



DIGITAL DISPARITIES

The global battle for reproductive
rights on social media





The Center for Countering Digital Hate works to stop the spread of online hate and disinformation through innovative research, public campaigns and policy advocacy.

Our mission is to protect human rights and civil liberties online.

Social media platforms have changed the way we communicate, build and maintain relationships, set social standards, and negotiate and assert our society's values. In the process, they have become safe spaces for the spread of hate, conspiracy theories and disinformation.

Social media companies erode basic human rights and civil liberties by enabling the spread of online hate and disinformation.

At CCDH, we have developed a deep understanding of the online harm landscape, showing how easily hate actors and disinformation spreaders exploit the digital platforms and search engines that promote and profit from their content.

We are fighting for better online spaces that promote truth, democracy, and are safe for all. Our goal is to increase the economic and reputational costs for the platforms that facilitate the spread of hate and disinformation.

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MSI Reproductive Choices is one of the world's leading sexual and reproductive healthcare providers, working across 36 countries and six continents to deliver and advocate for access to contraception and abortion. Driven by the belief that everyone should have the freedom to determine their own future, on their terms, last year, every day MSI supported over 93,000 women and girls with their reproductive choices.

Find out about MSI's work and donate at msichoice.org

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1 Introduction

By privatizing and monetizing the sphere of public discourse – the means by which we find, share, and discuss information and opinions – social media companies and search engines take on a moral responsibility to ensure that they administer those spaces effectively and in a way that encourages a healthy discourse. Platforms have three main means by which they do this.

First, they have a choice who uses their platform, whether that is to post or to advertise. Second, they have a choice on how they enforce their rules on disinformation, whether that is clear, transparent, and effective, or – as it is at the moment – confusing, opaque, and clearly ineffective. Third, they use algorithms to privilege certain speech with amplification and downgrade other speech.

Because of the ubiquity of their services, companies such as Meta and Google reshape our information environment on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) around the world. CCDH has partnered with MSI Reproductive Choices, a global leader in reproductive healthcare and advocacy, to investigate the real-world impact of platform behavior in 8 countries where MSI operates.

Our meetings with local healthcare providers and research into the user experience in those locations found platforms obstruct content promoting accurate abortion information by using opaque explanations to reject content, paid advertisements, or imposing blanket bans on accounts. Meanwhile, we found that these companies have failed to address abuse and misinformation targeted at healthcare providers in stark contrast to the experience of MSI Reproductive Choices, whose ads are often banned. We found Meta running anti-abortion ads in many countries peddling disinformation and conspiracy theories that received millions of views. Some of the disinformation ads were placed by foreign groups working outside of the countries they were targeting.

Healthcare providers like MSI Reproductive Choices – and countless others worldwide – are unable to provide people with necessary advice and care because social media platforms act as gatekeepers, deciding whether and how they can reach people online. The suppression of reliable health information undermines users' fundamental rights to accurate medical information about their sexual and reproductive health.

Search engines and platforms like Meta and Google claim to have 'global' advertising policies and community standards, which they apply at their own discretion with little oversight. The inconsistent application of these policies can seriously damage the ability of providers to reach people – and must be urgently fixed.

In this report, CCDH and MSI come together to show how reproductive health content is blocked, while anti-choice misinformation is given license to thrive. Platforms must

proactively address abuse, misinformation, and partner with providers globally to ensure accurate information is unrestricted. We need mandatory transparency about advertising for health-related content, not just social and political categories that platforms often box abortion within. In the United States, the legal immunity conferred upon social media companies by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act 1996, a law meant to protect burgeoning Internet content providers 28 years ago – sometimes described as a “Good Samaritan” law encouraging companies to clean up the spaces they administer – has morphed from protection from legal action, to a dereliction of their duty to predict and mitigate harms. Meanwhile, having seen the impotence of our legislators, courts, and regulators, many people and decision makers have resigned themselves to the notion that inaction and indifference is the norm, and have failed to demand any degree of transparency, accountability or responsibility from these companies.

