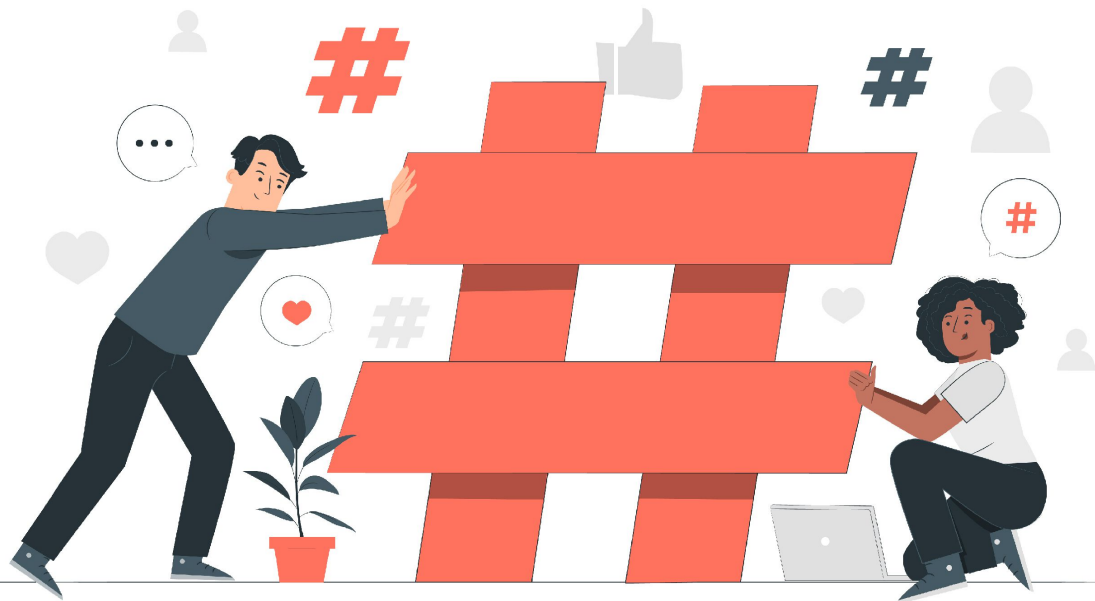


# GUIDE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS TO COMBAT HATE



This Guide on how to design effective social media campaigns to combat hate is aimed at civil society activists and organisations in Sri Lanka. We believe it can be a useful resource for members of local communities that wish to campaign against hate on social media platforms. The main goal of the Guide is to promote inclusion, diversity and public good by featuring the principles for countering hate speech through social media campaigns. The Guide is a result of workshops and bootcamps held during 2022 and 2023 as part of the Get the Trolls Out project in Sri Lanka implemented by Media Diversity Institute and Hashtag Generation, supported by the EU Delegation in Colombo.

Our work throughout the Get the Trolls Out project, and while producing the Guide, seeks to empower individuals and organisations in Sri Lanka to proactively combat hate, champion diversity, and reclaim online spaces for constructive dialogue and positive change.

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# COUNTERING HATE ONLINE



In today's interconnected world, the rise of hate speech poses a formidable threat to the fabric of our societies. This is especially true for Sri Lanka that has gone through several cycles of violence, the second longest civil war and in which we witness the continuous erosion of civic spaces. Our recent experiences reveal a bitter reality of hate speech, fuelled by prejudice and discrimination, permeating online platforms, perpetuating harmful stereotypes about “the other” and fostering divisions among communities. The urgency to counteract hate has never been more critical, as it corrodes the foundations of inclusivity and undermines the very essence of diverse and harmonious coexistence.

As we navigate the digital age, countering hatespeech is not just a moral imperative. It is an essential step towards fostering understanding, safeguarding marginalised communities, and preserving the values of tolerance and acceptance.

