentrations of Indian and South Asian populations in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2024). The research focused on students enrolled at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), where 40% of students are international and 39% are of Indian background (KPU, 2022). The location and demographic context provided a meaningful backdrop for examining how ethnic, cultural, and political identity intersect with student life.

Recent geopolitical tensions between India and Canada also shaped the context of this research, particularly in relation to the Khalistan movement and the assassination of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple in Surrey in 2023 (Shamim, 2024). Misrepresentations in media and social discourse have unfairly associated Sikh students with radicalism, compounding experiences of exclusion and online hate. This study was particularly concerned with how intersectional identities nationality, religion, race, and immigration status interact with public discourse to impact Indian international students, especially those of Sikh faith. The choice of KPU, situated in a culturally diverse but politically charged setting, allowed for an in-depth exploration of these themes. Interviews were conducted in semi-private spaces such as KPU study rooms or online via Zoom and Teams, based on participant preferences. Following McGrath et al. (2019), attention was given to rapport- building, ensuring participants felt comfortable sharing sensitive information about discrimination, social exclusion, and mental health impacts.

Data Collection

After obtaining Research Ethics Board (REB) approval, data were collected

through semi-structured interviews with ten Indian international students who met the following criteria: aged 18–25, enrolled at KPU, and residing in Canada for no more than two years. The decision to focus on recent arrivals was intentional, as this group is more likely to face acute challenges related to adjustment, cultural transition, and vulnerability to online hate.

Interviews were conducted between February and March 2025, either in person at Kwantlen Polytechnic University library study rooms (4 participants) or online (6 participants), depending on individual preference. Each interview lasted between 25 and 55 minutes, and all were conducted in English. Participants were recruited through targeted posters, email outreach via Criminology faculty, and communication with the International Student Office. Purposive sampling ensured that all participants met the study's criteria (Reid et al., 2017), and snowball sampling was used to reach additional eligible students through peer referrals (Reid et al., 2017). Participants received a \$30 Amazon gift card in recognition of their time, with funding approved by the KPU Student Research and Innovation Grant (SRIG 2024-61). Prior to each interview, participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form, which detailed their rights, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the option to withdraw at any time. Interviews were audio-recorded (with permission on Zoom/Teams audio recording feature), and handwritten notes were taken to support data accuracy. To protect participants' well-being, the study followed a minimal-harm approach in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2, 2022). Participants received a mental health resource list, including on-campus and 24/7 provincial supports. None of the participants chose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Management and Analysis

All research data including audio recordings and typed transcripts were stored securely in a password-protected OneDrive folder, accessible only to the researcher and supervisor. Signed consent forms were stored digitally in a separate, locked folder, and physical copies were scanned and shredded following the interview. No personal identifiers were included in the handwritten notes or transcripts. Transcripts were created using the Zoom/Teams and edited using Microsoft Word to ensure that identifying details were removed and pseudonyms (Participant #1,2,3 etc.) assigned to all participants. References to specific people or locations were generalized to maintain confidentiality. Since the Zoom/Teams transcript services were not advanced enough to accurately catch some accents, word pronunciations, the researcher ensured that transcripts were corrected as per participants' answers to ensure accuracy. Data will be securely destroyed after project completion by August 2025, in accordance with the supervisor's guidance and institutional policies (TCPS 2, 2022).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework outlined by Clarke and Braun (2016). This method involved reading and re-reading transcripts to identify initial codes, which were then grouped into broader themes. These themes captured core aspects of participants' experiences particularly around digital racism, academic disruption, emotional stress, and social isolation. Throughout the process, reflexivity was actively practiced. Following Reid et al. (2017), the researcher engaged in ongoing reflection and consultation with the supervisor to minimize bias and ensure authentic representation of participant voices. The analysis balanced both exploratory and explanatory approaches, identifying key patterns while also considering their broader social and institutional implications.

To further strengthen the trustworthiness of this research, additional care was taken to assess the potential limitations of the sampling strategy and to ensure reliability and validity throughout the study. While snowball sampling proved effective in recruiting eligible Indian international students for this study, it is essential to recognize the potential limitations associated with this method. Snowball sampling may introduce sampling bias, particularly if participants who have had similar experiences such as negative encounters with online hate tend to refer peers who share those same perspectives. This can result in a sample that disproportionately represents certain narratives, leading to a less diverse range of viewpoints. Acknowledging this possibility enhances the study's transparency as most participants shared that their fellow classmates are aware of this widespread phenomenon of online hate against the Indian international student community and some shared that they tend to discuss the impact of this on their future. Such recognition only aligns with ethical best practices in qualitative research (Noy, 2008). Thus, staying aware of this possibility also ensures the balanced interpretation of the data.

To ensure the integrity and credibility of the research findings, deliberate strategies were implemented to address both reliability and validity, two core pillars of rigorous qualitative inquiry. Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the analytical methods used (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Long and Johnson, 2000). It was maintained through the use of a semi-structured interview guide, consistent question phrasing, and detailed attention to the sequence and flow of each interview. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2016) thematic analysis framework, which provided a systematic process for identifying patterns across narratives. Additionally, regular supervisory consultations were conducted throughout the data analysis phases, ensuring consistency and guarding against subjective bias or drift in interpretations.

Validity in qualitative research pertains to the degree to which the research authentically and credibly reflect the participant realities. (Schwandt, 1997). In this research, validity was addressed through multiple strategies. These included practicing reflexivity which involved the process of “reporting on personal beliefs, values and biases that may shape the inquiry” (Creswell and Miller, 2000). The researcher practiced reflexivity via journaling and supervisor debriefs to monitor the influence of researcher positionality, and creating an emotionally safe, non-judgmental interview environment that fostered trust and openness among participants.

Rapport-building was key to ensuring that students felt heard and empowered to share candidly. The interviewer ensured that the process was clearly explained, the participants could skip any questions or withdraw at any time without any consequences. All efforts were made sure to ensure that the participants felt comfortable during the process. Further, the development of themes was guided by an inductive process rooted in the data, supported by clear alignment with the study’s theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and intersectionality. These frameworks provided a strong analytical foundation for interpreting students’ lived experiences within systemic and structural contexts. By combining methodological transparency with attention to both potential biases, this study ensured that findings were not only grounded in first-hand accounts but also interpreted through a process that is ethical, and reliable. These safeguards ensures that the voices of participants are represented in a respectful manner and also ensures the credibility of the conclusions drawn.