Platforms, which for too long have been negligent in their promises to users about championing reproductive health, must be held accountable for their failures to respect users’ fundamental rights to good information. Critical information about reproductive health and abortion should not be censored – the impact on women’s health is too costly to ignore.

Imran Ahmed
CEO, Center for Countering Digital Hate



2 Executive Summary

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROVIDERS TOLD US ABOUT THE PROBLEMS THEY FACE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- We partnered with MSI Reproductive Choices, one of the world's leading providers of reproductive healthcare, and a global advocate for reproductive choice.
- Evidence was gathered through correspondence and interviews with MSI's local teams working across the world including Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa and Vietnam.

PLATFORMS ARE OBSTRUCTING CONTENT PROMOTING ACCURATE ABORTION INFORMATION AROUND THE WORLD

- Evidence from MSI's local teams shows platforms restrict posts and ads promoting accurate information on sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion.
 - Meta rejected or removed ads placed in Ghana, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria and Vietnam, offering opaque explanations such as "sensitive content".
 - Meta has placed blanket advertising restrictions on MSI's teams in Nepal and Vietnam, without offering a clear justification or response.
 - Google is blocking ads even on "pregnancy options" in Ghana.

PLATFORMS FAIL TO ADDRESS ABUSE AND MISINFORMATION UNDERMINING EVIDENCE BASED HEALTHCARE INFORMATION

- Platforms are failing to address abuse of accounts sharing accurate abortion information.
 - Abuse labeling healthcare workers "baby killers" creates risk.
 - Despite MSI reporting a "review bombing", "Google [didn't] take this down".
 - This abuse can deter people from offering or accessing services.
- They are also failing to address misinformation targeting healthcare providers.
 - Misinformation in Mexico exaggerating the risks of abortion care deters women from accessing services, causing "total confusion".
 - Inflammatory WhatsApp messages in Ghana claimed that MSI was part of a "satanic" agenda aiming to "destroy the youth" of the country.

META RUNS ANTI-CHOICE ADS SERVED IN GHANA AND MEXICO VIEWED UP TO 8.8 MILLION TIMES

- Analysis of Meta's Ad Library shows that the company is profiting from ads served in Ghana and Mexico, and viewed up to 8.8 million times in these and other countries.
- Ads containing misinformation received up to 1 million impressions, including:
 - False claims that abortion drugs pose "high risks" to women.
 - Conspiracies that abortion is promoted by "small, but very powerful, groups".
- Anti-choice ads placed by foreign groups, not originating in the country where the ad was served, were viewed up to 4.2 million times.

3 Platforms are restricting content promoting abortion information around the world

This report highlights first-hand evidence that social media and ad platforms are hindering efforts to promote accurate information about reproductive health around the world, taken from health providers on the ground.

In contrast, we use data about online ads to show that platforms are facilitating the spread of misinformation about reproductive health for profit.

Our evidence was gathered through correspondence and interviews with local teams working for MSI Reproductive Choices, a leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services. It reveals that social media platforms are taking down posts and restricting ads that promote accurate information, while failing to tackle misinformation and abuse.

This section of our report collates evidence from all eight countries studied. Subsequent sections of the report provide case studies of problems faced by MSI in Ghana and Mexico specifically, where we also uncovered evidence of platforms profiting from ad campaigns promoting abortion misinformation, in some cases run by groups based in the US.

PLATFORMS REJECT AND TAKE DOWN ADS CONTAINING ACCURATE HEALTHCARE INFORMATION

MSI experiences difficulties running ads on Meta's platforms in Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria and Vietnam. Their ads have been rejected or removed for vague reasons such as for containing "sensitive content" or for "content that asserts or implies personal attributes".¹ This is despite MSI only operating within the parameters of the national legal frameworks of each country.²

In addition to receiving bans on individual ads, Meta has placed advertising restrictions on MSI's accounts in Nepal and Vietnam, meaning MSI's teams cannot use these accounts to "advertise across Meta technologies".³ The local team said that complaints to Meta did not receive a constructive response or a clear justification for the restrictions.⁴

This has forced MSI's local teams to open new accounts. While opening new accounts may be a short-term solution, local teams acknowledged that this approach is unsustainable and less effective for reaching people seeking high-quality information. Each time MSI is forced to create a new account, they have to build their followers back up from zero, taking time and effort to regain the credibility of the original account.

