

Ending Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting Through Social Media Advocacy

A Beginner's
Toolkit



ASIA
NETWORK TO
END **FGM/C**

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Understanding FGM/C

What is FGM/C?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022), female genital mutilation/cutting refers to “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injuries to the female genital organs.” It is currently estimated that worldwide approximately 200 million women, girls and people with vulvas have been subjected to FGM/C. Within the Southeast Asian context, it is estimated that around 83- 85% of Muslim girls have undergone FGM/C by medical professionals (Equality Now, 2021). Similarly, in Indonesia, nearly half of the girls under the age of 11 have undergone FGM/C (Jha, 2019). While there are national data on the prevalence in FGM/C of specific contexts, the continued practice of FGM/C is grossly underestimated in many countries. Though it is often carried out by traditional practitioners, FGM now seems to a be growing participation of medical practitioners which could be due to the false presumption that the procedure is safer when it is medicalized (WHO, 2022).

The use of the terms “people with vulvas” and “non-men” is to be inclusive to all bodies and genders that are survivors of the practice of female genital mutilation, and to highlight the ways that gender inequality continues to manifest and impact bodies that experience sexism, misogyny and gendered oppression

Why FGM/C Must End!

FGM/C, often incorrectly referred to as “female circumcision” in many contexts, is fundamentally an unethical and often non-consensual procedure that violates the human rights of women, girls, and people with vulvas across the globe. The continued practice of FGM to this day stems from sexist, misogynistic, and patriarchal beliefs of needing to control women’s bodily and sexual autonomy, and is deeply rooted in the gendered oppression of all women, girls, and non-men.

The Purpose of This Toolkit

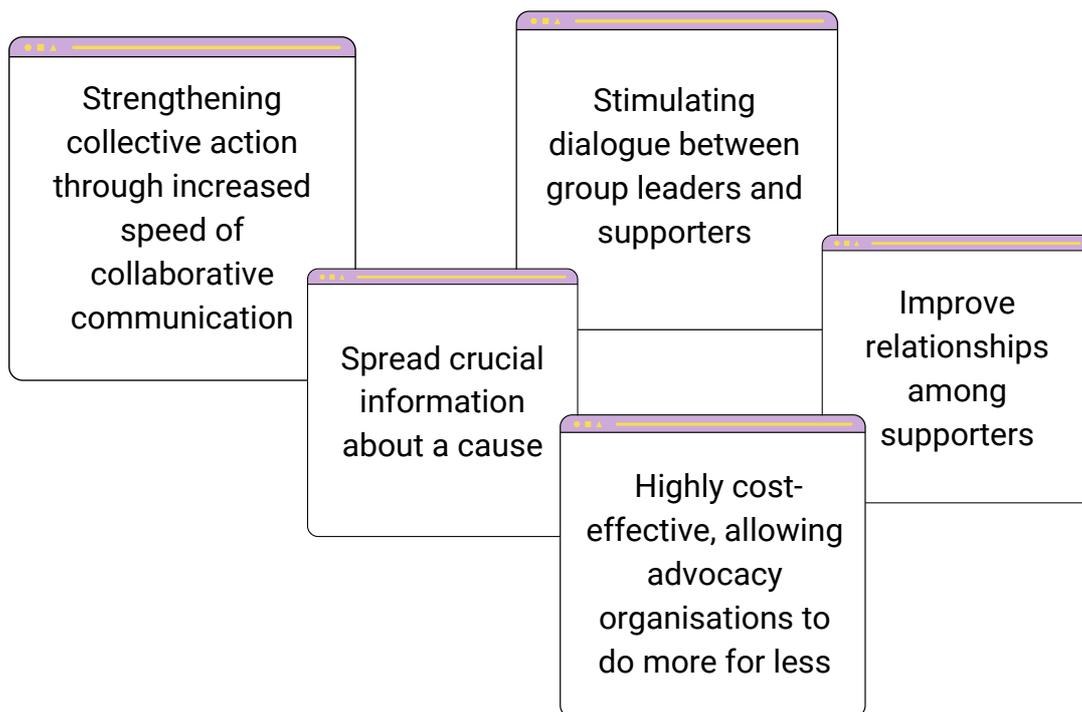
This toolkit acts as a step-by-step guideline for both activists and community leaders interested in the field of awareness-raising and education through social media activism. Given the rise of social media as a platform for social and political change, this toolkit aims to guide its readers through the core aspects of navigating a platform of social media, identifying and growing your audience as well as crafting impactful messages that result in meaningful change. This toolkit is guided by human-rights-centred and gender-sensitive principles to ensure that the communities built online are safe, inclusive, and intersectional.

Social Media for Social Change! How and Why?

How does social media advocacy work?

Digital advocacy is using technology to contact, inform, and mobilise movements around an issue or cause. Social media can increase advocacy efforts and can reach audiences at a larger scale and even faster speed. The purpose of digital advocacy is to encourage action.

Why use social media for advocacy?



