

How to deal with negative or antagonistic comments

If a user is posting negative comments these should be treated with caution, but not removed. If a forum only has positive comments, genuine discussion is that this is not what we are trying to achieve. The moderator should monitor negative/unconstructive comments, however not act unless it threatens to dominate the entire conversation, in which case you need to review why people are being so critical.

If negative commenting is inaccurate, then it is important to add content or additional information which resolves inaccuracies or adds an alternate view. Alternatively, the moderator can ask a negative commenter to elaborate their point. Antagonistic comments are usually the habitat of trolls. They are purposefully aiming to derail the conversation and prevent a meaningful discussion from taking place.

So, with negative or antagonistic comments, moderators have 3 options:

1. **Challenge** (This could take the form of questioning the user, providing information/research to dispute their claims, or direct the user to the community guidelines)
2. **Ignore** (Which is a method of managing conversations as unconstructive comments don't get extra visibility)
3. **Hide** (This should be applied for repeat offenders, at the moderator's discretion, and should be accompanied by a private message)

If a user becomes a nuisance on the page and is unwilling to follow community guidelines after warnings, consider banning them.

How to deal with abusive or offensive comments

Abusive comments include offensive, abusive, obscene or discriminatory comments, personal attack and incitements to violence. They should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

If abusive or offensive comments are made, the moderator should hide the comments as soon as they are seen.

Depending on the moderator's judgement they should message the user and either inform them this is not that kind of community or deliver a yellow card. If a user offends repeatedly, or it's obvious they are a spammer, consider blocking them but be transparent and consistent. Never ban someone just for being critical or having a controversial opinion. If in doubt assess the comments against your community guidelines.

After banning a user, the circumstances can be logged in a report.

Hate speech, including personal attacks, discrimination, prejudice and abuse, should be handled with care:

- Opposing viewpoints in the form of comments on posts are not deleted *unless they contain extreme 'hate speech'*

- Our moderators engage with users who comment with toxic (disrespectful, unreasonable) language to encourage them to express their viewpoints in a positive, respectful manner
- In the cases of *extreme hate speech, comments are hidden or deleted*, and the user is asked to follow community guidelines and engage respectfully.

Users who ignore the guidelines and persistently engage in hate speech will be blocked in the interest of inclusivity of the larger community. This is necessary to build and maintain a trusted online community where views can be expressed safely.

How to acknowledge and reinforce respectful user practices

It is equally important to acknowledge users respectfully participating in the conversation and abiding by the community guidelines.

Moderators can do this by thanking users for their contributions, liking their comments (or replies) and thus giving prominence to these comments in the thread, or replying to users in a positive manner.

How to deal with polarisation

It's important to understand when you are encountering polarisation. Polarisation in its simplest form is: we are right, they are wrong. Polarisation is an artificial construction of identities. It's about people who are being targeted by narrow identity communication to choose sides. Pushers try to lure them into polarisation. The definition of the problem and problem ownership is not very clear.

When dealing with polarised situations we have four options:

1. Change the target audience. Pushers portray an enemy in the other pusher and target the middle ground. That's where polarisation is intended. So, target the middle ground for depolarisation;

- This could take the form of ignoring extreme, polarised positions and looking and highlighting the opinions of the middle.

2. Change the topic. Move away from the identity construct chosen by the pushers and start a conversation on the common concerns and interest of those in the middle ground;

- Apply the aspirational approach. Already do with our content, but let's get the conversation back on the issues that all young people are experiencing – price of rice etc.

3. Change position. Don't act above the parties, in between the poles, but move towards the middle ground;

- Stop trying to build bridges (positioning above the poles) but rather to a position in the middle (connected and mediating).

4. Change the tone. This is not about right or wrong or facts. Use mediating speech and try to engage and connect with the diverse middle ground.

- Moderators here should not moralise, nor ask who is guilty but should focus on the development of mediating speech and behaviour with a non-judgemental approach to moderation.

Moderation by representative teams

As online moderation of discussions between users on the digital platforms is an important tool to stimulate inclusive dialogue, it is essential to ensure that the moderators and community managers of the platforms are also truly representative of the online communities in the countries they operate in.

★Exercise: Be the moderator!

Read the 3 comments below, and identify your moderation strategy (**hide/ignore/reply**). Then, for each comment, answer the following questions:

- Why did you choose to use that specific moderation technique?
- What do you expect the user's response will be to the use of that technique?
- Could you have used another moderation technique? If yes, how would that have changed the user's response?

In a response to an article about female genital mutilation, the following comments were made:

- Comment 1: "Excision is part of our culture and it will remain so forever."
- Comment 2: "I think that's normal, to avoid that we get too many bitches and unfaithfulness on earth."

In response to an article about intimate partner violence, the following comment was made:

- Comment 3: "He wants improvement in you. He is the second man of your life's possession after your father. So give him what he wants."