The local team in Ghana reported that Google Ads have been "restrictive", saying "if you plan a campaign using the Google Adwords yourself, they'll actually ban you from using words like pregnancy options".⁵

MSI is not the only organization that has faced these issues. Other providers, advocates and organizations interviewed by Amnesty International have expressed frustration with social media platforms' practices of restricting abortion-related content, removing posts, or labeling them as "sensitive material."⁶

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FAIL TO ACT ON ABUSE DIRECTED AT PEOPLE SHARING ABORTION INFORMATION

Evidence revealed the multiple issues encountered by MSI's local teams when using social media platforms to promote their services, including online abuse. For example, the MSI team in Kenya reported an "increasing number of negative comments" such as "baby killers" on Facebook and X, formerly Twitter.⁷

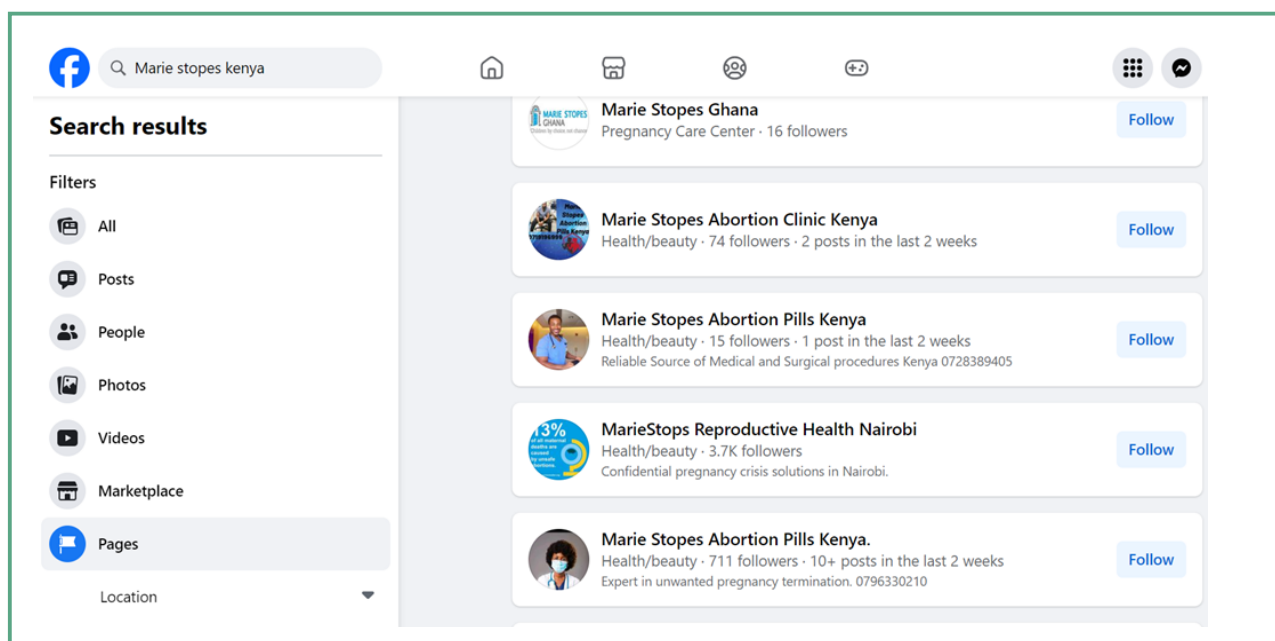
The team in Ghana also reported receiving similar messages, including "you are killing babies and proud" on TikTok.⁸ One member of the local team said that they had "just grown used to" online abuse, and asked that social media platforms implement tools to better track and manage hate speech that appears alongside their content.⁹