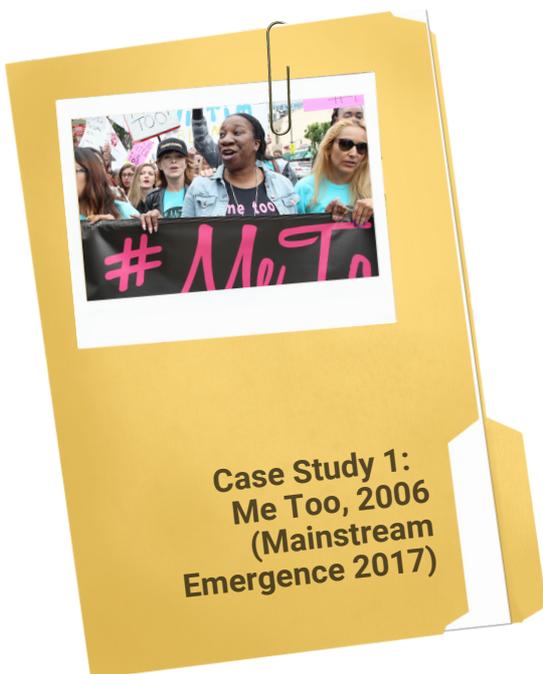
With social media, you're able to share your passions with more people and even discover a community of like-minded people.

Social media content is uncensored and open for multiple-way mass communications, as it is not controlled by mainstream media. This gives a lot of room for publicly calling out injustices, empowering survivors, starting critical conversations, and mobilising initiatives worldwide.



Impact of social media activism

Many on-ground activations have been mobilised by the awareness and conversations created on social media. Some examples include:



Case Study 1: Me Too

- Initiated by Black activist Tarana Burkes. What began as an online source of solidarity for survivors of sexual violence, has since created a very tangible impact on a global scale.
- Large-scale resignations and oustings began to occur worldwide, in both private and public sectors.
- One Korean lawyer's televised interview of public accusation inspired hundreds of others to step forward. This led to the unexpected resignation of several Korean sports figures, literary elites, and even politicians.

- China mandates that employers enforce workplace protections as a part of a civil code reform, while Japan has been prompted to convene public discussions and submit legislation to address workplace harassment.
- A young woman in Egypt fighting back against her attacker, not only initiated a conversation on sexual harassment but she was also one of the first Egyptian women to win a court ruling on sexual harassment charges.
- Any public dialogue in India about sexual assault are typically hushed, yet the 2012 Nirbhaya case sparked nationwide outrage. Despite the normalised high rate of gender-based violence, widespread news of the case gave courage to hundreds of survivors to step forward and report allegations of sexual assault and misconduct.



Case Study 2: Ain Husniza's outcry for safer schools

- 17-year-old student Ain Husniza makes a Tiktok video, calling out an incident where a teacher made a rape joke.
- In response, thousands of students across Malaysia shared their encounters with verbal and physical harassment in school.



**Case Study 2:
Ain Huzniza's
outcry for safer
schools**

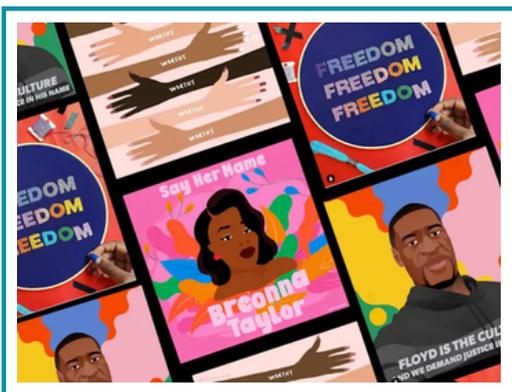
- Despite violent pushback and threats, the gravity of the issue compelled Ain to create the campaign #MakeSchoolASaferPlace, urging authorities to take the safety of students more seriously.
- This campaign has since gained the support of major NGOs, 20 women MPs, PKR, former Deputy PM Anwar Ibrahim, and National Diver Pandalela Rinong.
- From a single Tiktok video, Ain shook up the Malaysian education system, and went from regular student to thought leader.

Black Lives Matter, 2013

- From hashtag to organisation of over 40 chapters across the country, BLM may be the largest movement in US history.
- Apart from sharing information and spreading awareness, BLM has also become a place of resources and community building for the Black community.
- As of June 2020, 4,700 demonstrations over George Floyd's death were held in the US, which averaged 140 a day, and estimated 15-26 million participants in total.
- As the video of George Floyd's brutal murder went viral worldwide, his case had become the first to convict a white Minnesota police officer of murdering a Black person. This was soon followed by the conviction of the 3 other officers who violated Floyd's civil rights.



**Case Study 3:
Black Lives Matter,
2013**



- While none of this will ever bring back Floyd's life nor take away the grief and hurt of family, friends and the global Black community, this case does demonstrate the continued powerful impact of the BLM movement in raising awareness of the lived experience of Black communities in America, as well as across the globe.

Nonexistent Social Barriers

This makes social media an **efficient equaliser**, as you are not required to be connected to people in power to gain mass recognition.

Connectivity

Given the shareability nature of social media formats, your content can also reach outside of your audience. This **creates connection** amongst users who share those lived experiences, which in turn builds community.



Accessibility

Effectively includes people who are disabled, tied to long work hours, and whoever is simply unable to participate physically, etc. Social media functions as a **direct link to the world** that enables lived experiences to be platformed and centred in all movements.

Community

Especially for survivors and other oppressed communities, social media can be a **liberating space** where community can be built and all lived experiences are heard, seen, recognized and platformed.

CHAPTER 2

Social Media Activism 101

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by new things, but it gets much easier once you get the hang of it. This toolkit was designed with you in mind, so we shall get through this together!

Choosing Your Platform!



Target Audience

Youth activist networks
Age group: between 18 - 35

Functionality

- Multiple visual interactive features to engage directly with your audience. Their interaction can be used to compile user-generated content.
- Posts are extremely shareable which increases the likeliness of your content to be seen.



