

10 Evaluation Practices and Standards That Can Help Us Counter Polarization on Social Media

01 Using inclusive language and framing

Evaluation pays close attention to how language connects with different stakeholders. It avoids jargon or overly technical terms that might confuse or exclude people. Social media posts can do the same: use clear, accessible language that resonates with audiences. This helps build trust and invites more people into the conversation.

02 Applying participatory approaches

In evaluation, participatory methods bring stakeholders into the process, making it a two-way street rather than a broadcast. Social media should mirror this by encouraging real dialogue, not just posting and hoping people respond, but actively inviting people to join conversations, ask questions, and share ideas, ensuring that marginalized voices are included.

03 Engaging diverse voices

Evaluation stresses the importance of engaging diverse voices. Social media users can apply this by inviting people with varied perspectives to participate in discussions, thus breaking the echo chambers that propagate polarization online.

04 Upholding ethics and integrity

Evaluation and research standards emphasize ethics: respect for people, fairness, and transparency. Social media users can draw from this by prioritizing responsible engagement. That means avoiding sensationalism, clickbait, or polarizing tactics that generate clicks but deepen divides. Instead, they can practice truthfulness and build respectful communities.

05 Grounding communications in evidence

Evaluation emphasizes using credible evidence to make decisions. Social media users can apply this by fact-checking, curating diverse sources, and ensuring content is based on accurate information. Ground your posts in solid data and diverse perspectives, not just what's trending or likely to get the most likes. There's a wealth of evaluations and evidence available out there. Let's make use of them!

06 Being aware of power dynamics

In evaluation, it's important to be mindful of who's dominating the conversation and whose voices are missing. We can apply this same awareness to our social media use by intentionally including underrepresented groups.

07 Using indicators other than engagement

Evaluation often looks at impact beyond numbers. Social media users can also shift their focus from just 'likes' and 'shares' to measuring indicators like the constructive sharing of ideas, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, or the quality of collaboration and partnerships we produce along the way.

08 Applying systems thinking

Evaluation often takes a holistic, systems-level approach. Social media users can also think beyond individual posts or campaigns to consider how their actions influence broader social dynamics and shape collective behaviors and norms.

09 Foster learning and adaptation

Evaluation is all about learning from experience and using those learnings to improve how we do things. We can bring this same mindset to social media. That means continuously refining our practices to foster meaningful dialogue and bridge divides.

Just as evaluation relies on feedback to inform improvement, social media can draw on analytics and listening tools to better understand audience dynamics. These insights can help refine communication strategies and foster more inclusive, constructive interactions online.

10 Encourage nuanced thinking

Evaluation addresses complex social problems by exploring interconnected issues like poverty, education, climate change, governance, and many others. These real-world challenges are rarely black and white. Their dimensions, factors, and causal relationships often appear messy and intertwined. Similarly, social media users can avoid extreme positions like labeling someone as entirely good or evil. Instead, they can embrace the complexity of issues and choose curiosity over certainty, just as evaluation encourages us to ask questions rather than make snap judgments.

By allowing space for nuanced thinking, we can help break the cycle of "us vs. them" mentalities that fuel polarization.

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