A recent report by Amnesty International found that threats and abuse directed at abortion providers are pervasive and can profoundly unsettle and discourage providers. This effect is particularly pronounced when such incidents are not promptly and thoroughly investigated. The lack of consequences for threats and intimidation can embolden perpetrators to escalate their actions further.¹⁰

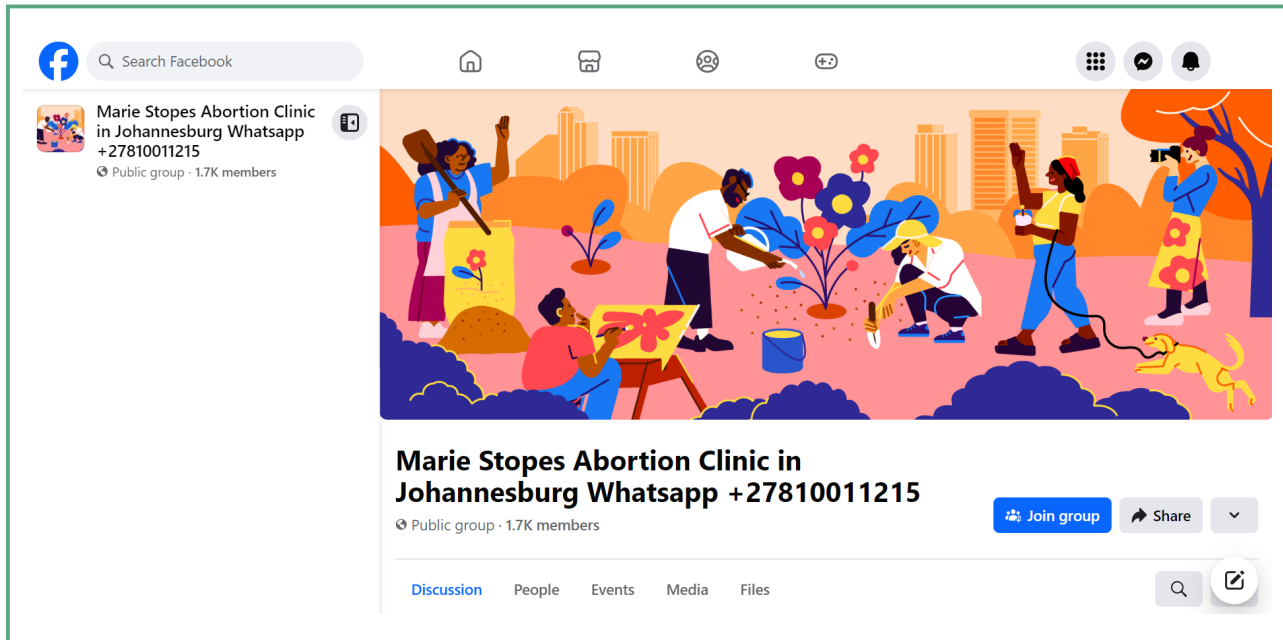
PLATFORMS FAIL TO TAKE DOWN FAKE PAGES AND SITES IMITATING MSI

Fake pages and websites on Facebook and Google respectively, designed to imitate MSI's content and branding, were cited by MSI teams in Kenya, Nigeria and Vietnam as a concern.¹¹ A member of MSI's team in Kenya stated that "Often the only difference in the pages is the contact number. Some of these sites are scams and they ask prospective clients to make mobile money transfers."¹²

Although MSI reported these pages and sites, the platforms either delayed action or failed to remove the fraudulent pages.