Positionality and Reflexivity

As a woman of Indian origin and a former international student, the researcher’s positionality was central to the development of this project. Past experiences with immigration

processes, academic adaptation, and social adjustment inspired a personal investment in the topic. Mustafa and Jacobson (2019) emphasize that positionality shapes not only what researchers' study but also how they interpret meaning. This insider perspective helped in establishing rapport with participants, particularly in interviews involving cultural nuance and emotional disclosure (McGrath et al., 2019). However, it also introduced the risk of over-identification, especially as the researcher is now a domestic student, no longer facing the same legal or institutional challenges as international students. To mitigate this, the researcher followed reflexivity strategies proposed by Olmos et al. (2022), such as journaling, supervisor check-ins, and continuous examination of assumptions. This dual identity as both insider and outsider was used thoughtfully to amplify participant voices rather than substitute them, ensuring that the findings reflected students' lived realities, not the researcher's projections.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the core principles of TCPS 2 (2022): Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice. Every effort was made to protect participant dignity, rights, and mental health throughout the research process. Participants received detailed informed consent forms outlining the study's goals, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time before analysis began. They were also allowed to skip questions without explanation.

All interview data were anonymized, and recordings stored securely. The interviews took place in semi-private or private settings to ensure participant comfort. To minimize distress during conversations about discrimination and online hate, the researcher created a supportive, non-judgmental environment and offered a list of mental health resources at the end of each session. Particular care was taken to support the vulnerabilities of international students,

including their temporary immigration status, unfamiliarity with Canadian legal systems, and potential social isolation. Participants were reassured that their responses would remain confidential and that their involvement had no bearing on their academic or immigration status.

Chapter 3: Results

This chapter explores the nuanced and multi-layered experiences of Indian international students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University based on in-depth interviews conducted for this study. It presents how participants understand, internalize, and resist the impacts of online hate, harmful stereotypes, and structural challenges embedded in both digital and real-world spaces. Drawing from their own words, this section brings forward narratives that reveal the emotional, academic, and social costs of digital racism, while also highlighting how students navigate these challenges. The findings are organized into three major themes: (1) Experiencing Online Hate and Stereotypes, (2) Feeling Unwelcome and Questioning Belonging, and (3) Navigating Vulnerability and Seeking Change. These themes reflect not only the participants' struggles but also their strength, agency, and vision for a more inclusive future.

Theme 1: Experiencing Online Hate and Stereotypes

This theme explores the online hostility participants encountered and how it shapes their identities and experiences. All participants described encountering derogatory and xenophobic content online that specifically targeted Indian or Punjabi international students. The hate content often surfaced unprompted on their feeds and circulated widely on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit. It was deeply racialized. Most participants noted that Instagram was the most common platform for such content, stating, "It is increasing at a very rapid speed." Interestingly, almost none of the participants used TikTok, as it had been banned in India prior to their arrival in Canada. As a result, Instagram became the dominant platform for their media consumption. Many reported seeing hateful comments on everyday content, such as videos of students walking or standing in line for the bus, often accompanied by offensive comments like

“*Deport.*” This normalization of hostility became an alarming and routine part of their media experience.

1.1: Pervasive and Repetitive Hate Across Platforms

Every participant described social media as a space where hate was highly visible, consistent, and repetitive. One student shared, “It’s all over the place... You open the comments, and you just see the word ‘deport’ deport them, deport them.” This phrase appeared so frequently that it began to feel like an automated reaction in public online discourse. These experiences highlight how anti-immigrant sentiment has become normalized on Canadian digital platforms, where users’ express hostility without accountability.

This kind of repetitive hate is not accidental but algorithmically sustained. As Bakshy et al. (2015) and Pariser (2011) explain, digital platforms are structured to prioritize content that evokes strong emotional reactions, such as outrage or disgust. One participant echoed this sentiment, stating that the result is the amplification of xenophobic narratives portraying Indian students as unworthy of being in Canada. As Liddar and Pallapothu (2024) noted that platforms like 6ixbuzz routinely post decontextualized or sensationalist videos involving Indian individuals, reinforcing stereotypes and encouraging public scorn. Participants in this study echoed these analyses, recognizing that online narratives were actively shaping how others perceived them in society.

Some students reported modifying their behaviors to avoid negative attention. For example, one participant shared that they dressed in a way that would make people think they had been in Canada for a long time. Another participant described being extra polite and holding doors open for others even from a distance to counter negative stereotypes. Some avoided

wearing cultural clothes or visiting expensive cafes, even if they could afford them. Others skipped seminars because they felt they wouldn't fit in. Participants described being hyper-aware of their actions and consciously avoiding speaking in their native languages in public, all of which had a noticeable impact on their mental health.

1.2: Stereotypes Amplified Through Misleading and Visual Content

Participants emphasized that online hate was not limited to text, it was also visual and performative. Videos and reels frequently misrepresented Indian students' behaviors, often through selective editing that made them appear aggressive or disrespectful. One participant recalled a viral video in which a fellow student was portrayed as threatening when he was simply asking for help. "They just recorded that one moment and posted it," the student said. They described how an Indian student at Walmart asked a Canadian woman for help after failing to find an employee nearby. The woman didn't understand his accent, called for help, and the situation was resolved amicably. Days later, a manipulated video of the incident appeared online, claiming that Indian students were assaulting Canadian citizens. Participants noted that such misrepresentation fosters false perceptions and contributes to digital moral panic. Walther (2022) refers to this as the weaponization of visual media in digital hate. These videos need not be accurate to be harmful, once uploaded, they feed into existing stereotypes. Several students feared that Canadian peers or employers might see these videos and assume they reflect all Indian students. This fear reflects how digital misrepresentation has real-world consequences.

1.3: Racialized and Cultural Stereotyping

The stereotypes participants encountered were explicit, racialized, and deeply tied to culture. Students were described online as dirty, smelly, loud, uncultured, and incapable of

speaking English. “They think our food smells bad... or that we are not clean,” one participant said. Another described posts mocking their accents and fashion. One participant noted being extra careful not to be perceived as someone who “smells,” referencing the stereotype that they think “all Indians smell like curry.” Participants observed that people had become bolder and more openly racist in public, influenced by online content. One student shared an incident where a woman began recording her and her sister while they were sitting and talking on a bench, fearing that the woman intended to sensationalize the moment. One participant shared that “So I feel like people then just feel that it’s okay to say anything to someone just because its accepted online”. The participants shared that this boldness is inspired by lack of consequences on social media which then manifests in real life in the form of unwanted interactions, microaggressions and in some cases hate attacks.