Target Audience

Collaborators from other organisations, potential funders, long-time activists

Age Group: Early thirties and up

Functionality

Group:

Useful for hosting discussions and debates

Organising and mobilising events

Sharing resources and information

Admins can monitor and moderate group interactions, preserving a safe space for group members

Page:

Functions like a mini-site

Suited for networking on a larger scale

Depending on budget, paid content can be promoted to a much bigger audience

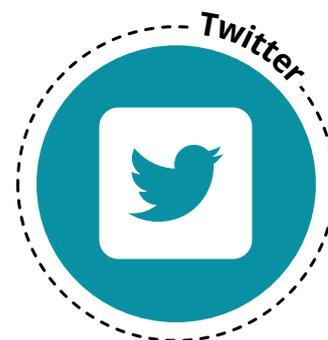
Target People

Younger activists and youth activist networks

(Age group: Between 18 - 35)

Functionality

- Effective for signal boosting and raising immediate awareness for urgent issues
- Stay updated with the latest news on human rights
- Engage directly with policymakers
- Retweet format makes the dissemination of information and resources not only quick but also true to the original source. This decreases the likelihood of missing data in this process of sharing.



Target People

Usually popular among younger audiences, however, activists of all ages and networks can use TikTok to amplify their message and reach young people

Age group: 18 and up!

Functionality

Unique algorithm which allows for numerous organic views, which enables broad audience range and makes it easier for content to go viral

Effective for engaging with and mobilising younger audience in political and social activism





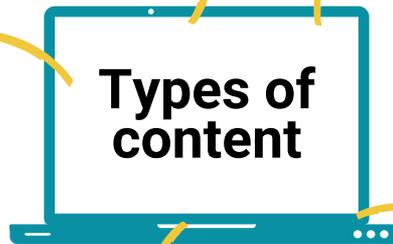
Long-Format Videos

- Great to **dive deep into a certain topic**, when you intend to educate and/or share a tutorial
- Types of videos that work in this format: documentaries, tutorials, and event coverage
- Video can be cut into various smaller content to be used for stories, reels, etc which may reach a wider audience
- Gen Zs make up 40% of consumers, and they spend an average of 3.4 hours a day watching online videos



Short-Format Videos

- Best suited for **fast-paced, entertaining content**
- Some creators have also used this format to discuss elaborate subjects, initiate movements for a good cause, and share their knowledge in various subjects from financial management to world history to healthcare
- The limit in video length pushes creators to make content that is easy to digest and gets the message out within a small period.



Types of content

Text-Based Instagram Carousel Posts

- Texts enable users to **receive the message directly and accurately** without the need for interpretation
- This format is suitable for providing information and educational context that can be quickly shared across socmed



Instagram Stories

- With many interactive features, which not only allows you to create different kinds of content (static images, text, animated content, etc), but it's also a great opportunity to **engage directly** with your audience
- Extremely discoverable, as they are the first thing you see at the top of Instagram when you open the app

Images

- Super effective in grabbing immediate attention, because our brains react quicker to images than any other form of media
- A strong visual has the **potential to tell a story** which may provoke the audience to contemplate, and interact

Understanding Language on Social Media

From terms like *sliding into the DMs* to feeling *FOMO* (*fear of missing out*), social media has clearly shaped and continues to have an impact on the ways we communicate. Not only does language continue to change and evolve on social media, but so does the way we reach and connect with audiences. Communication styles can also change according to the platforms you use and the target demographics you intend to reach.

If you feel like all of this seems a little alien to you, don't worry! Here are some points to help you better understand your communication style!



Identifying the Audience

Before choosing your approach, knowing your audience is key! **Who are you speaking to? What language and lingo is your audience speaking?**

E.g. Are you speaking to university students in their twenties? Or working people in their thirties or forties? Identifying your audience is crucial to your communication strategy

Understanding Tone

What do you want your content to sound like? **Who is the voice behind your approach?** Knowing the tone of your message allows you to more effectively communicate your message!

E.g. For a social media campaign on gender-based violence, the tone of your campaign would be serious and informative due to the nature of the subject. Whereas, the tone for a women's empowerment campaign would probably be more uplifting

Purpose of Approach

What is the main purpose of your communication strategy - **to inform, educate or entertain?** This distinction is important as it is the core of how your content will be shaped! Content designed to educate your audience will look very different from content aimed to entertain them.

The ☆☆ Lingo ☆☆ of Social Media

Let's get down to the nitty gritty - the slang of social media. It is definitely easy to feel left behind and confused by the language and lingo online today, but here's some pointers on how to keep your content current!

What are emojis and how to use them

- Having rose to popularity in the 2010s, emojis are images that allow for another **layer of self-expression** to your social media communication
- Emojis can depict a variety of faces, activities and objects that you can use as **non-verbal cues** as well as make your content more emotive and meaningful
- E.g. If you're telling a joke, adding the 😜 emoji not only makes it clear, it may also add to the humour of your statement.
- Emojis can also be used to articulate emotions and responses in a more concise way. It **add personality, diversifies your tone and most importantly, humanises** your content to help you better engage with wider audiences.



What are hashtags and how to use them

- Initially created as a function on Twitter, hashtags categorise your posts and makes them more discoverable. When you tap or click on a hashtag, other posts with that hashtag will show up.
- Popular hashtags often become trending topics on Twitter.
- Hashtags always start with a # and won't work with punctuation, spaces, or symbols.
- Hashtagged content can only be seen in public accounts.
- Having hashtags in your post is to participate in related conversations, which increases your visibility, engagement, and even new followers.

Hashtags to use



#EndFemaleGenitalMutilation



- Good hashtags are **short and easy to remember**. Make sure they are relevant and specific to your cause.
- Some campaign-based examples include: #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #SayHerName, #OscarsSoWhite, etc
- Consider combining niche and generic hashtags to reach different kinds of audiences. Avoid using too many as it can come off ingenuine, and may instead attract bots.