Facebook Pages falsely presenting themselves as MSI Kenya



A Facebook Group falsely presented itself as operated by MSI in South Africa¹³

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FAIL TO ACT ON POSTS PROMOTING ABORTION MISINFORMATION

MSI's teams shared their experiences with battling abortion misinformation and explained how misinformation left clients too "afraid" to go to their clinics.¹⁴ MSI's team in Ghana explained that MSI had been the focus of a conspiracy theory that spread on WhatsApp, accusing MSI of wanting to introduce "satanic" sexual education to children.¹⁵

Testimonies from MSI and evidence collected from Meta's Ad Library for this report shows that platforms are failing to remove posts and ads promoting abortion misinformation. We found Meta had accepted and served ads on Facebook that contained conspiratorial theories about abortion and misleading information about the abortion pill.¹⁶

4 Mexico: Meta blocks ads while allowing misinformation that creates “total confusion”

MSI’s team in Mexico told us that they use social media platforms on a daily basis to reach their target audience.

Both Facebook and Instagram were cited as important tools for raising MSI’s brand awareness in Mexico and crucially, for reaching people seeking high-quality services and information on sexual and reproductive health.

The local team’s main concerns were about sharing reproductive healthcare information on Meta’s services, where frequent ad bans have forced the team to rethink their marketing strategies. Meanwhile, online abortion misinformation continues to impact their clients.

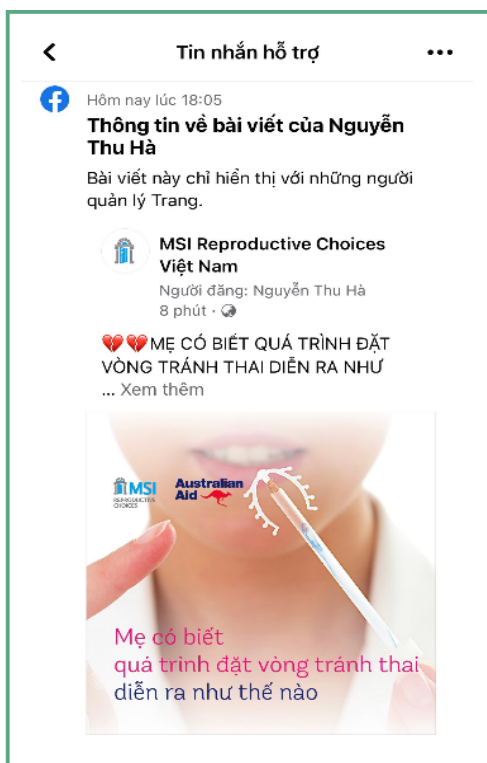
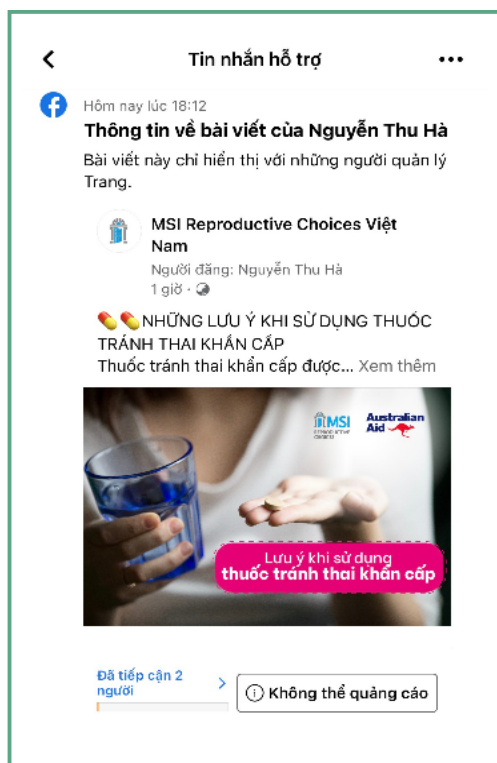
Mexico’s Supreme Court decriminalized abortion nationwide in September 2023, ruling criminal penalties for terminating pregnancies as unconstitutional.¹⁷ However, further legal advocacy will be required to remove all penalties across all states.¹⁸

META’S UNFAIR AD BANS FORCE MSI TEAM TO RETHINK MARKETING STRATEGIES

MSI’s team in Mexico shared the difficulties they have advertising on Meta’s services, stating: “anything we do as MSI is quickly detected, is quickly banned or taken down”.¹⁹ This has forced the team to find alternative marketing strategies.