Others shared examples of Indian students being ridiculed online even when displaying kindness such as helping a neighbor whose car was stuck. Rather than being praised, their clothes and appearance became the subject of mockery. These narratives are a form of rage-bait, designed to generate outrage and clicks. Such stereotypes are not new but are rooted in Canada’s colonial legacy (Thobani, 2007). They reflect assumptions of white and Western superiority. According to Lee and Rice (2007), non-Western students often face heightened discrimination precisely because of these racialized hierarchies. Participants shared that the videos targeted people who were visibly Punjabi or Sikh highlighting intersectional discrimination based on race, nationality, language, and religion (Crenshaw, 1989).

1.4: Narratives of Overpopulation and Economic Threat

Beyond cultural mockery, participants noted being framed as economic threats. Several

cited Reddit and TikTok threads that blamed Indian students for rising rent, overpopulation, and job scarcity. “People are saying immigrants are the reason Canadians can’t get jobs... because we accept lower wages,” one participant shared. Some shared that Canadians think that international students are not focusing on their studies and working illegally under the table often at low wages. These narratives, though oversimplified and often inaccurate, dominate comment sections. Some students argued that Indian international students work harder and are more compliant, making them more attractive to exploitative employers. At least two participants claimed that Canadian citizens rarely applied at their workplaces, countering the narrative that they were taking away jobs. In times of weak economies, vulnerable populations like international students become easy targets. As Marom (2023) and Sharma (2018) argue, Indian students are often blamed for structural problems they did not create. Despite contributing to Canada’s economy and paying high tuition, they are still framed as burdens which is a reflection of how international students are commodified and simultaneously excluded socially and culturally.

Theme 2: Feeling Unwelcome and Questioning Belonging

While online hate occurred in digital spaces, its consequences were deeply felt in participants’ everyday lives. The psychological toll of being targeted online extended into students’ perceptions of self, their academic confidence, and their sense of safety and inclusion in Canada. Even those who had not experienced direct in-person racism described having experienced weird “looks”, microaggressions, exclusion in the classroom, doubts about their belongingness and a heightened sense of visibility. Many questioned whether Canada was truly the welcoming society it claimed to be. This theme explores how emotional distress, academic

self-consciousness, and social disconnection shaped students' experiences of belonging.

2.1: Emotional Distress and Inferiority Complex

Participants described the emotional strain of online hate as persistent, internalized, and at times overwhelming. Several reported feeling low, experiencing anxiety, and overthinking after watching harmful content online. One student said, "These videos make me feel like an outsider... you don't feel like home." Others expressed similar emotions, describing an inferiority complex stemming from the idea that they lacked something because they were not born in Canada. Some even questioned their decision to come and felt dissatisfied. These emotional responses align with Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma, where repeated exposure to dehumanizing narratives causes individuals to question their self-worth. Sue et al. (2007) describe this process as racial battle fatigue which is a state of chronic stress caused by ongoing exposure to racism. Participants' vulnerability was compounded by a lack of spaces where they could process or challenge these narratives. Most reported being unaware of the resource systems available to them while others thought that they would not be very helpful.

2.2: Self-Consciousness in Academic and Social Settings

The internalization of hate extended into academic environments. Many participants felt judged, ignored, or misunderstood in classrooms. Several admitted to withholding their opinions during class discussions. Language barriers and accents made them hesitant to speak up and participate. "Sometimes I feel like, what if they've seen those videos and now think I'm like that?" one student explained. Another said, "In group discussions, other people don't like put so much emphasis on my viewpoint, so it is ok to not speak". These interactions undermine

the intelligence of international students who may not have the western English accent. These reflections demonstrate what Williams et al. (2022) refer to as self-censorship, where racialized students reduce their classroom engagement out of fear of being stereotyped. This silence creates a cycle: students speak less, feel less heard, and become further disengaged. As Houshmand et al. (2014) explain, this leads to diminished academic confidence and success, even in the absence of overt discrimination. Although most students shared that they did not have any problems with the faculty, some stated that work can be done to make classrooms more inclusive for international students.

2.3: Social Isolation and Peer Disconnection

Social exclusion was another major consequence of online hate. Participants described difficulty forming friendships with Canadian peers. “Hate has divided people”, one student said and “They’re just not interested,” claimed another participant. Others described self-segregation among international students who came earlier, which further limited opportunities for connection. Aggarwal and Çiftçi (2021) emphasize that belonging is vital for international students’ mental health. Without meaningful peer networks, students are left vulnerable to isolation. Many expressed a longing for connection but lacked the confidence or opportunity to build relationships as their peers seem disinterested. As Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) have shown, academic success is closely tied to social integration, which becomes difficult when students fear judgment based on appearance, background, or accent.

2.4: Questioning Canada’s Identity and Their Future in It

The cumulative impact of online and offline exclusion led several participants to question Canada’s image as a multicultural, inclusive society. “They show one thing in ads and media, but

the reality is very different,” one participant said. Others shared they would no longer recommend studying in Canada to their siblings and acquaintances in India. One student questioned, “why I came here and why is everyone hating on us?” while other students claimed that “If my brother wanted to come, I’d tell him no. It’s too much.” These reflections echo Lee and Rice’s (2007) findings on the dissonance between promotional images and lived realities. For many Indian students, promises of cultural safety and pathways to permanent residency led to disillusionment. Constantly having to prove their worth or “earn” their belonging are prompting some to consider leaving Canada entirely.

Theme 3: Navigating Vulnerability and Seeking Change

Despite the emotional and social challenges, participants also demonstrated resilience, resourcefulness, and a desire for systemic change. This theme captures the coping strategies students used to manage online hate and the broader structural reforms they believe are needed. Their stories underscore the importance of peer support, self-preservation, and community, alongside urgent calls for institutional accountability.