What is a call-to-action (CTA) and why it's necessary

- Originally a marketing term, a call-to-action (CTA) refers to the step we want our audience to take. A CTA should be plain to see, as a **clear indicator attached to the original message**.
- CTAs are made of **action verbs**, which include but are not limited to:



- Adding a specific CTA to your messaging **closes the loop and upgrades your cause** from a vanity boost, to promoting active participation and taking actionable steps.

The Breakdown: Advocacy Writing! (Originally developed by Vaneesha Krishnasamy)

- **Brainstorm for your cause**

1

- A new angle that can get people curious and talking, which leads to taking action
 - Many outlets may already be parroting similar takes on an issue. A new, refreshing perspective may distinguish your writing from the noise and crowd.

- **Consider a unique narrative**

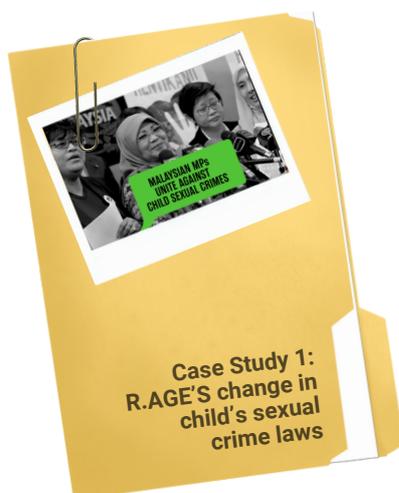
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- **Narrow down the area you want to highlight.** Being spread thin in a broad subject can make it difficult to get your voice heard. Focusing on a specific angle allows you more capacity to bolster your cause.
- **Use positive language that inspires hope.** Anger is crucial to our well-being, and a primordial indicator that shows us what is potentially threatening our survival. The rumination which comes after is just as important to validate and process that anger, but that alone cannot lead to your cause and may even become stagnant. Leading with hope, however, can in turn motivate your audience to take actionable steps for your cause.
- **Adjust your communication to suit the audience you want to reach.** Get to know your audience. Speak their language. Use the approach that will appeal to them most.
- **Indicate a call-to-action (CTA)** to stir up your campaign. Direct your audience to what they can do, so that they are not just consumers of your content, but also direct contributors to your cause.

- **Name your campaign**
- 3**
- Easy to remember and related to the cause
 - Include a tagline that briefly (5-10 words) describes the meaning of the campaign. Consider the emotions you want the audience to feel when reading it.
-

- **Developing the structure**
- 4**
- **Make the story relatable.** How will this issue impact the audience as an individual? People are more likely to engage with content they can relate to.
 - **Know thy platform. Tailor the format of the content to suit where you're posting.** Refer to the 'Choosing Your Platform' segment for guidance.
 - **Capture your audience's attention within the first sentence or first 10-15 seconds** of your content. There's a lot of content, and even shorter attention spans. Your content should be catchy right from the start.
 - **Incorporate quotes from experts and appropriate profiles.** Make sure the quotes are pertinent to the narrative.
 - **Add relevant stats/data/information from studies or journals.** Numbers and graphs are visual descriptions that make it easier for your audience to understand the gravity of the situation.
 - **Maintain objectivity in your campaigning.** Openly favouring only your own views, may project that your intentions don't necessarily reflect the interest of the people you intended to highlight.
 - **Include a CTA** to inform your audience on how they can support you.
-

Potential Impact That You Can Achieve



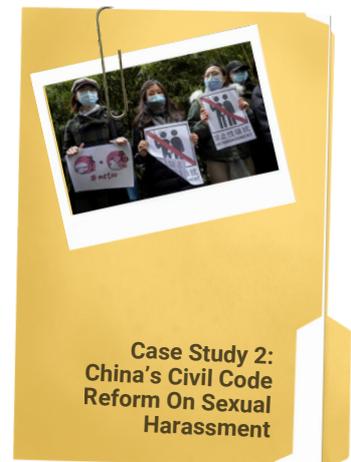
R.AGE'S change in child's sexual crime laws

- Thanks to the efforts of 12 young journalists, the **Sexual Offences Against Children Bill was passed in April 2017**
 - While lawmakers and NGOs worked hard for years to lobby for policies protecting children, R.AGE's initiative with Predator In My Phone finally got the ball rolling
 - Their endeavours include but are not limited to going undercover in sting operations and continuously calling up MPs to get their pledges for the Bill, then finally securing a total of 115 pledges.
- The new law provides **greater protection for minors** where child grooming and production & distribution of child porn are illegal.

- The courage and determination of a tiny team of young people have managed to mobilise an investigation where progress was overdue, and even unified a usually-divided Parliament to centre to work together.

China's Civil Code Reform On Sexual Harassment

- The reformation of China's civil code picked up in 2018, presumably in response to the #MeToo movement.
- Sexual harassment cases were officially given a designated cause of action, meaning these cases are no longer filed under other categories.
- As of 2020, employers are mandated to enforce measures to address sexual harassment.
- These cases would not be limited to only physical contact but also speech, writing, and images.
- Unlike China's other anti-harassment laws and regulations, this particular civil code uses gender-neutral language.



As shown in the aforementioned case studies, one voice can have a domino effect, leading to transformation on a legislative level. Social media has made it so easy to share information so quickly, that your content may be even viewed outside of your usual audience. It does not matter how many followers you have, your story has significance and your voice matters to someone. The smartphones we have today are almost a thousand times more powerful than the computers Ronald Reagan used to lead The First World. So if you're reading this from your smartphone, can you imagine how much power you have in your hands right now!