Despite attempts to discuss and resolve these issues, Meta states that MSI is prohibited from advertising their abortion services in Mexico given that abortion is not legalized in all 32 states.²⁰ However the local team stated that ad restrictions are not just placed on abortion-related content, but also on content promoting other sexual and reproductive health services.²¹

This seems to be a persistent issue amongst MSI’s local teams. The team in Nepal had an ad removed which promoted cervical cancer screening, while Meta removed the following posts from the local team in Vietnam promoting accurate information on IUDs and how to use contraceptive pills.²² Meta also issued a warning threatening to permanently block their page.



MSI's team in Mexico have creatively dealt with advertising obstacles, but the ongoing fight for a fair shot at advertising on social media platforms is proving to be unsustainable: "We have been forced to be very creative, but this is time consuming. It is expensive. It is not fair, and it's always, you know, trying to deal with so many things at the same time. So it's exhausting."²³

ADS PROMOTING ABORTION MISINFORMATION CREATE "TOTAL CONFUSION"

Meta has restricted ads placed by MSI's team in Mexico, but they continue to profit from ads placed by anti-choice organizations, some of which contain misinformation. For example, our investigation into anti-choice ads in Mexico featured later in this report found that one anti-choice organization exaggerated the risks of mifepristone in multiple ads, claiming it could lead to "fatal vaginal bleeding".²⁴

Another anti-choice tactic is to promote images from the later stages of pregnancy as if they were from the early stages, to increase stigma, confusion, and to discourage women from terminating their pregnancy: "If women knew better their body and the real image of a 12-week gestational image, it would be a totally different story. Women come so afraid to our clinics [...] they think they are going to die."²⁵

The team stated that online abortion misinformation has created "total confusion" for people seeking high-quality information, leading to incidents where some women have incorrectly administered a medication abortion, only for it to have no effect.²⁶

They also observed inconsistencies in Meta's approach to abortion-related ads. While many of MSI's advertisements were banned, anti-choice groups seemingly have no trouble running ads. One member of MSI's local team described this approach as "totally unfair. I mean it makes me more upset because they are advertising fake information, not scientific information".²⁷

5 Ghana: Meta's enforcement of policies on abortion content is inconsistent

MSI's local team in Ghana has encountered inconsistent treatment of ads and organic posts on Meta's services, experiencing unexplained ad bans on some platforms and underperforming ads on others.

Additionally, they've encountered difficulties verifying their accounts, essential for legitimizing their operations, with no explanation from Meta. In contrast, the local team reported conspiracies about MSI which have been spread on WhatsApp without consequences.

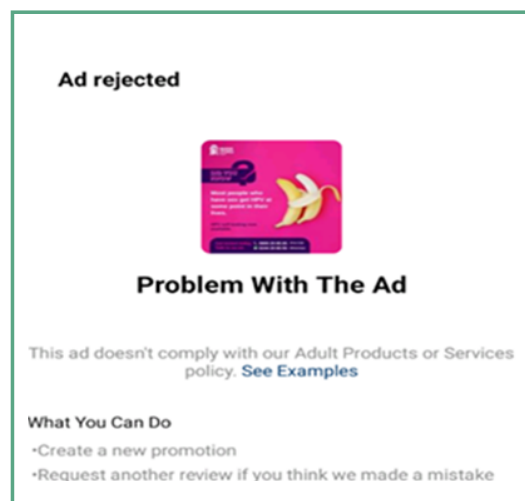
Abortion in Ghana is legal in cases of rape, incest, fetal abnormality or disease, defilement, or to protect physical or mental health.²⁸

META INCONSISTENTLY ENFORCES ADVERTISING POLICIES ON ABORTION SERVICES ACROSS PLATFORMS

The local team in Ghana stated that on Facebook, "any advert you post, you can't promote it". This had prompted the team to switch to Instagram, where they saw more engagement from organic posts.²⁹ In response to whether they had resolved any issues with Meta, the team replied "Meta will never respond to you. They don't tell you why they are limiting your ad."³⁰