Although in a country like Sri Lanka diversity should be a strength, bad faith actors throughout history have used it to perpetuate bias and discrimination. In such context, it has become more crucial than ever to:

- Confront prejudice
- Give voice to minorities and vulnerable groups
- Overcome simplification and generalised narratives used when describing various minority groups
- Remember that minorities are not monoliths
- Encourage the careful use of words and images online

In an attempt to overcome this challenge, we believe deconstructing stereotypes and countering hate are two crucial steps. Such actions should not only occur at the top level, but it should be democratised across every layer of society.

# WHAT IS HATE SPEECH?



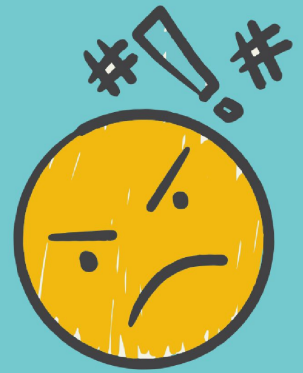
“The terms ‘hatred’ and ‘hostility’ refer to intense and irrational emotions of opprobrium, enmity and detestation towards the target group”



“There is one common thread among definitions of hate speech, which is that it vilifies a person or group of people because they belong to a group or share an identity of some kind. Therefore it’s not hate speech to say ‘I hate you’ without referring to a group.”



“Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”



## CHALLENGES

As noted by scholar Susan Benesch and the Dangerous Speech Project, hate speech can be “vague, broad, and in practice, everyone defines it differently”. A few questions to keep in mind when trying to identify hate speech are:



How intense and sustained must speech be to be identified as hatred?



Who feels the hate in hate speech? The speaker, the target of speech, others exposed to the speech, all of them?



What are the social norms and contexts (whether social, political, cultural) that inform how hate is expressed and perceived?

# IDENTIFYING HATE SPEECH



There is no single or singular definition of hate speech and what constitutes “hate” can be both universal and extremely context specific. With this in mind, we share a few frameworks and definitions that explore the parameters and challenges of hate speech.

## THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF HARMFUL SPEECH

Developed by Gehan Gunatilleke, a lawyer and scholar from Sri Lanka, the concentric circles of harmful speech is a model that is helpful in identifying where hate speech is located within various kinds of harmful speech. Below is an adaptation of it for the purposes of this toolkit.

### EXAMPLES

Speech that defames, stereotypes, or insults a person

Speech that conveys hatred towards a particular group

Speech that incites others to commit acts of hatred against a particular group

Speech that specifically incites others to commit acts of violence

HARMFUL SPEECH

HATE SPEECH

INCITEMENT

INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE

### POSSIBLE RESPONSES BY THE STATE AND OTHER ACTORS

'Providing remedies'  
E.g. civil damages for defamation, reporting mechanisms on platforms

'Countering'  
E.g. creating and sharing counter-messaging

'Regulating'  
E.g. impose civil sanctions (dismissal, revoking licenses)

'Prohibiting'  
E.g. the state may investigate prosecute and punish

As shown in the above figure, the types of harmful speech can be differentiated according to the intensity of harm caused by the speech. Similarly, the intensity of the responses should correspond to the intensity of the harm. This model identifies hate speech as “speech that conveys hatred towards a particular group” and it is important to unpack what “hatred” may entail. Below are some definitions that could be helpful.

“Public speech that **expresses hate** or **encourages violence** towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.”

- **Cambridge Dictionary**

Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that **attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language** with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour descent, gender or other identity factor.

- **United Nations**

“All forms of expression which **spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance**, including: **intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.**”

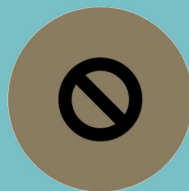
- **The European Court of Human Rights**

When countering hate speech online, these are some of the precautions that you can take.