CHAPTER 3

The Ethics of Social Media!

Building an Inclusive Platform

What does it mean to be "inclusive"?

Social media has the potential to be space for diversity and positive, meaningful change, and a large part of why this is so is because of the growing importance of inclusivity - the conscious practice of providing equal access and opportunity for all bodies and identities, particularly for the most marginalised and disadvantaged in society (Ricee, 2021).

One of the best ways to make your content more inclusive on social media is by making your content more accessible. This means shifting away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach in terms of audience reach and instead, working towards how you can create content for a wide and diverse range of people. This also includes finding ways to dismantle barriers that make your content harder for certain groups, particularly marginalised and oppressed groups, to access (e.g. people with disabilities).

1. Make your text accessible

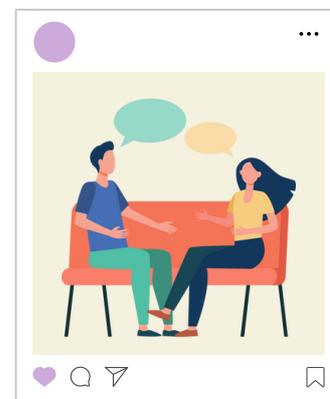
- Write in simple language that is easy to understand and use technical terms only when appropriate and absolutely necessary.
- Make sure your font size and type is clear enough to read from afar (without users needing to zoom in) and try not to use special characters that make it hard for voice over and other assistive tools
- When using hashtags and emojis, make sure to use them only at the end so that the more important information is consumed first
- Limit the length of your text - Concise and straight to the point information can be more helpful than long and descriptive sentences
- Use non-ableist (ableism discriminates against people with disabilities), cultural and gender-sensitive language
- Inclusive language is essential to acknowledge that more than singular identities are being impacted
- Some examples of non-ableist, cultural and gender-sensitive language can include but are not limited to:

If talking about this	Replace this	With this
<p>Abortion & Female* Reproductive Health and Rights</p> <p>*Female in this context refers exclusively to the sex of people with vulvas, and not gender.</p>	Women	<p>People with Uteruses</p> <p>Women are not the only identities who may have a uterus. Hence people who aren't women also have abortions.</p>
Indigenous Peoples Rights	<p>"American Indian"</p> <p>"Aboriginal"</p>	<p>Native or Indigenous People</p> <p>Depending on context, it is also important to recognize the different tribes within Indigenous communities when speaking about them</p>
Aggressive hater in your comments and/or DMs	<p>"Psycho"</p> <p>"R*tarded"</p>	<p>Ignorant, dense, bizarre, outrageous, troll, incel</p>

- For more examples, you may look up the following:
 - Gender-Sensitive Language @ NuWrite, Northwestern University
 - Types of Ableist Language and What to Say Instead by Ariane Resnick, CNC @ Verywell Mind

2. Provide image/video captions and descriptions

- **Provide descriptive captions and alternative texts** to allow people to visualise images when they cannot see them - this includes even the usage of emojis and GIFs
- E.g. If you post an infographic with text, you should add the text of the infographic in your description
- **Using closed captions in videos** is crucial for deaf people and people with hearing impairments, and they can also enhance the viewing experience



3. Make space for discussion and criticism

- An important aspect of an inclusive platform is **making sure that there is room for discussion, feedback and yes, criticism!**
- It is always great when content you create generates discussion, but it is important to always **highlight and centre the most invisibilized of voices** in these discussions
- Make sure to always **be open to feedback!** Know that there is always more to learn from others
- It can be incredibly daunting to receive criticism, and it is valid to feel overwhelmed when that happens! Take some time to research and reflect before responding, and always ensure to be respectful when you do!

What is Social Media Etiquette?

While there aren't really specific dos and don'ts to navigating social media, these are some of the general dos and don'ts that help make online spaces safer and more respectful in our interactions and approaches!

So, what are some of the dos and don'ts of social media?

Dos	Don'ts
<p>Always credit your sources. If your content has information from someone's post, tweet, stories, etc, you must cite them. This applies as well when you're reposting them. Also, make sure that they are reliable sources.</p>	<p>Don't spam. Seriously. We get it. You want to build an audience. But when have you ever felt excited receiving a generic copy-pasted message? This includes hashtags. Too many is a turn-off and may attract bots instead.</p>

Dos	Don'ts
<p>Fact check. Blindly reposting can contribute to oversharing of misleading information. This can be easily avoided by a quick Google search.</p>	<p>Avoid incorrect grammar and spelling as much as possible. These mistakes may substantially reduce your content's credibility.</p>
<p>Amplify the voices of marginalised creators. When sharing content, seek out who can best represent the cause at hand i.e. Black creators for BLM rather than white and non-black politicians & influencers.</p>	<p>Refrain from giving opinions on things you don't understand. One news article is not adequate for an informed opinion. It's okay to not know everything. But it can be dangerous to give input without nuanced context, especially if you already have a large following.</p>
<p>Prioritise facts over opinions to educate. Incorporate statistics and fact-based information in your content. This provides more substance and can help others understand the subject better.</p>	<p>Civil discourse is great for engagements, but avoid engaging in heated arguments, as this may take the attention away from the issue at hand. As soon as a conversation starts getting aggressive, keep a levelled head and shut it down.</p>
<p>Include a call-to-action in your post. Social media is flooded with plentiful different opinions and news reporting on the issue. What helps is directing your audience to an actionable step i.e. donation & petition link, politicians' contacts, rally information, etc.</p>	<p>Don't share/repost empty promises or fear monger with baseless statements i.e. "1 Share = 1 tree is planted" or "THE WORLD IS DYING". Unless there is a call-to-action and an execution plan that is plain for all to see, shallow strategies like these are performative and do nothing for the cause.</p>
<p>Interact with your audience! It's called social media for a reason. Your content should make your audience feel like they want to share their insight with you. You don't have to do all the talking. Make them reflect. When they leave a comment and/or ask questions, respond! Keeping your audience engaged means keeping their attention on the activism you're campaigning for.</p>	<p>You shouldn't be on social media 24/7. Burnouts can occur, and empathy fatigue is very real. There's only so much the human mind can take, and there's a danger of becoming numb toward the causes that need your attention. To be in it for the long run, we need to be mindful of how we are helping others and also taking care of ourselves. Make sure you take breaks, eat properly, get rest, and spend time with your loved ones.</p>