3.1: Personal Coping Mechanisms

Participants employed various strategies to manage emotional harm. The most common was avoidance or skipping hateful videos and not engaging with harmful comments. “I ignore them,” most student said. “If I keep seeing those things, it ruins my mood... so I just avoid them”, claimed one participant. Other participant shared that “If you see all this content continuously, you feel like maybe you have some faults and maybe you are not civilized enough”. These remarks suggest the deep impact on the mood, mental health and personal identity of

international students. Some participants also shared the content with their friends to raise awareness. As one participant noted that they shared the video of a girl getting attacked on a bus stop in Calgary to make their friends who take public transport aware of the things happening around them. These process highlight the various mechanism used by students to survive in these difficult times.

3.2: Uncertainty About the Future in Canada

The long-term effects of digital hostility shaped how students envisioned their futures. Some no longer saw themselves living in Canada permanently. “Right now, I don’t feel like I belong here,” one said. “Maybe in the future, I’ll think differently, but not right now.” These doubts were rooted in fears of job market discrimination and unstable immigration pathways. Marom (2023) highlights how international students are often promised a path to residency but face shifting policies and little support. Viswanathan and Jacob (2024) argue that policy rollbacks and rising hostility have created uncertainty about belonging. Students echoed this, worrying that even with qualifications, they might never be accepted and must rethink their future plans.

3.3: Desire for Change—Policy, Support, and Representation

Nearly every participant expressed a desire for change. “They’re not doing enough,” one student said. Another one expressed their frustration stating that “We can report it, but it’s still there... so many racist videos.” Some suggested awareness campaigns to combat misinformation and highlight the positive contributions of international students. “There should be more appreciation videos... not just the bad ones,” one participant suggested. Another participant

suggested that “we need a channel or community where we can talk about these things, we have the same problems... maybe together we can do something.”

The findings offer a complex, painful, yet insightful portrait of Indian international students in Canada. Their experiences with online hate extend far beyond the digital realm, affecting their mental health, academic engagement, and sense of belonging. The stereotypes they face are not isolated, they are manifestations of systemic exclusion rooted in colonial histories and perpetuated by digital algorithms. Yet despite these hardships, participants showed remarkable strength. They supported each other, resisted harmful narratives, and envisioned a better future. As one student said:

“We are the last generation that can deal with this. The next one, I’m scared for them. They’re softer. I don’t know how they’ll survive this.”

This powerful reflection emphasizes the urgency of institutional, social, and political action. Participants mentioned warning siblings and relatives not to pursue higher education in Canada due to growing hostility. The above findings highlight the unique struggles of Indian international students consistent with the previous literature but amplified by online hate. This shows that online hate is not just a virtual issue, it shapes how Canada is perceived and could influence future choices made by international students, visitors, and immigrants. Addressing these concerns is critical to preserving the multicultural identity that Canada claims to champion.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This discussion critically unpacks the three core themes that emerged from participants' narratives: (1) Experiencing Online Hate and Stereotypes, (2) Feeling Unwelcome and Questioning Belonging, and (3) Navigating Vulnerability and Seeking Change. Framed through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality, this section demonstrates how Indian international students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University are not only targets of online racism but are also affected in profound and lasting ways. The narratives of these students provide deep insight into how digital hate becomes embedded in their daily lives, shaping identity, altering academic and social engagement, and reshaping aspirations. This section positions these lived realities within broader structures of systemic racism, colonial legacies, and the commodification of international students in Canada.

Online Hate as a Mechanism of Structural Racism

One of the most striking takeaways from the findings is the pervasive and algorithmically reinforced nature of online hate. Participants did not just describe isolated incidents rather they spoke of a constant presence of xenophobic and racist narratives across multiple platforms, particularly Instagram and Reddit. These narratives were normalized to the extent that students expected to encounter the word “deport” in comment sections, regardless of the content. Critical Race Theory emphasizes that racism is not simply the result of individual bias but is systemic and embedded in institutions and everyday practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Social media algorithms designed to amplify engagement through emotionally charged content. These become channels for the reinforcement of racial hierarchies and exclusionary nationalisms. As Bakshy et al. (2015) and Pariser (2011) argue, these platforms prioritize visibility for content that triggers

outrage, and the lived experience of participants confirms that Indian students are regularly placed at the center of this digital hostility.

This confirms and extends Walther's (2022) analysis of the weaponization of visual media. Short clips, taken out of context and stripped of nuance, are posted not to inform but to incite. Participants shared powerful examples of this, such as a student being filmed while asking for help and later portrayed online as aggressive. These narratives strip Indian students of their humanity and flatten their diverse experiences into a singular image of threat or disruption. As CRT posits, racism adapts to the times as it is fluid, not static. The weaponization of digital media is a modern expression of old colonial logics that continue to mark racialized people as inferior, uncivilized, or unworthy of respect.

Internalizing Stereotypes and Emotional Labor

Another powerful thread running through the findings is the internalization of harmful narratives and the emotional burden students carry as a result. The discussion of feeling “dirty,” “loud,” or being mocked for smelling like curry are not trivial anecdotes. They are evidence of how deeply racialized and cultural stereotypes travel through online platforms and become embodied experiences. Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma offers an important lens here: when people are repeatedly exposed to negative portrayals of their identity, they begin to anticipate judgment and alter their behaviors to avoid it. Participants in this study engaged in constant self-monitoring i.e. modifying how they spoke, dressed, and acted to avoid fulfilling negative expectations.

This mirrors findings by Lee and Rice (2007), who documented how non-Western international students often encounter heightened forms of exclusion because their identities

visibly disrupt dominant cultural norms. Participants shared that even routine activities, such as speaking in their native language or dressing in cultural attire, became loaded with risk. Intersectionality deepens this analysis. Their experiences illustrate how multiple identities intersect to produce unique forms of vulnerability.

The psychological cost of this labor is immense. Students described anxiety, overthinking, and feelings of inferiority that mirror racial battle fatigue (Sue et al., 2007). The notion that one must be extra polite, overcompensate, or avoid public spaces altogether to be seen as “acceptable” reflects a deep internalization of racialized expectations. This emotional burden is not simply about personal insecurity, it is evidence of the cumulative impact of systemic exclusion that tells international students they are forever temporary and not “Canadian” enough.