## WHEN RESPONDING TO HATE SPEECH...



**CHOOSE YOUR WORDS**



**DON'T GET PERSONAL**



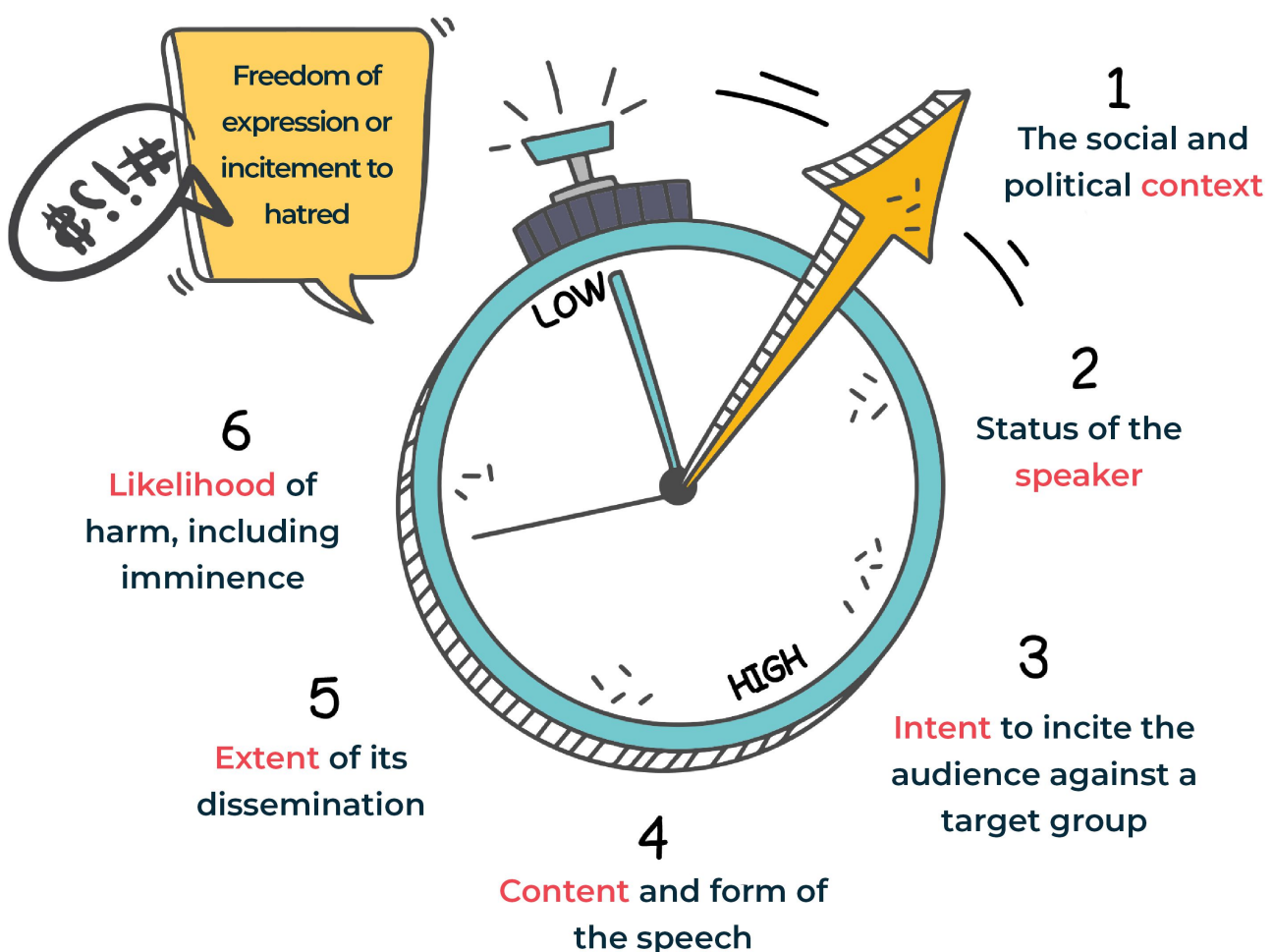
**THINK ABOUT YOUR TONE**

But it is even more crucial to do the following to discern the response to the particular form of hate speech.

The Rabat Plan of Action introduces a six-part threshold test which is also useful in making a distinction between freedom of expression and incitement to hatred which is as follows:

1. Social and political **context**
2. Status of the **speaker**
3. **Intent** to incite the audience against a target group
4. **Content** and form of the speech
5. **Extent** of its dissemination
6. **Likelihood** of harm, including imminence

It is particularly important to be reflexive in how we identify and address hate speech when a country is in a democratic deficit. As illustrated by recent examples, including in Sri Lanka, the legal framework that is applicable to hate speech can often be used to criminalise legitimate speech and to silence and shut down dissent including by journalists, activists, cartoonists, bloggers, writers, artists, members of ethnic minorities, etc.



