



Work is needed to encourage people to report digital harms to platforms

Digital harms victims

rarely report abuse and harassment

Our research found that people rarely report online abuse or harmful content, partly because reporting systems on social media platforms are poorly designed. By reviewing platform reporting interfaces, our research showed they lack links to policy information, offer no support options or links, hide how decisions on reports are made and provide no space for individual testimonial. These issues reduce trust in the reporting process and make it harder for users to feel safe online.

What did we do?

- A team at the RMIT Digital Ethnography Research Centre, incorporating the *Digital Hostility and Disinformation Lab*, studied 28 of the most highly-used digital platforms in Australia.
- Using a 'walkthrough' method, we assessed each platform's reporting interface for layout, design and efficiency, and options for personal testimony, care and support links and links to platform policy.
- We analysed our findings through the lens of contemporary organisational complaint practices and philosophies of recognition.

What do we recommend?

- Platforms, governments, moderators and community members need to work together to develop better, more inviting reporting interfaces.
- Platforms should link the report to exact policy wording so users can refer to it quickly. Keep them succinct and direct.
- Space for individual testimonial helps describe abuse, harassment and online stalking occurring in the cross-platform environment.
- Platforms should provide reporters with links to support--including peer support--in the reporting interface.

What do these findings mean?

- Platforms are not investing enough to keep users safe.
- While moderating and intervening in reporting is resource-heavy, platforms have a duty-of-care to their users not just to keep them safe, but to listen to them when they feel unsafe or harmed by other users.
- Improved reporting interface design is one way platforms can help address this problem. We also need better education of all users, and better platform design, to reduce exposure to digital harms like disinformation, abuse, harassment, doxxing and other harmful content and practices.

Where can I find out more?

Cover, R., Beckett, J., Brevini, B., Lumby, C., Simcock, R., & Thompson, J. D. (2025). Reporting online abuse to platforms: Factors, interfaces and the potential for care. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Technologies*.

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The RMIT Digital Ethnography Research Centre (DERC) undertakes comprehensive research on the everyday lived experience of digital cultures, mobile media, platforms, workplaces and settings. Working with a wide array of partners and collaborators in Australia and internationally, we undertake people-centric data collection, design and analysis to help governments, industry and the community make sense of changing factors in our digital lives, including digital harms, AI, disinformation, emergent mobile technologies and online economies.