

# ADVOCACY MESSAGING

## The Reducing Online Conflict Community (ROCC)

June 2024



**About this document:** This collection of advocacy messaging is intended to speak to the roles of different stakeholders in addressing the Weaponization of Social Media in Nigeria and globally. The Reducing Online Conflict Community (ROCC) recognizes that different stakeholders must be reached through different targeted forms of messaging to address cross-cutting issues. However, the digital peacebuilding advocacy community is uniquely responsible for this process.

This document is specifically designed to assist digital peacebuilders in tailoring their messaging based on their audience – social media platforms, institutional donors, and government officials. These messages are grounded in lessons learned from a generative workshop with co-designed priorities, where representatives from various sectors and regions came together to identify key challenges and develop strategies for addressing them.

## Key Challenges:

1. Lack of coordinated efforts among stakeholders within the ecosystem of actors addressing online threats and harms
2. Limited connection between institutional donors, government agencies, tech companies, community leaders, and other sectors addressing digital peacebuilding issues regarding the severity of online conflict and its offline consequences

## Cross-Cutting Themes:



### 1. **Accountability and Prompt Action in Content Moderation:**

Lack of accountability and prompt action in content moderation are common frustrations between stakeholders across all sectors. Effective content moderation must involve the timely identification and removal of harmful content, transparency in decision-making processes around moderation policies, and consistent enforcement of community guidelines. By holding platforms accountable and demanding prompt action, we can protect users from online harassment, misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, fostering a healthier social media ecosystem.



2. **Importance of Media Literacy:** Media literacy is crucial for empowering individuals of all ages to evaluate information critically, discern between credible sources and misinformation, and engage responsibly as digital citizens. By enhancing media literacy, we can significantly reduce the spread of harmful false information, protect users from online harms, and foster a more resilient community. These foundational skills are essential for maintaining the integrity of the information shared and building an educated and aware user community.



### 3. **Collaboration to Prevent Online Harms:**

Collaboration amongst stakeholders is not just a suggestion, but a necessity in our fight against the weaponization of social media. It's about more than just working together -- it's about leveraging our collective strengths to respond effectively to online harms. By collaborating, we can develop holistic and comprehensive strategies to address issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and digital harassment. These collaborative efforts enhance the effectiveness of our interventions while preventing duplication of efforts. Together, we are stronger.



**4. Promoting Positive Social Media Use:** Promoting positive social media use is not just a strategy, but a potential catalyst for significant positive change. It involves encouraging respectful, supportive, and constructive interactions online. This effort includes implementing pro-social design features, supporting counter-messaging initiatives, and fostering on and offline cultures of empathy. By advocating for positive behavior, we cannot only reduce instances of online harm but also improve user engagement and satisfaction, and build strong, more cohesive online communities. This, in turn, can contribute to the creation of a healthier social media ecosystem.

# Social Media Platforms



## Content Moderation Accountability

**Key Message:** It is possible to profit and prosper while protecting users. Implement robust content moderation practices to protect your users and build authentic trust in your platform.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Trust and Safety:** Ensure prompt action in content moderation to highlight user trust and safety. Over time, this will build confidence and good faith between users and platforms, fostering fidelity to the platform from users, content creators, and advertisers.
- b. **Practice What You Preach:** Emphasize corporate responsibility's importance to the social media platform by highlighting social media platforms' baseline responsibility to act transparently and consistently in content moderation.
- c. **Reputation Protection:** Accountability in content moderation that is intentional and not performative upholds the credibility and integrity of social media platforms. A strong reputation for ethical practices differentiates your platform in a competitive market.
- d. **Good for Profits:** Accountability is good for business. Positive user experiences can lead to higher levels of content creation (thus interaction), advertising revenue, and market share.



## Media Literacy

**Key Message:** Promote and support media literacy initiatives to create an informed and responsible user base.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Reducing Organic Spread of Misinformation:** Emphasize the transformative potential of media literacy in significantly reducing misinformation and fostering a well-informed user base. This concerted effort can elevate the quality of discourse on the social media platform, offering a brighter future for online interactions.
- b. **A Trustworthy Reputation:** Highlight how media literacy initiatives drive user trust, platform reputation, and perception of company integrity.
- c. **Sustainability:** Stress the long-term benefits of a knowledgeable and responsible online user base, curbing the spread of false information.



## Collaboration to Prevent Online Harms

**Key Message:** Partner with local organizations to address and mitigate offline conflict arising from online interactions.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Evidence-Driven:** Illustrate the effectiveness of partnerships and coalition building with local organizations and subject matter experts in mitigating conflicts both online and offline.
- b. **Strength in Numbers:** Underline the vital role of collective action in countering the weaponization of social media. The interconnectedness of efforts is crucial, and collaboration is not just an option but a necessity in this context.
- c. **Lead by Example:** Call for collaboration to demonstrate the social media platform's commitment (or lack thereof) to corporate social responsibility and user safety.



## Promoting Positive Social Media Use

**Key Message:** Encourage positive social media behavior through targeted pro-social design and campaigns.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Pro-Social Design:** Emphasize that implementing features into social media design that encourage positive interactions can significantly reduce instances of harassment, bullying, and tech-facilitated gender-based violence.
- b. **Protect the Vulnerable:** Highlight proactive measures to promote positive behavior online. These measures not only prevent the escalation of conflicts during hate speech surges but also protect vulnerable users, inspiring a safer and more inclusive online environment.
- c. **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Remind companies that promoting positive behavior demonstrates their commitment to social responsibility and ethical practices. Positive social media use reflects a company's reputation in a kind light and reinforces positive user experiences.