Expectations versus Reality

The emotional distress participants described is exacerbated by the contradiction between Canada's promotional image and lived reality. Students were drawn to Canada by promises of multiculturalism, opportunity, and acceptance. However, what they encountered were exclusionary narratives online, limited social connection, and systemic barriers to belonging. The findings strongly support Marom's (2023) argument that Indian international students are treated as commodities, valued for their tuition and labor but denied full social or cultural inclusion.

This contradiction is structural. Institutions actively recruit Indian students to bolster enrollment and revenue, but they often do not provide the necessary support to ensure their success or well-being. The participants' sense of betrayal was compounded by their legal status as temporary residents, which further amplifies feelings of precarity. Despite contributing

significantly to the Canadian economy, these students remain positioned as outsiders, expected to endure racism without adequate recourse. Their stories echo Sharma's (2018) critique of the neoliberal university, where diversity is celebrated only when it is profitable and non-disruptive.

The discussion around economic scapegoating further highlights this tension. Participants were routinely blamed in online forums for job shortages, rising rents, and other systemic issues despite evidence that Canadian citizens were not applying for the same positions. These narratives are not based on facts; they are driven by a fear of the "other" and serve to deflect attention from structural failures. The scapegoating of Indian students reflects a long history of racialized economic anxieties in Canada, where immigrant communities are framed as threats to national stability rather than contributors to it (Liddar and Pallapothu, 2024)

Disconnection, Silence, and Educational Impacts

Participants also revealed how online hate filtered into academic environments, leading to self-censorship, disengagement, and a sense of invisibility. CRT challenges us to ask who is allowed to feel comfortable, safe, and confident in public spaces—including classrooms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The students in this study did not always experience direct racism from instructors or peers, but many spoke of being quietly excluded, ignored in group work, hesitant to participate in class, and dismissed in social interactions.

Williams et al. (2022) describe this as self-censorship, a protective response where students limit their engagement to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or being misunderstood. The internalization of hate extends into academic performance and sense of belonging. One participant noted that even when she tried to engage, she felt that her voice didn't matter. These subtle but persistent signals of exclusion lead to educational disengagement and reduce

opportunities for students to thrive. This aligns with the work of Houshmand et al. (2014), who show that international students' academic success is closely tied to feelings of inclusion. When students are anxious, hypervigilant, or emotionally distressed, they are less likely to take risks, ask questions, or assert themselves academically. Participants in this study carried digital baggage into the classroom which was a constant fear of being seen through the lens of online stereotypes.

Social Isolation and Reimagining Peer Relationships

The impact of online hate also played out in the social sphere, where students described feeling rejected, or disconnected from both Canadian and international peers. Some spoke of Canadian students living “in their own bubble,” while others noted divisions within the international student community who came before them. This led to a deep sense of loneliness and longing for authentic connection. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) stress the importance of social integration for academic and emotional success among international students. When such connections are limited, students are left to navigate a new country and culture largely on their own. Participants in this study described peer support as critical, but often informal and self-created. These “micro-communities” offered validation, empathy, and a sense of solidarity, but they could not fully replace the systemic support that was lacking from institutions.

This isolation becomes especially harmful when students also begin to question Canada's core identity. The disillusionment shared by many participants' statements like “I don't think I belong here” or “I wouldn't tell my brother to come”. These reflect a rupture between expectation and the true experience. It also suggests that the harms of online hate are not contained within individual experience rather they have ripple effects on the migration choices

and educational decisions of entire communities.

Digital Coping and Acts of Resistance

Despite the emotional toll, participants showed notable agency in how they coped with online hate. The most common coping strategy was avoidance, skipping comment sections, and disengaging from harmful content. While avoidance is sometimes viewed as passive, Jane (2018) argue that selective withdrawal is often a deliberate act of digital self-preservation. For racialized users, creating boundaries around what they consume is a form of resistance. These students were not simply absorbing racism online and offline rather they were working around it and trying to protect their mental health in an environment that continuously exposed them to harm.

Participants also emphasized the importance of peer support in navigating digital trauma.

They talked about sharing content with friends, discussing the present state and future with friends, and sharing common experiences. These informal networks offered community-based care when institutional supports were either absent or unknown. This highlights the significance of social networks for international students' need for genuine connections.

Uncertainty toward future in Canada

Perhaps one of the most humbling insights from this study was the extent to which participants had begun to question their long-term future in Canada. Several explicitly said they no longer saw themselves settling here permanently. These were not offhanded comments rather they were grounded in lived experiences of racism, social exclusion, and a sense that their value in Canada was conditional and transactional. This ambivalence is especially concerning given that international students are often encouraged to see Canadian education as a pathway to

immigration and long-term residency. Viswanathan and Jacob (2024) describe how recent policy shifts, coupled with increased anti-immigrant sentiment, have made students feel insecure and unwelcome, even when they fulfill all institutional expectations.

Participants in this study were highly aware of the political and social changes that shaped their futures. Even as they worked and studied hard, they could not shake the sense that they were disposable in the eyes of the broader society. This disconnect reinforces CRT's insistence that racism is not always overt or intentional. Instead, it manifests through policies, norms, and practices that devalue racialized groups while upholding the status quo consistent with Canada's history. Their growing doubt about staying in Canada, or recommending it to others, signals a critical moment of reckoning for immigration policy, educational institutions, and public discourse.

Call for Action

A final message shared by participants was the need for change. One student expressed their concern that some professors at Kwantlen Polytechnic University are aware of the hatred towards Indian international students, yet they have not taken any steps to make classrooms more

inclusive. A common message was the need to regulate hateful content, the need to quickly remove racist posts and improving accountability against those who share such content.

Surprisingly, students shared little to no awareness of available resources such as counselling, peer mentorship etc. Another participant shared little to no knowledge of their rights if something were to happen to them in real life. This highlights the need for informational sessions to make sure that international students are aware of their rights and responsibilities in

Canada. While some shared that the federal limits of numbers of international students entering Canada as a step in the right direction, others called for stricter policies surrounding student visas. Some sent the message to their fellow students to “work hard” and ignore the social media, while others asked them to “speak up”. These messages highlight the multi-step approach that may be needed to make Canada more inclusive for international students. Their ideas were clear, reasonable, and urgent: better regulation of digital hate, institutional acknowledgment of their struggles, and intentional investment in spaces that affirm their presence.