As hate speech is on the rise especially in the online space, there is an urgency to find different and effective ways to combat it. One such crucial intervention is formulating campaigns that could counter hate.



# MAIN PRINCIPLES OF CAMPAIGNING ONLINE 2

Planning, designing and implementing a media campaign calls for a specific use of language, visual expression and an upgrade of the skills, tools and techniques of the digital age. To run a successful media campaign, you not only need to be comfortable with posting on social media and producing videos and infographics, but you also have to know and understand the media landscape and context of a community you wish to campaign for.

## PREPARATION IS THE KEY.



Get informed about past and current media campaigns, as well as on public opinion on the issue(s) you want to campaign for. Knowing how the media report on a certain issue as well as what the population thinks about that issue, can help you draft the approach to be used in your campaign. For instance, a Sri Lankan activist prepared an online campaign #AccessForAll featuring an important data on places and services not available for persons with disabilities. These figures have a powerful effect and lead towards more successful social media campaigns.

## DEFINE THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES.

Decide what you want to achieve. Know what result you want to get from the campaign. Is your objective sensible, rational, and feasible? The advice is to focus on smaller, more concrete, and precise objectives such as having a few people attending a meeting on drug abuse rather than having the huge and



complex problem of addiction in a community solved. For example, if you want to raise awareness about the problem of human trafficking from Sri Lanka, the suggestion is to create a campaign with a simple goal of informing and getting social media users engaged about the topic, rather than having an objective of a country's policy on human trafficking changed.

## IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE.



Identify target audience and people you want to create your campaign for. Identifying your target audience is crucial. Ask yourself to whom do you want to send the message of your campaign. Is it a specific social group, such as young people, people with disabilities? Or you are aiming your message at politicians, national legislators? Or will your campaign give the best results if you target ethnic and religious leaders? Once you know who is your target audience, the message of your campaign and your choice of social media platforms will be easy to determine.

## IDENTIFY THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

Identify the social media platforms that are the most suitable for your campaign. Once you have determined who your audience is, the next step is to identify what social media platforms they use and where your campaign can have the biggest impact. Not all social media platforms should be used because they gather different type of users. For instance, Facebook and TikTok have different audience in terms of age and habits.



## DEVELOP YOUR MAIN MESSAGE.



One of the most important elements of your media campaign should be your media message(s). The media messages should be tailored to suit and serve the target audience of your campaign. There is a big chance that your media message will resonate with more people if it reflects universal values such as human rights, freedom of speech, diversity and inclusion, climate change awareness.

The media message has to be clear, short, and direct. It is permitted to use humour or humorous messages, but avoid cuteness or frivolity that can downplay the seriousness of the issue you are campaigning for.

Numbers and statistics have to be accurate, based on research and studies carried out by official or reliable non-governmental institutions. In other words, if you use numbers and statistics in the message of your campaign, they should not be susceptible to any misinterpretation.

## THE LANGUAGE USED ON SOCIAL MEDIA MUST BE SIMPLE AND SHORT.

The audience you are targeting with your campaign needs to understand and react to it. Therefore, simple and precise language is preferable. Avoid long sentences and text. Avoid formal expressions. Imagine that you speak rather than write to your audience on social media.

## VISUALS WORK BETTER THAN WORDS.

Therefore, we advise using more visual content such as short videos, infographics, memes.



## INTERACTIVITY.

Interactivity is a very important element in digital communications. A successful social media campaign would feature an element of exchange with the audience through comments, links and reactions.



## COMBINE DIGITAL AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA CHANNELS.

One of the biggest takeaways from the Get the Trolls Out bootcamps held in July 2023 in Sri Lanka was the need to get back in touch with the people on the ground. Social media campaigns are designed for an online audience and speak to them in a specific way - usually in direct, concise and mostly visual language. But when campaigning for the inclusion of marginalised groups or against hate speech allows getting back to the local communities themselves and discussing those issues with them, our suggestion is to do so. Gathering local communities and activists in the panels, roundtables or exhibitions could be seen as a continuation of your social media campaigns in an offline world.



# SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

# 3































Although Sri Lanka had been in discussion about connecting computers and creating networks since the 1980s, it was fully embraced only in 1995. Yet, the first email connection in Sri Lanka was established in 1989 using a dial-up modem.

The pioneer of Sri Lankan internet was LEARN – Lanka Experimental Academic and Research Network. This was established mostly for academics in universities in Sri Lanka to connect with those in the US. The first email was through this network and is called LEARNmail. The internet hub operated out of the University of Moratuwa. In making LEARNmail, Sri Lanka managed to obtain the domain .lk, which led to the formation of LK Domain Registry. In all this, one person, Professor Abhaya Induruwa of the University of Moratuwa stands out. He worked with the University Grants Commission to find the money for the connections, worked with universities to establish IP connections, and worked with Sri Lanka Telecom to bring it all together. Therefore, he is considered the father of the internet in Sri Lanka. As big and important the internet has been, one part has taken the world by storm: social media.





As we noted before, however, social media is not a singular entity. There are different types of websites, platforms, and applications that come together to make the massive entity of social media. The following list features some of the types of social media platforms and websites. It is important to remember, however, that this is not an exhaustive list; nor is it fixed. Social media platforms evolve, absorb others, and change shape to fit the current trends.

| Social Networks   | Instant Messaging Platforms   | Media Sharing Networks  |
|---|---|---|
|      |       |      |
| Discussion Forums   | Bookmarking & Content Curation  | Consumer Review Networks  |
|     |     |     |
| Blogging and Publishing Networks  | Social Shopping Networks  | Dating Networks   |
|     |       |      |



# Every generation has their favorites

% of social media users outside of China who say the following are their favorite

## Gen Z (aged 16-26)

|           | %  |
|-----------|----|
| Instagram | 30 |
| TikTok    | 13 |
| Facebook  | 12 |
| Twitter   | 5  |
| Snapchat  | 4  |

## Millennials (aged 27-40)

|           |    |
|-----------|----|
| Facebook  | 22 |
| Instagram | 21 |
| TikTok    | 9  |
| Twitter   | 4  |
| LINE      | 2  |

## Gen X (aged 41-59)

|           |    |
|-----------|----|
| Facebook  | 24 |
| Instagram | 14 |
| TikTok    | 6  |
| Twitter   | 4  |
| LINE      | 3  |

## Baby boomers (aged 60-64)

|           |    |
|-----------|----|
| Facebook  | 27 |
| Instagram | 8  |
| LINE      | 4  |
| Twitter   | 4  |
| TikTok    | 4  |

? Which of these would you say is your favorite?

GWI Core Q1 2023 202,709 social media users outside of China aged 16-64





# GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES



TikTok, the social network for sharing user-generated videos, was a breakout star six years ago, and it has only ballooned in popularity and usage since then. The platform currently boasts over 1 billion monthly active users and has become synonymous with dance challenge moves, cooking hacks, and Gen Z. But for nonprofits, TikTok presents a unique opportunity to tell stories, connect with new audiences, and even promote fundraising. If you need even more convincing, here are a few reasons why starting a TikTok account for your nonprofit is a no-brainer:

- **Videos less than 15 seconds have a higher engagement rate than long-form media.** Attention spans are short right now, and TikTok capitalises on that. You can, too.
- **TikToks are easily shareable.** The unique ability of TikToks to go viral and impact millions in the span of a few days holds great potential for cultural influence. So why not leverage it to raise awareness for your cause?
- **It's cost-effective.** TikToks are easy and quick to make and require little to no additional resources.

Here are few examples how TikTok is used as a tool for social campaigning and for social good.



**SCAN ME!**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

# 5

Individual campaigners are driven by the belief that they can make a difference in the world. To truly create an impact, however, telling a compelling story is key. Start with a narrative that pulls at the heartstrings of your audience, emphasizing a problem and its impact on individuals to convey the significance of your cause.