Always remember, consent is key!

One of the most important aspects to take note of is **understanding consent**, particularly how to approach the practice of informed consent online!

So, much like everywhere else, consent in online spaces and communities is about decision, permission and choice! This means that **informed consent needs to be an enthusiastic agreement to participate** in something only when someone is fully aware of the situation and what they are agreeing to without coercion, manipulation or force.

This also involves taking into consideration things like power dynamics as well as one's positionality and how that can create power imbalances, even in situations where both parties agree to the situation. The practice of informed consent also approaches consent as something that **can be constantly renegotiated and withdrawn at any point in time.**

What are some ways you can practise informed consent online?

- **Asking before resharing content** from others (e.g. Instagram stories or photos)
- **Getting the consent of people you want to include** and tag people in your content
- **Asking before taking photos and videos** that include people
- **Checking in before forwarding** your private conversations with others
- **Asking whether including the personal details** of others in your content is okay
- **Asserting your boundaries** when you are asked to be included on someone else's online content
- **Making sure you feel comfortable** with and consent to giving out your personal information to others
- **Don't pester or badger people into agreeing** to a situation they may not be comfortable with (this would also be coercion)
- **Do not move forward with posting content** like photos/videos unless the people included are completely sure
- **Making sure to take down posts that include people** (despite the discomfort you may feel) when they communicate that they no longer feel comfortable with the content being up
- **DO NOT take pictures or videos of children** (people under the age of 18 do not have the legal capacity to consent, particularly without adult supervision and the consent of their legal guardian)

Why Intersectionality Matters!

You may have heard of or have seen the term **intersectionality** in today's buzzwords of social media. But what does it mean? What do people mean when they talk about being **intersectional**? And why does it matter?

Well, the term itself refers to Kimberle Crenshaw's **theory of intersectionality**, which is a Black feminist theory founded on the lived experiences of racial and gendered oppression of Black women in America. Crenshaw's theory talks about how these lived experiences of particularly race and gender are not separate and for Black women and other women of colour, intersect and overlap. Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality asks us to be critical of **how the world operates differently for different bodies**.

So, intersectionality describes how **all forms of oppression and inequality are linked** - we cannot look at gender, sexuality and race as separate lived experiences. Intersectionality allows us to better understand how systems of power work to marginalise and oppress communities differently, and that is why it is important that we are intersectional in our activism and that we centre the voices of the most marginal!

<p>Acknowledge the ways that you are privileged because of the ways that you benefit from systems of power! It is not always going to be easy to do and you will not always be comfortable and that's valid, but remember that it is also part and parcel of the work of learning and unlearning</p>	<p>Listen to the voices and perspectives of the most marginal and learn from their experiences, but also know that it is not the responsibility of marginalised and oppressed communities to educate you</p>	<p>Do your own research! Your learning should not be dependent on the emotional labour of bodies more marginal than you, and it is important that you are responsible for your own learning</p>
<p>Often you may need to ask yourself if you are the right person to take up space or speak on certain issues, and it is important to always remember not to speak over and speak for communities more marginalised than you</p>	<p>So, what can you do?</p> <p>Accept that you, like everyone else, will never be completely unproblematic - you will make mistakes, but see them as opportunities to learn and lessons that you needed to know better than you did before</p>	<p>Make sure your approach to intersectional activism is survivor-centred - which prioritises the rights, needs and wishes of survivors. This also means centering the experiences of survivors and ensuring that your content ensures the dignity of survivors and does not further stigmatise, discriminate and cause further harm, such as victim-blaming and perpetuating rape culture.</p>

CHAPTER 4

Mitigating Risk and Harm Online

Crisis Management

Dealing with Hate Online: Taking the Necessary Steps

Allow yourself to feel upset and take a breather

- Getting upset after receiving unpleasant comments and DMs is so human and valid. Allow yourself to be angry, to feel hurt.
- Talk to someone who makes you feel safe, be it an individual or community.
- Give yourself **time to recollect your composure** before deciding how to respond.



Hater or critic?

- Not all disagreements come from a place of hate.
- **Genuine criticism is crucial in bettering ourselves**, especially when we're in spaces to advocate for important causes.
- Disclaimer: **Oppressed communities whom you might be supporting, do not owe you niceness** when they criticise your takes. Their humanity should be prioritised over your discomfort. **Allyship is not conditional, and doing the good work does not make you immune to criticism**. We all can and should do better!
- **Criticism is rarely about you**, and more so about how to best represent the cause, and properly advocate for impacted communities.