Digital Racism as a Real-World Harm

A central argument of this research is that online hate is not separate from offline experiences. It is not a virtual issue to be brushed aside. Instead, digital racism shapes how students are perceived, how they see themselves, and how they move through the world. The participants in this study confirmed that hateful content had direct consequences on their mental health, social relationships, academic performance, and future planning. Digital narratives become real life scripts, informing how Indian students are treated by landlords, employers, and peers.

This affirms the need to treat digital hate as a form of systemic racism not just an internet trend. It operates through algorithms, public discourse, and racialized stereotypes that carry real consequences. Participants made it clear that what they saw online often predicted or explained what they experienced in real life. The link between the digital and physical world is not hypothetical; it is lived and deeply felt. Canada’s multicultural identity is at stake. If international students feel excluded, misrepresented, and unsupported, this has long-term implications for immigration, higher education, and national reputation. What happens to Indian students now

may shape how future migrants, tourists, or investor's view Canada. Institutions, governments, and tech companies must confront this reality with policies, accountability, and care.

This discussion has shown that Indian international students in Canada are navigating much more than academic challenges. They are living through a complex web of racialized narratives, digital hostility, and social exclusion that deeply affect their identities, well-being, and sense of future. Far from being passive victims, they are also creators of community, resilience, and resistance. By placing participants' voices in conversation with theoretical frameworks and literature, this section underscores how online hate is not simply a digital inconvenience but is a contemporary expression of systemic racism, shaped by colonial histories and modern technologies. These students are not just reacting to trolls or bad actors online—they are navigating institutional neglect, public hostility, and policy contradictions.

Ultimately, their stories point to an urgent need for reform within social media platforms, educational institutions, and immigration frameworks. The next generation, as one participant explicitly warned, may not be equipped to survive this without change. This is not just a student

issue or an internet issue in fact it is a national one. Canada's credibility as a multicultural society depends on how it listens, responds, and evolves in the face of these realities.

Contribution to the Field of Criminology

This research adds to the criminological literature by examining how digital platforms serve as incubators for hate, discrimination, and the marginalization of international students specifically Indian students at a post-secondary institute (KPU) in BC, Canada. Through their lived experiences, the study reveals how online hostility manifests in real-world consequences,

including threats to mental health, academic disengagement, and social exclusion. These findings deepen our understanding of how virtual spaces reinforce systemic inequalities and perpetuate real life harm.

The study also offers concrete policy insights aimed at improving the educational and social experiences of Indian international students. Participants' narratives highlight the need for culturally responsive support systems, expanded mental health services, and stronger institutional responses to online racism and xenophobia. These recommendations speak directly to gaps in current policy and practice within post-secondary education and immigration frameworks.

Policy Implications

The findings have significant implications for both post-secondary institutions and broader policy debates on immigration, multiculturalism, and digital justice in Canada. By exposing the unique challenges faced by Indian international students, who are often lauded for their economic contributions but socially and institutionally sidelined, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of belonging, integration, and host society responsibilities. Post-

secondary institutions must recognize the dual burden faced by international students which is adjusting to academic and cultural life while simultaneously enduring digital hostility that often goes unaddressed.

The findings of this research underscore the need for universities to adopt holistic strategies that promote equality, combat hate, raise awareness about racism and xenophobia, ensure digital safety, and provide culturally attuned mental health services, academic supports, and anti-racism training for staff and students alike. At the policy level, the research highlights

the urgent need for stronger protections against digital harassment particularly for temporary residents and international students who often lack both robust support systems and access to legal remedies. Legislative action on hate speech, alongside regulation that holds platforms accountable for algorithmic amplification of xenophobia, is essential in addressing these harms moving forward. Stricter policies and accountability measures are needed to regulate the harmful content about minorities and vulnerable communities moving forward.

In the long term, these findings challenge the dominant narrative that views Indian international students primarily as revenue sources. Instead, the study argues for recognizing these students as vital members of Canadian society whose well-being, safety, and contributions merit meaningful investment. It also lays the foundation for future comparative research exploring how students from various international backgrounds experience online hate, exclusion, and institutional neglect. These insights could inform national strategies for equity and inclusion in higher education.

Limitations

This study was conducted as part of a semester-long undergraduate research project at a single institution, which introduced several practical limitations related to time, budget, and participant recruitment. The short timeline required all phases of the project such as recruitment, interviews, transcription, and analysis to be completed within a few months. As a result, the depth and breadth of data collection were constrained, and some emerging themes could not be fully explored.

One limitation of this study stems from the use of snowball sampling, which, while

effective for reaching a hard-to-access population, may have led to a sample that overrepresented students with particularly negative experiences of online hate. Although efforts were made to ensure diverse perspectives, referral-based recruitment can sometimes cluster similar narratives, potentially limiting the breadth of experiences captured. Future research could benefit from combining purposive sampling with random techniques to enhance variation and include voices that may not circulate through tightly connected student networks

Additionally, students' busy academic and work schedules often required rescheduling, limiting both the number of participants and the opportunity for longer or follow-up interviews. Only ten students participated, which, while adequate for a small-scale qualitative study, limits the generalizability of findings across the broader population of Indian international students.

Although efforts were made to include a variety of experiences, the small sample size restricted the complexity and diversity of perspectives that could be captured.

Budget constraints further narrowed the study's scope. Translation services were not feasible, meaning only students who could comfortably communicate in English were interviewed. While participants demonstrated conversational fluency, language proficiency can influence how individuals articulate sensitive or emotionally complex experiences, potentially limiting the depth of some narratives (Temple & Young, 2004).

The demographic composition of the sample presented further limitations. Most participants were from North India, and none identified as being from South India—a region where students may face different forms of discrimination, including colorism or linguistic bias. Additionally, the experiences of turban-wearing Sikh students, who make up a significant portion of the Indian international student population at KPU, were not uniquely explored in this study.

Their visible religious identity may expose them to distinct forms of online targeting, which future research should investigate more directly.

Gender representation in the study was also uneven, with eight participants identifying as female and only two as male. No participants identified as non-binary or gender diverse. The existing research suggest that highlights how gender shapes the ways individuals experience and respond to discrimination (Jane, 2017). Thus, the findings may be more reflective of female perspectives and less representative of other gendered experiences.

