SHOWING UP FOR DIGITAL PEACE

Five Good Practices for Addressing Social Media Weaponization

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A practical guide for social media platforms, civil society organizations, technologists, digital peacebuilders, and any professional combatting the Weaponization of Social Media on and offline.

About: This document, developed and finalized through deliberative and collaborative processes, provides an overview of five good practices for designing interventions and activities to reduce online conflict. These practices are valuable across professional and community contexts but are most relevant for individuals and organizations that professionally address the Weaponization of Social Media. We are all in this together.

The following practices are not only considered 'good practices' by digital peacebuilding experts but are furthermore minimum standards that should be expected of anyone impacting community members directly or indirectly through their work in and around social media. Gathering as the Reducing Online Conflict Community (ROCC) in Abuja, Nigeria, in February 2024, these themes and concerns were central to discussions surrounding:

- What practices must we start to implement?
- What practices must we continue to implement?
- What practices must we stop implementing altogether?

The practices outlined in this guide have been intentionally developed and finalized through a collaborative process. They reflect the diverse roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in addressing the Weaponization of Social Media. Our aim is that these practices will serve as a compass, guiding professionals and advocates in making social media spaces safer and more socially cohesive.

This document's ' How to Show Up' sections provide practical steps and strategies for implementing the practices in your professional context. They serve as guidance through the process of effectively addressing the Weaponization of Social Media.

Good Practice #1: Prioritize Ongoing and Inclusive Stakeholder Mapping

Effective 'stakeholder engagement and mapping' involves identifying and engaging with all relevant stakeholders, understanding their roles and interests, and fostering inclusive and impactful collaborative efforts to address online conflicts. In the constantly changing world of weaponized information online, stakeholder analysis must be flexible and frequent to understand the ecosystem of actors effectively.

How to Show Up:

- **Identifying Relevant Stakeholders:** Identifying a diverse range of stakeholders who contribute to the online ecosystem's resilience, response, and regulation and may be impacted by or contribute to online conflicts is crucial. This stakeholder analysis includes government agencies, civil society organizations, community leaders, educators, media outlets, tech companies, and individual users. Each stakeholder brings unique perspectives, expertise, and interests, enriching the understanding of the online ecosystem and its conflicts.
- **Involving Stakeholders in Collaborative Efforts:** Once stakeholders are identified, actively involve them in collaborative efforts to address online conflicts. Invite representatives from various sectors to participate in workshops, working groups, task forces, or advisory committees focused on specific conflict prevention, response, or mitigation aspects.
- **Mapping Stakeholders for Inclusivity:** Developing a stakeholder map or matrix is a powerful tool for visualizing the relationships, connections, and dependencies between different stakeholder groups. It helps identify key influencers, decision-makers, connectors, and gatekeepers within each stakeholder category. More importantly, it ensures inclusive representation across diverse communities, regions, and demographics, considering power dynamics, resource availability, and accessibility. This practice promotes a fair and balanced approach to addressing online conflicts.

Good Practice #2: Integrate Psychosocial Support in Your Strategies for Resilience and Community Care

Instances of cyberbullying and Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) have become increasingly prevalent, often leaving victims and survivors vulnerable to psychological distress and emotional harm. Therefore, it is imperative to prioritize providing psychosocial support services tailored to individuals affected by such online conflicts' unique needs.

How to Show Up:

- **Tailored Support Services:** Recognize that victims and survivors of online cyberbullying and gender-based violence may require specialized psychosocial support tailored to their specific experiences and circumstances. This support should encompass counseling, therapy, and emotional assistance to help individuals cope with trauma, stress, and anxiety resulting from online abuse.
- **Accessible Resources:** As practitioners engaging community members on the Weaponization of Social Media, ensure that psychosocial support resources are readily accessible to those in need, whether through online platforms, helplines, or community-based organizations. Collaborative efforts between security agencies, social media monitors, and community members should be made to reduce barriers to access, including stigma, language barriers, and geographical limitations, to ensure inclusivity and reach diverse individuals.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Implement trauma-informed care practices that prioritize the safety, dignity, and autonomy of individuals affected by online violence. This approach involves creating supportive environments that validate survivors' experiences, minimize re-traumatization, and empower individuals to regain a sense of control and agency over their lives.
- **Preventive Strategies:** Integrate psychosocial support into broader preventive strategies to address the root causes of online conflict and promote digital citizenship, empathy, and respectful online behavior. By fostering compassion and solidarity, communities can mitigate the impact of online abuse and create safer and more supportive online environments for all users.
- **Ensure Mental Health Support:** Recognize the mental and emotional toll of moderating online space, mainly when dealing with sensitive or traumatic content. Provide moderators with access to mental health resources, counseling services, peer support networks, and self-care strategies to help them cope with the stress and challenges of their role.