# Institutional Donors



## Content Moderation Accountability

**Key Message:** Invest in efforts at the community and institutional levels that uphold responsible standards for accountability and transparency in content moderation.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Community-Driven:** The role of donors in funding initiatives that promote accountability is significant to sustainable incentives for community-centric content moderation.
- b. **Cross-Cutting with Community Development:** The weaponization of social media directly impacts any community—local, global, from a specific group, etc. Social media moderation and accountability standards must be built into community development projects.
- c. **Leadership Amongst Peer Organizations:** Leading the charge in leveraging financial resources to enact change in the social media space is suitable for an institutional donor's brand. Grantees and peer organizations alike can look to the donor as a leader in this space by emulating their priorities.



## Media Literacy

**Key Message:** Fund long-term media literacy programs that empower communities to think critically about the social media content they consume, ultimately reducing the impact of misinformation on populations supported by your grantees.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Scalable and Replicable:** Funding is needed for scaleable media literacy strategies and programs at the community level. With resources to back these programs, collaborative strategies for building media literacy can be established to effectively address misinformation and cyber crimes.
- b. **Capacity-Building:** Media literacy programs are capacity-building programs. Local actors are empowered to combat digital misinformation and promote peace through these learning environments.
- c. **Community Empowerment:** Support for local programs is at the heart of many funding strategies. Focus on how educating and empowering communities on conflict resolution, critical thinking, and digital literacy can contribute to resilience and social cohesion.



## Collaboration to Prevent Online Harms

**Key Message:** Invest in collaborative projects that unite diverse stakeholders and empower them to address the weaponization of social media as a unified effort.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Sustainable Initiatives:** Highlight the effectiveness and sustainability of supporting coalition-building efforts.
- b. **Bringing Grantees Together:** Fund collaborative projects for stakeholders to address complex social issues as a united front.
- c. **Good Faith Partnerships:** Reduce competition between these stakeholders by encouraging collaboration through your funding practices.



## Promoting Positive Social Media Use

**Key Message:** Invest in organizations and initiatives that promote positive social media behavior to reduce online harassment.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Mission Critical:** If an organization aims to bolster community well-being and development, positive social media use is crucial in achieving that in the digital space.
- b. **Safety Offline:** Positive social media use can reduce the negative impacts of online harassment and violence, making these initiatives crucial in creating safer spaces for all users.
- c. **Health and Wellness Commitment:** Positive social media campaigns contribute to the overall well-being of communities by fostering supportive and respectful online environments.

# Government Policymakers



## Content Moderation Accountability

**Key Message:** Protect the public by enforcing regulations that require prompt action and accountability in social media moderation.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Legal Responsibility:** Government oversight is essential to actually getting through to tech companies as they ground content moderation frameworks in laws and policies.
- b. **Local and National Security:** The government is responsible for protecting the public. This extends to protection from online harms through responsible regulation.
- c. **Public Health:** Social media safety is a public health issue. Unregulated content has long-term impacts on mental health and wellness, which directly relate to physical health problems.



## Media Literacy

**Key Message:** Prepare citizens for a digitally complex world with the skills needed to evaluate information and make informed decisions critically.

### Conceptual Framing:

- a. **Educational Integration:** A well-educated population includes a media-literate population. Integrating media literacy into the academic curriculum to equip future generations with digital skills is necessary to further all aspects of education.
- b. **Civic Participation:** Emphasize the role of media literacy in empowering citizens to critically evaluate information and make informed decisions when participating in democratic or community-centered decision-making.
- c. **Misinformation is Dangerous:** Misinformation and disinformation can have deadly consequences when distributed in dangerous ways. Highlight the importance of media literacy in reducing the spread of these harms and curbing conflict.



## Collaboration to Prevent Online Harms



**Key Message:** Share responsibility and cultivate community trust by engaging stakeholders during policy drafting processes.

**Conceptual Framing:**

- a. **Shared Responsibility:** While government policymakers are primarily responsible for ensuring a safe online environment, it does not have to be their burden alone. Shared responsibility across different sectors strengthens efforts to bolster online safety.
- b. **Community Trust:** Community members want their voices heard by those in power, helping them feel secure in their elected or appointed officials. Collaborative efforts between government officials, community leaders, and experts to tackle online harms show communities that the government is willing to earn and maintain their trust.
- c. **Advocacy Through Shared Priorities:** Often, policymakers' priorities align with advocates fighting for social media rights and safety. Cross-collaboration helps varied stakeholders from different groups find common ground while leveraging the advocacy strengths of each stakeholder group.



## Promoting Positive Social Media Use

**Key Message:** Strengthen community ties and foster civic engagement through positive and respectful social media design and use.

**Conceptual Framing:**

- a. **Productive Civic Engagement:** Stress the role of positive spaces on social media in building community and encouraging civic participation.
- b. **Healthy Online Environments:** Positive behavior online translates to cohesive communities offline. A healthy and inclusive digital environment proliferates in communities impacted by polarization and division offline.
- c. **Policy Support:** Policies can impact social media design. Emphasize the need for supportive policies encouraging and rewarding tech companies and users for positive social media behaviors.

This document results from the Reducing Online Conflict Community (ROCC)'s Good Practices working group, established at a collaborative workshop in Abuja, Nigeria, in February 2024. The crafting of this document by the working group concluded in June 2024.

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### About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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