Overall, while this study offers valuable insights into the experiences of Indian international students facing online hate, it should be viewed as an initial exploration. The findings must be viewed with caution due to limited sample size. These limitations highlight the need for future studies that can engage a broader and more inclusive participant base, with expanded sample size, time and resources to explore emerging themes in greater depth.

Future Directions

Future research should aim to include a larger and more demographically diverse sample of Indian international students across different institutions and regions in Canada. The experiences of students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, located in Surrey, BC, are shaped by its unique geographic and social context. Comparative studies across provinces or between urban and rural institutions could help identify regional differences in students' experiences with online hate.

Expanding the participant pool to include South Indian students, as well as a wider range of linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, would provide a more intersectional perspective. Differences in skin tone, language, and regional identity intersect with race, religion,

and immigration status, shaping students' vulnerability to discrimination in complex ways (Baas, 2014; Inman, 2015; Ee, 2013). Future studies should also intentionally include turban-wearing Sikh students, whose visible religious identity may influence how they are perceived and targeted in digital spaces. Moreover, greater gender diversity among participants including male, non-binary, and gender-diverse students would provide a more complete understanding of how gender mediates the experience and internalization of online hate (Crenshaw, 1989).

Longitudinal studies could further illuminate how students' experiences with online hate evolve over time. For instance, tracking changes in mental health, academic performance, and social integration throughout students' academic journeys would help identify both immediate and long-term consequences. These insights could inform more effective and timely support strategies by institutions. Additionally, future research should examine how support systems including peer networks, community organizations, and university services which mitigate the impact of online hate. Comparative studies of institutions with proactive anti-racism and mental health initiatives versus those without could provide evidence-based recommendations for effective intervention. Participatory and youth-led research methods may also be especially

valuable, enabling students to play an active role in shaping knowledge that reflects their lived realities.

Finally, future studies should explore how online hate intersects with other structural stressors that Indian international students often face, such as labor exploitation, housing instability, and academic pressure. A more holistic and participatory research approach would not only enhance understanding but also support transformative change. Such efforts would help Canadian institutions strengthen their commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how online hate shapes the identities and lived experiences of Indian international students in British Columbia. The findings offer compelling answers to both research questions. Digital hostility was shown to profoundly influence students' self-perceptions and public image, often resulting in internalized stigma, heightened self-consciousness, and cultural distancing. At the same time, online hate directly impacted students' mental health, academic engagement, and social relationships—demonstrating how virtual hostility translates into real-world harm. By employing a rigorous qualitative approach grounded in Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, the study ensured that participants' voices were represented with authenticity and care. Ultimately, the research confirms that online hate is not confined to digital platforms; it reinforces systemic exclusion and reshapes how students navigate their lives in Canada.

Beyond individual experiences, this study reveals how online hate intersects with broader structures of social exclusion, psychological strain, and academic disengagement. Framed through CRT and intersectionality, the research demonstrates that Indian international students are affected not only by overt digital hostility but also by institutional and societal dynamics that perpetuate marginalization. Geopolitical tensions between Canada and India, cultural stereotypes, and the commodification of international students create an environment in which online hate is generated, circulated, and normalized.

Platforms driven by rage-bait content, dehumanizing stereotypes, and algorithmic amplification have become hostile spaces that deepen feelings of “otherness.” These digital environments intensify anxiety, depression, and isolation for students who are already under pressure to succeed academically and adapt culturally. These challenges, though deeply personal,

are political, rooted in longstanding inequalities that shape who is welcomed, protected, and valued in Canada's educational landscape.

Yet this study also highlights the resilience and agency of Indian students who resist harmful narratives and call for accountability. Their voices advocate for a shift in how international students are perceived—not merely as economic contributors but as integral members of Canadian academic and social communities. Although international students have become more visible in policy conversations, a critical gap remains in understanding how online hate affects their mental well-being and academic success. This research helps fill that gap with a focused, student-centered analysis that underscores the urgent need for systemic change.

By centering the lived experiences of recent Indian international students, this study calls for inclusive institutional policies, culturally responsive support systems, and national conversations that directly address xenophobia, both online and offline. Ultimately, it envisions a Canada where international students are not only welcomed but meaningfully protected, supported, and empowered to thrive. As Canada continues to redefine its identity in an increasingly digital and diverse world, creating safe, inclusive, and equitable spaces for international students is not just an ethical imperative, it is a necessary step toward building a truly multicultural society.

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Call for Indian International students



Exploring the Lived Experiences of Indian International Students in times of rising Online Hate

IF YOU

- Are an International Student from India.
- Between the ages of 18-25 and been in Canada for 2 years or less.
- Enrolled at KPU for Spring 2025.
- Able to have a conversation in English.

then you are qualified to participate in my study and receive a \$30 Amazon Gift card for your participation. The study requires approximately 40-60 minutes of your time.

Email: jasmeen.kaur5@student.kpu.ca to express interest or for more information.

REB Ref. No. 7921 (2024-48)

For any concerns, contact (reb@kpu.ca) or 6045993163



CONSENT FORM

Navigating Online Hate: The Experiences of Indian International Students in Lower Mainland, BC, Canada
Ethics ID KPU REB Ref No. 7921 (2024-48)

STUDY TEAM

Principal Investigator: Dr. Petra Jonas-Vidovic petra.jonas@kpu.ca

Co-Investigator(s): Jasmeen Kaur (Student) jasmeen.kaur5@student.kpu.ca

INVITATION & PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- You are invited to participate in this research study about the experiences of Indian international students with rising online hate in Canada. The purpose is to understand how these experiences impact social, academic, and personal lives of Indian International students.
- Participation is completely voluntary, and your decision to participate or not will not affect your academic standing, employment, or other status.
- The study is part of co-investigator's Bachelor of Criminology Honours requirement.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

- Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary.
- Whether or not you choose to participate in this study will not affect your academic standing, grades, or employment opportunities.
- I will give you any information that is relevant to your decision to continue participating in this study and answer any questions that you may have about the study.
- You are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer by saying "I don't want to answer that" or something similar.