Good Practice #3: Analyze the Relationship Between Security, Social Media, and Your Approach

Individuals facing online threats such as doxxing, cyberbullying, and harassment require both immediate security assistance and advocacy for robust responses from tech platforms. This dual approach protects victims from harm while holding online platforms accountable for fostering safe and inclusive online spaces.

How to Show Up:

- **Immediate Security Assistance:** Establish mechanisms to provide reliable and immediate security support for individuals targeted by online threats, including doxxing (the unauthorized sharing of personal information), cyberbullying, and harassment. This support may involve connecting victims with law enforcement, cybersecurity experts, or specialized support services capable of addressing their specific security needs.
- **Digital Security Measures:** Educate individuals on digital security best practices to mitigate the risk of online threats and safeguard their personal information and online accounts. Interventions may include guidance on setting strong passwords, enabling two-factor authentication, and recognizing and reporting suspicious online activities to relevant authorities.
- **Platform Accountability:** Hold tech platforms accountable for their role in facilitating online abuse and harassment by advocating for prompt and effective responses to reports of harmful content and abusive behavior. This practice includes urging platforms to enforce community guidelines, promptly remove abusive content, and implement robust moderation and filtering mechanisms.

Good Practice #4: Recognize Internal Content Moderators and Third-Party Fact Checkers as Vital Resources and Collaborators

Leveraging third-party fact-checking services and collaborating with those upholding accountability in the social media realm are crucial for combating misinformation and promoting digital safety. These approaches aim to enhance the accuracy of online information and empower users to navigate encrypted social media platforms securely.

How to Show Up:

- **Utilization:** Integrate third-party fact-checking apps and services into encrypted social media platforms like WhatsApp to verify the authenticity of information shared within these networks. Fact-checking services can analyze and debunk false or misleading content, helping users make informed decisions about the information they encounter online.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide training and capacity-building initiatives to equip fact-checkers with the skills and resources necessary to identify and verify misinformation effectively. This may include workshops, online courses, and access to specialized tools and databases for fact-checking investigations.
- **Collaborative Networks:** Foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing networks among fact-checking organizations, media outlets, peacebuilders and mediators, and digital rights advocates to amplify the impact of fact-checking efforts and address emerging challenges in combating misinformation.
- **Moderation Tools:** Provide community moderators with user-friendly moderation tools and platforms to identify, assess, and remove inappropriate content and behaviors. These tools may include content flagging systems, keyword filters, automated moderation algorithms, and reporting mechanisms for users to report violations. Additionally, empower moderators to escalate complex issues to designated support teams or law enforcement agencies when necessary, ensuring swift and appropriate responses to emerging threats and crises.

Good Practice #5: Bolster Community Resilience to Online Harms Through Inclusive and Accessible Data

Across the globe, power dynamics, access to technology, ethnic tensions, and language differences play significant roles in the dynamics of the online ecosystem. Ensuring inclusive access to online conflict data and solutions is paramount for fostering transparency, equity, and effectiveness in addressing social media weaponization.

How to Show Up:

- **Data Accessibility:** Prioritize efforts to make online conflict data accessible to all relevant stakeholders, regardless of their socioeconomic status, geographical location, or linguistic background. Implement mechanisms for collecting, aggregating, and disseminating data on social media usage, hate speech incidents, misinformation trends, and other relevant indicators of online conflict.
- **Knowledge Diffusion:** Facilitate the diffusion of knowledge and information on issues related to social media weaponization through targeted awareness campaigns, capacity-building initiatives, and knowledge-sharing platforms. Develop culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate educational materials, training programs, and public awareness campaigns to raise awareness about the risks and impacts of online conflicts, promote digital literacy, and enable individuals to navigate digital spaces safely and responsibly.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage diverse communities, including marginalized groups, ethnic minorities, rural populations, and linguistic minorities, in dialogue and consultation processes aimed at co-creating solutions to address online conflicts. Foster participatory decision-making processes that prioritize community voices and perspectives, ensuring solutions are responsive to different demographic groups' unique needs, priorities, and concerns.
- **Provide Comprehensive Training:** Offer comprehensive training programs for community moderators to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to moderate online spaces effectively and understand their relationships through accessible data. Ensure moderators are familiar with relevant laws, regulations, and platform guidelines governing online behavior and content moderation practices.

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