Pity the haters and disengage

- In most cases, **hateful messages are also very rarely about you** and may come from ignorance, false assumptions, misinterpretations, and even projected envy.
- No genuinely happy person would ever go out of their way to leave hateful comments and messages.
- **Empathising without agreeing** may help alleviate some of the distress you're enduring.
- When attacks become personal and abusive (i.e. body shaming, derogatory slurs, death threats, etc) proceed to **report and block**, because these situations don't deserve your energy.
- **Shift focus** to where you can make the most difference, and to people who could use more urgent assistance.



Strategies and Approaches to Self-Protection

When hate or malicious intent is left unchecked online, it makes cyberspaces unsafe for those of us who exist there. This is known as online harassment, and is usually inflicted upon a victim by perpetrators who find pleasure in causing distress, more often than not in an undetectable manner because of the anonymity that cyberspaces provide. Online harassment can look like:

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is defined as sending, uploading, or spreading nasty, harmful, false, or derogatory content about another person. It can also involve disclosing sensitive or private information about another individual in a way that causes embarrassment or humiliation. It can also veer into illegal or criminal action.



Threats to harm

A clear indication that this person wants harm you. The harm intended is usually physical, but it can also be a threat to your mental and emotional safety as well. This includes blackmail and threats towards your organisations and/or loved ones or anyone associated to you, to get to you.

Doxxing

Doxxing is a term coined in the 1990's, combining the word 'docs' from Words Document and 'dox', which means the collection of someone's personal information or documents and publishing it online - an invasion of privacy, typically with malicious intent.



What to do when you've identified the harassment:

Cyberbullying

DON'T:

- Don't respond immediately
- Avoid retaliating with your own nasty comments
- Stop checking and rereading offensive posts frequently
- Consider disengaging completely

DO:

- Put your phone down and take a tech break
- Talk to people you trust
- Follow up when calmer, use neutral language
- Take screenshots for evidence
- Report and block

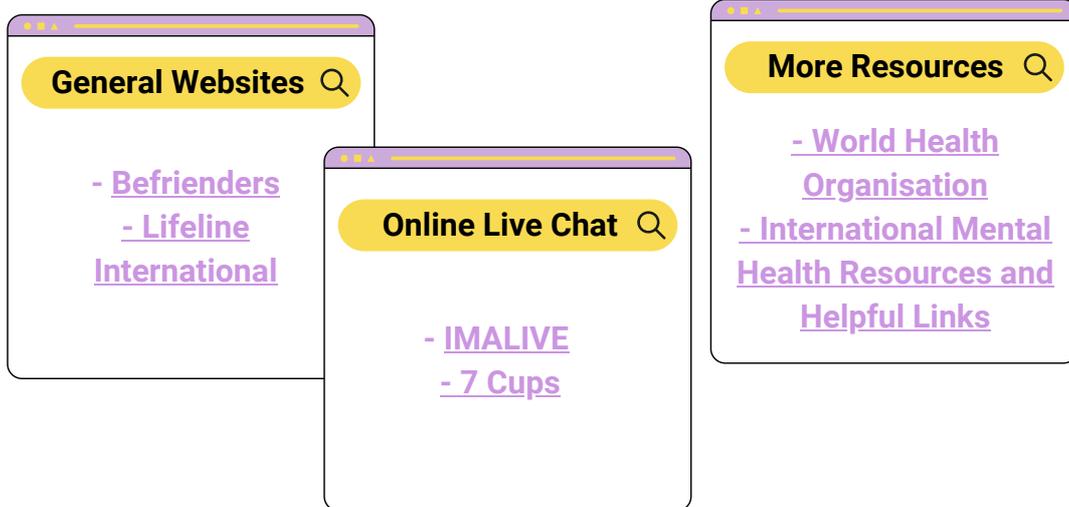
Threats & Doxxing

- **Document all evidence:** text screenshots, record voice notes, keep letters, save emails.
- **Notify the people you trust** (friends, allies, community) about the threat. Assess the threat with them. Be clear about the type of support you seek.
- **Reinforce your cybersecurity** and set firm boundaries between online and personal presence.
- **Block the account and report** to appropriate social media channels.
- Especially if you have been doxxed and your assessment tells you that you might be under a real threat: **Trust your gut. Consider relocating** to a place where you know you are physically safe, with trusted people.
- **Report to law enforcement.** They may not be equipped to take action, but it creates a record that may be useful down the road.



Remember this is NOT your fault
This was an act of violence committed against you. Consider engaging with a mental health professional to help with grounding. Spend time with loved ones. Ask them for help with self-care.

Resources in Times of Crisis!



Mitigating Strategies

Receiving Mis-flags: What Can I Do About It?

So your posts, stories or other content online are being reported, even though it isn't content that is harmful in any way. Unfortunately, this is quite common for many content creators, and especially so for marginalised creators. Challenging oppressive systems will not always be easy to do, online or offline, and sometimes you may feel defeated. Know that you are not alone in this feeling, and that there are ways you can navigate these situations.

Here are some steps you can take if your account receive a mis-flag:

- 1** Check the status of your account and which of your posts and other content was reported and appeal to have these reports reviewed
- 2** Review your followers if you have a potential suspect of who may be reporting your content online and report their account (only when you are sure)
- 3** While waiting for the appeal, you can also contact the platform you are using and mention that you have been receiving false reports
- 4** To ensure your safety while waiting, particularly on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, make your platform a private space for some time
- 5** In the case of your account potentially being taken down, make sure to have a back-up account that you can re-direct followers to
- 6** Do not be discouraged! Sometimes it can definitely feel like a major setback but remind yourself that the work you do is important and necessary, and that you deserve to take up space on these platforms!