PROCEDURES

- If you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to participate in an interview which will be conducted either in-person (For e.g. KPU Study rooms) or online via Zoom or Teams.
- With your permission, I will audio record the interview to ensure the accuracy of my data. I will also take some notes. I will ask questions such as "Can you share any experiences where online hate influenced your daily life?" Or "What impact, if any, has online hate had on your mental health or social relationships?"
- I will transcribe the interview to analyze it. If you do not want anything recorded, you can let me know.
- Your name and any identifying information will not be used, and the data will be securely stored on password-protected devices and the investigator's OneDrive folder. Notes and consent forms will also be scanned and stored digitally in password protected folders. The physical copies of notes and consent forms will be shredded securely with a paper shredder once the scanned copies are securely uploaded to separate password protected One Drive Folders.
- Only the investigator and co-investigator will have access to the data, and all efforts will be made to protect your confidentiality.
- If you choose to participate in this study, the interview will take approximately 40 minutes to an hour in person (e.g. a study room in the KPU Library) or online via Zoom or Teams.
- You are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer by saying, 'I don't want to answer that,' or something similar."

WITHDRAWING FROM THE STUDY

- You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequence. If you choose to withdraw during the interview, any data collected will be destroyed

- immediately. Notes will be securely shredded and audio recording will be permanently deleted.
- After the interview is complete, you can contact the researchers mentioned above regarding any questions about withdrawing from the study.
 - If you wish to withdraw after the interview has been completed, you can request that your data be excluded from the study by contacting the co-investigator Jasmeen Kaur via email. The contact information of the co-investigator is mentioned at the top of this consent form.
 - If you choose to withdraw, the information provided by you will not be used, and all data will be erased.
 - Once the process of data analysis begins (approximately late February), then withdrawal will not be possible as data will be anonymized, and it would not be possible to track down the identity of the participants from the data.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- If you choose to participate, I will ask you to attend an interview which will be conducted either in-person (e.g. KPU Study rooms) or online via Zoom or Teams.
- For in person interviews, they will ideally take place at KPU library's study rooms, which are intended to be quiet and private spaces.
- Only the researchers mentioned on this form will have access to the data. Names and other identifying information of participants will not be linked to the data and each participant will be assigned a unique code to anonymize their responses.
- The audio recordings will be securely stored using the Zoom application voice recording system, which is based in Canada with access provided only to the researchers. Notes will be double checked, and any personal identification will be removed. Both the notes and consent forms will also be scanned and stored digitally in password protected folders right after the interview process. The

physical copies of notes and consent forms will be shredded securely with a paper shredder once the scanned copies are securely uploaded to separate password protected One Drive Folders.

BENEFITS

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. However, your participation will contribute to my education as a student at KPU and help improve our understanding of the experiences of international students facing increasing online hate. The findings may also inform policies to better support international students.

RISKS

- The information you share will be kept confidential. The interviews will take place in quiet, semi-private spaces like KPU study rooms to protect your privacy and safety. However, please note that complete confidentiality may not always be guaranteed because of the semi-private nature of the library. Interviews may be scheduled during quieter times on campus to help ensure more privacy.
- Talking about your experiences may bring up uncomfortable feelings. If this happens, you can skip any question or stop the interview at any time. You will also be given contact details for free counseling services at KPU if you need support. If you feel uncomfortable after the interview, you can contact the co-investigator and choose to withdraw without any consequences.

RESOURCES

If you experience any distress, you can seek support from **FREE KPU Counselling services**. You can Call 604-599-2828, or you can also email at Counsellor@kpu.ca.

Below are some more useful resources if you experience any crisis or need support:

- Contact the BC Crisis Centre <https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/get-help/>
- CALL or TEXT 9 8 8 ([Canada's 24/7 national suicide crisis helpline](https://www.suicideline.ca/))

- CALL **1800 SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433; [BC's 24/7 suicide prevention and intervention line](#))**
- CALL or CHAT **[MySSP \(TELUS Health 24/7 Student Support app\)](#)**
- If you are in an emergency call **[9 1 1](#)**

PAYMENT

- You will be provided with a **\$30 Amazon gift card** as a token of appreciation. You may keep the gift card even if you choose to withdraw from the study.

STUDY RESULTS

- Your name or any identifying information will not be shared in the final results.
- The overall findings (without any direct identifying information of participants) will be shared in the Honours final presentation, written thesis, and may be published or presented at conferences.

DISPOSAL OF DATA

Information collected during this study will be stored until the end of August 2025. At the end of this time, all audiotapes/transcripts/communication and any other files related to the data will be deleted.

FUTURE USES OF DATA

There is no secondary purpose of the data, and all data will be destroyed by the end of August 2025.

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions or concerns, wish to withdraw, or would like a copy of the results, please contact: jasmeen.kaur5@student.kpu.ca

CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS/ETHICS CONCERNS

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the KPU Research Ethics Board at reb@kpu.ca or 604-599-3163.

CONSENT & SIGNATURE

- Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study at any time.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interviews are intended to be semi-structured in nature. The following questions will guide the conversation. The interviews are no longer than an hour therefore, not every question on this list will be asked rather these questions will ensure that the discussion remains semi-structured.

1. Can you please share your age, background, and how long you have been studying in Canada? What program or field of study are you pursuing?
2. Can you tell me about your journey to Canada as an international student, including reasons for choosing Canada and any initial challenges you faced?
3. What has been your experience adjusting to life in Canada, both academically and socially?
4. Do you feel that being an international student has affected your interactions with Canadian peers or faculty? If so, in what ways?
5. Do you think that online hate directed at international students is becoming more common or harmful?
6. How do you feel when you see other international students being targeted by online hate or discrimination?
7. Have you ever discussed your experiences with online hate with your family or friends back home? What was their reaction?
8. What kinds of online behaviors or comments do you consider harmful or discriminatory?
9. Do you think international students from certain countries, like India, face more or different forms of online discrimination compared to others? If so, why?
10. How has experiencing online hate affected your mental health or well-being?
11. Has online hate influenced how you perceive your identity as an Indian international student in Canada?
12. How do you cope with or respond to online hate?
13. How does online hate impact your social relationships, both online and offline?
14. Do you feel that online hate has affected your academic performance or engagement? If so, in what ways?

15. What changes or improvements would you suggest to institutions or social media platforms to reduce online hate and better support international students?
16. How do you think your experiences with online hate shape your views on the future of international students in Canada?
17. Do you see your experiences with online hate impacting your future decisions, either professionally or personally?
18. Do you feel like the Canadian government or public institutions are doing enough to control this hate? What changes would you suggest?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as an international student or regarding online hate in Canada?