## 1. Compelling Visuals:

- Leverage visuals, such as infographics and videos, to enhance engagement.
- Create shareable content that is both interesting and relevant to your cause.
- Share visuals on social media platforms to broaden your reach.

## 2. Personal Connection:

- Highlight the human side of your cause to help your audience connect emotionally.
- Share stories of individuals affected and use real-life examples for relatability.
- Ensure authenticity and relevance in the stories you tell.

## 3. Effective Storytelling:

- Use storytelling techniques to forge an emotional connection.
- Craft a story that remains pertinent to your cause.
- Employ descriptive language to vividly convey your message and showcase the impact on individuals.

#### 4. Incorporating Humour:

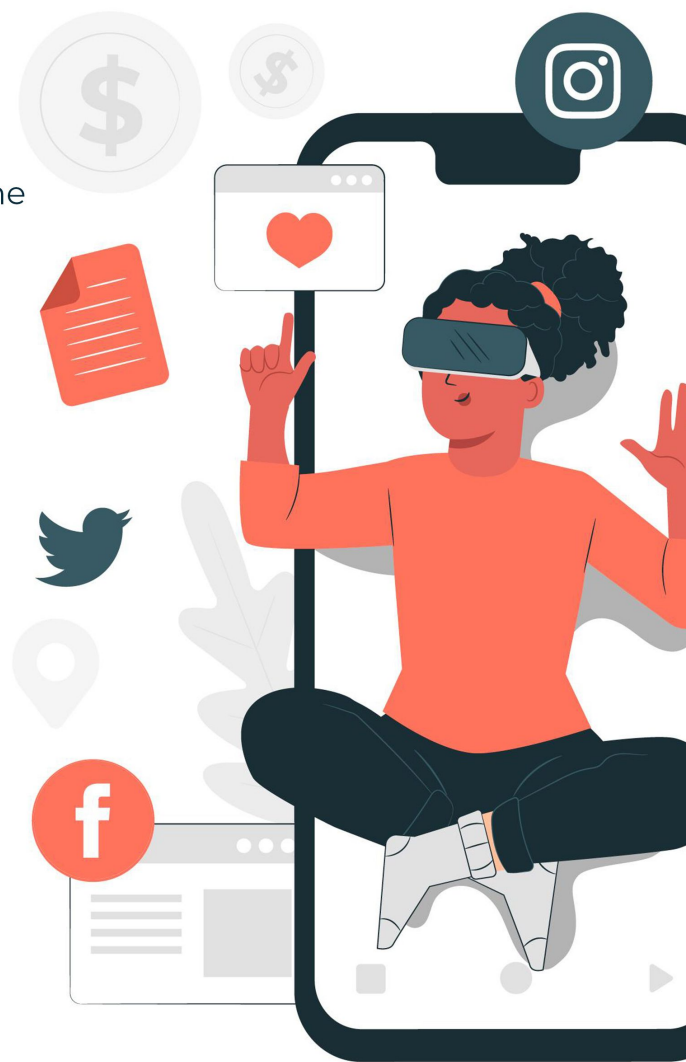
- Infuse appropriate humour to make your content interesting.
- Maintain relevance and showcase the human side of your cause.
- Ensure humour doesn't compromise the seriousness of your message.

#### 5. Creating Urgency:

- Use language that instills a sense of urgency.
- Showcase the immediate impact of your cause.
- Ensure authenticity and relevance in creating urgency.

#### 6. User-Generated Content:

- Encourage supporters to share their stories and experiences.
- Leverage user-generated content to increase your campaign's reach.
- Ensure authenticity and relevance in the content shared.



As an individual campaigner combatting hate through social media, the principles of storytelling, engagement, and strategic use of platforms remain key. Tailor your content to resonate with your audience emotionally, leverage visual elements, and harness the potential of influencers and social media analytics. Remember, your impact is driven by creativity, persistence, and a deep understanding of your audience. With the right approach, you can inspire others to join you in making a meaningful difference in the world.

