Recommendations for Platforms: Empowering Young Users to Push Back Against Hate Online

Most kids agree that it's important to speak out when they see hate and prejudice online – and when they do speak out, they make it easier for other kids to do it too.

MediaSmarts' research has found which factors make young people more or less likely to push back against hate. Some of these apply directly to how online platforms are designed and operated.

Make It Easier to Report Hate

The most important thing that platforms can do to encourage young people to respond to hate is to *make it easier* to do so. **Seven in ten youth** said that they **would be more likely to respond** to prejudice online if **the website or app they were using had clear and easy-to-use tools** for reporting unacceptable behaviour.

Making tools for reporting hate easier to use has two benefits: First, it makes users more aware of the option of reporting content and it will take less time to do it. Second, making these tools more visible shows that the platform cares about this issue, and wants to encourage reporting of online hate and casual prejudice.

Set Clear Rules and Community Standards

Young people often take their cues about how to behave from the messages a platform sends. **Two-thirds of young people** say that they **would be more likely to respond** to prejudice online **if there were clear rules** about what was and wasn't acceptable behaviour on the platform**.**

These don't always have to be rules that users will be punished for breaking. Many of us, and teens in particular, take their ideas of what's right and wrong from what they think are the social norms of their community. Because of this, simply creating and implementing rules that help set the values of a community can change how people behave.

If platforms don't set clear rules and standards, the norms of the community will be set by users. The problem with this is that those norms aren't actually set by the majority, but instead are set by the loudest voices in the community – which are often the most extreme.

Just under half of youth say that they sometimes **choose not to do something because they're not sure if what they've seen is really prejudice**. Setting clear rules can make it easier for young people to know when someone has crossed the line, and it will help them to decide whether or not to report the behaviour.

Setting clear social norms can reduce hate and other harmful content while encouraging free speech: one American study has found that first-time users were seventy percent more likely to post if the forum had clearly posted rules.

Being clear about community standards also gives users something to do to respond to behaviour that isn't bad enough to formally report, but is still against the spirit of those standards. **Half of youth** say they sometimes don't act because they **don't know what to say or do to make a difference**. Giving them the ability to post a pointer to community rules gives them a response to borderline behaviour that isn't likely to make other users more hostile and draws the focus away from them and onto the rules of the platform. This can be a valuable tool for moderators who are employed by the platform as well.

Respond to Reports and Publicize Enforcement

It's important to respond in some way to *every* report. **Just under half** of youth say they sometimes don't respond to prejudice online because they **don't think people will listen to them.**

Platforms should also make sure that users know the rules are being enforced. **Two-thirds** of youth say they **would be more likely to act if they knew the website or app had punished users** for unacceptable behaviour.

This can also have an effect by letting users know that others feel the same way about hate: **more than half** of youth say they **would be more likely to act if they thought most users agreed with them**.

Publicizing enforcement doesn't have to mean sharing specific details about reports, and the decisions that were made: **just under half** of youth say they **would be more likely to act if nobody knew they were the one doing it**. Protecting the identity of the person reporting is critical.

What is important is to make sure that all users know **what kinds of behaviour** were acted on. It can also be useful to let users know what proportion of posts or other interactions broke the community rules: research on bullying has shown that young people almost always overestimate how common it is, and that when they're given accurate information they're less likely to do it themselves. If they know that relatively few other users are part of hate and prejudice in a community, they'll see that it's not normal or acceptable there.