As mentioned earlier in this toolkit, we all make mistakes. Maybe you posted something inappropriate or unintentionally caused harm. Maybe you have unknowingly platformed a person who has harmed others. While it is important to remember that you shouldn't punish yourself for what you didn't know when you didn't have the information, it is nonetheless important to own up and take accountability. But what does it mean to actually take accountability? Is saying "I'm sorry" enough? How long should you wait before apologising?

So you made a mistake. How do you make amends?

Here are some things to take into consideration when issuing a public apology and taking accountability:

Firstly and most importantly, **take responsibility and own up to your mistakes!** Knowing and accepting that you have made a mistake is not a weakness, and usually defensiveness makes apologies less genuine

Ideally, it is better to **issue your statement of apology** as soon as possible after realising the mistake you've made - this demonstrates willingness to make amends

Make sure to **be specific in your accountability** and do not just issue a general apology - really apologise for your specific actions!

It is okay to be transparent about coming from a place of ignorance or lack of awareness - transparency and vulnerability are key

If possible, **offer some form of reparations or repair for the harm caused** (e.g. if a specific community was harmed by your actions, sometimes an apology is simply not enough - take the time to listen to the demands of the communities that have been harmed)

Do not expect or demand to be forgiven - this is solely dependant on the people who have been harmed in the situation, but you can forgive yourself while also being remorseful for your actions

Ensure and **make it known that your actions will not be repeated**, and that you will make the effort to learn and grow from them!

Here's an example!

Scenario:

You are organising a social media campaign for sexual assault awareness month to highlight the issue of female genital mutilation as a form of sexual and gender-based violence. You collaborate with a known influencer who advocates for victims and survivors of FGM. Months later, you release your campaign on social media, but it receives backlash. Many criticise you working with someone who is now outed as an abuser. Therefore, you must take accountability and apologise for this situation that has caused harm, even though you did not intend for it. In digital spaces, this means issuing an apology statement.

Sample Template:

*"Hello everyone, it has come to our attention that the representative spokesperson of our recent campaign has been outed for abuse. We are deeply remorseful, given that we did not know about the allegations against them. **This does not excuse our actions and we take full accountability for both our ignorance and our actions** in this situation that **has undeniably caused harm**, particularly to survivors. There are no words to describe the **deep regret** of having unintentionally platformed an abuser, especially on a month and for a campaign dedicated to raising awareness on sexual and gender-based violence.*

We will always stand in solidarity with victims and survivors and we ensure that this will never happen again moving forward. We are taking the necessary steps to de-platform, report and flag the alleged abuser.

*All posts and content with the accused have been removed, and while we understand this cannot take away the harm caused, **we hope to continue the conversation of the campaign. We will be working alongside other organisations to spotlight more victims, survivors and activism groups dedicated to ending all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.***

*Acknowledging that it is never the labour or responsibility of survivors to keep organisations in check, **we thank you for holding us accountable in spite of it, helping us keep our spaces safe as we continue to work to do and be better for the communities we seek to aid and empower.***

Here is a list of resources for victims of sexual and gender-based violence:..."

While this is just an example of an apology statement for one potential scenario or hypothetical situation, it is important to remember that the key aspects to making genuine apologies are **full transparency, honesty and taking complete responsibility!**

Navigating Controversial Topics

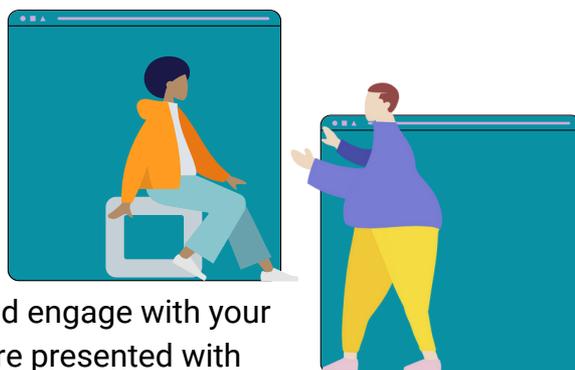
Sometimes, the word “controversial” is enough to deter people from speaking up about a variety of different issues. Take issues such as legalizing abortion or LGBTQ rights for example! While it is deeply unfortunate that such necessary causes remain controversial to this day across the globe, sometimes shying away from subject matters that are deemed as “controversial” and “risky” means that we are often not having honest and important discussions on things that matter. Ignorance is not always bliss, especially for those who cannot ignore their own lived experiences.

So, how do you proceed to discuss these issues online?

1. **Emphasise factual information.** This makes it easier for audiences to understand, digest and engage with your campaign or cause particularly because they are presented with information and data that is reliable, sourced, credited and unbiased.

2. Engage in **honest and respectful discussion.** Avoid using language that is sarcastic, condescending and rudely critical of the opposing view or party you're holding accountable.

3. Approach all discussions with **empathy and compassion.** This will not always be easy, especially when dealing with very strong and even harmful beliefs and perspectives, but it is important to try to **appeal to the empathy of your audiences.**



Moving Forward From Here

Moving forward, irrespective of being cyberbullied and doxxed or called out on social media, can be difficult. Rebuilding your confidence in the effectiveness and impact of your platform may take time, and it is important to allow yourself that time as well! Remember that while social media is an important platform, it is not something that defines you. You are also allowed to exist in that space and take up space in all of your complexity.

Remember to take mental health breaks and detach from social media every once in a while. Remind yourself that this does not make you any less committed to your activism online...

So, keep up the incredible work!

And if you ever feel lost, unsure or confused, know that you can always refer back to this toolkit for social media activism for beginners.



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