



Case Overview

Supporting equal speech and preventing bullying of women and minority groups online

"I am sponsoring and supporting this program because it is an area I am passionate about and I strongly believe that the student population can make an impact in this space." - **Johnny Smoes** (*Case Competition Sponsor*)

In partnership with School of Computing and Information Systems and



Introduction

There is an old joke that on the internet, no-one knows you're a dog. The intent behind this joke is that the internet is a place where everyone can participate equally, without fear of discrimination based on who they are. This democratic ideal is supposed to promote the free and fair exchange of ideas, new interactions, learnings and collaborations and knowledge sharing, broadening horizons and improving society's knowledge capital. Increasingly, though, we are seeing reports showing that those who are powerful offline are those who are powerful online. Women and other minorities who speak up are often bullied, harassed, and threatened. This means rather than improving exchange of ideas, the internet limits speech for women and minorities. Consider the case of Twitter, which is a place where 'every voice has the power to impact the world', but which Amnesty International has singled out as being 'toxic' for women

(<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>). Truly democratizing the internet, and ensuring that everyone had equal access to the benefits of idea sharing would benefit not just those individuals, but society as a whole as knowledge capital grows.

In Australia, the eSafety Commission is the first government agency in the world that is fully dedicated on online safety (<https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/adult-cyber-abuse>). They point out that minority groups can be particularly susceptible to online abuse, and provide some key useful resources for dealing with abuse.

This Case Competition is seeking proposals for ideas that will contribute toward preventing abuse from happening in the first place, in order to promote a safer internet environment for women and other minority groups.

Challenge

As indicated by the eSafety Commission, online abuse can target a person based on their sex, race, religion, sexuality, gender identity or disability. Abuse can be social, psychological or physical, and can occur on all social media platforms, including online chat and messaging platforms, text messages, emails, online forums (including comments for articles), and gaming platforms.



You can choose to just block and delete, but they're going to make new accounts, and there are just so many different ways they can contact you.

– Abuse Survivor



The Australia Institute in their 2019 Report on ['Trolls and Polls – The economic costs of online harassment and cyberhate'](#) estimated that online abuse costs the economy some \$3.7billion as a snapshot of the time when they conducted their research. This included both lost income and medical costs. However, the challenge of online abuse goes beyond financial costs have also have impacts on the Internet being a safe space.

Therefore, we are looking for solutions that can mitigate risks and online abuse, in order for women and other minority groups to participate equally and without fear.

"What we're saying to the technology platforms is, 'you know that things can go wrong when you create platforms that will facilitate human interaction, so what kinds of risk assessments are you doing up front?'"

*– Julie Inman Grant,
eSafety Commissioner*

Areas for Consideration

The following are some questions that might guide future solutions. You don't have to address all of them but they might be helpful for your consideration.

- ▶ How can online abuse be prevented?
- ▶ What can online platforms do to increase the safety and security of all who use them?
- ▶ How can we ensure that a variety of voices are visible in any given discussion?
- ▶ How can minority groups be encouraged to participate in online debate and interactions?
- ▶ How can constructive debate (without abuse) be supported?
- ▶ How can online abusers be sidelined or minimized?
- ▶ What are some potential downsides to your proposed approach?

Deliverables

We are looking for Reports that are no longer than 1500 words (including all tables, appendices, and references). Teams should provide a Case Report that includes:

- ▶ An analysis of the key issues to prioritise or focus on
- ▶ Discussion on which stakeholders to focus on and why
- ▶ Options for addressing prioritised issues
- ▶ Recommendation(s) going forward
- ▶ Implementation plan for recommendation(s) including some initial costings

Target Audience

The target audience for this report includes:

- ▶ eSafety Commission
- ▶ Venture Capitalists and Foundations that support and invests in social projects
- ▶ Academic Assessors