Meta's responses to MSI's concerns appear inconsistent, as well as their enforcement of advertising policies. Teams in Kenya and Nepal echoed Ghana's difficulties when it comes to reaching out to Meta, while the team in Bangladesh said that they had been able to resolve their issues by contacting Facebook directly.³¹

MSI's local team in Ghana have requested that Meta verify their accounts, stating: "Facebook needs to recognize MSI accounts across all the partnerships and better understand what we do".³² The team said that the current process for account verification is not transparent and that it is unclear why their accounts have remained unverified.³³

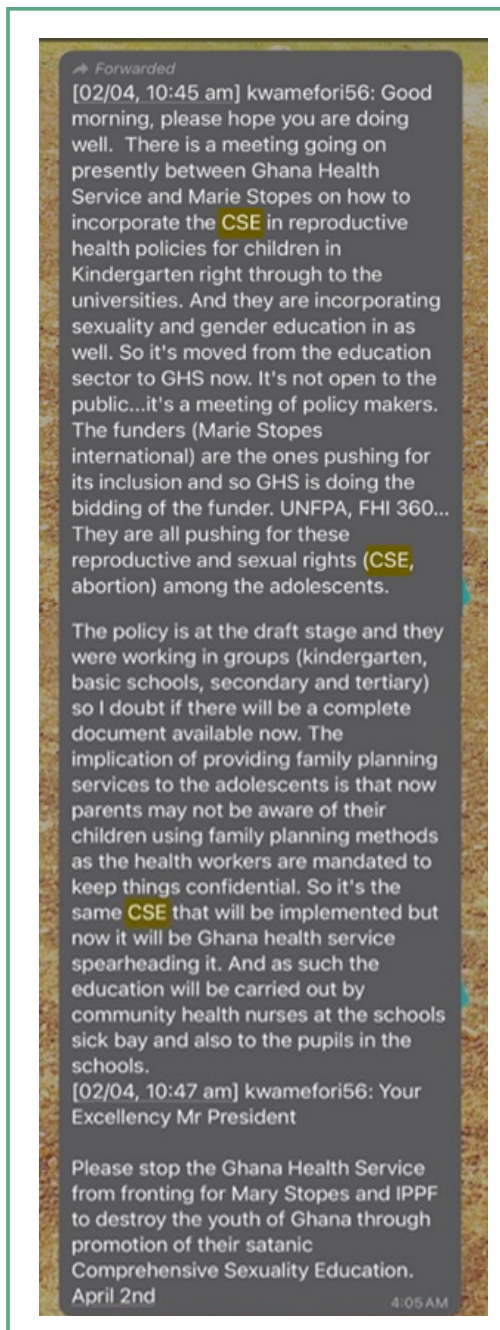


META ALLOWS MISINFORMATION FROM ANTI-CHOICE GROUPS TO CIRCULATE ON THEIR PLATFORMS

Contrastingly, MSI's local team voiced concerns over the spread of abortion misinformation on Meta's platforms. The team has seen abortion misinformation circulate on Facebook, but said that WhatsApp was the primary platform used, stating that anti-choice organizations had used WhatsApp groups to share "presentations around how family planning is an agenda to [depopulate] Africa".³⁴

The team in Ghana also cited how MSI became the focus of a conspiracy theory that spread on WhatsApp, accusing the organization of introducing "satanic" sexual education in schools to "destroy the youth" of Ghana.³⁵

The MSI team believe that account verification by Meta would establish a better understanding of MSI's services and highlight their authority on sexual and reproductive health, promoting accurate healthcare information while reducing the spread of abortion misinformation online.³⁶



6 Meta runs anti-choice ads served in Ghana and Mexico viewed up to 8.8 million times

Despite restricting promotion of accurate reproductive information in countries studied by this report, Meta has profited from anti-choice ads served to users in these and other countries.

Analysis of ads listed in Meta's Ad Library that were served to users in our two case study countries, Ghana and Mexico, identified a total of 187 anti-choice ads that were viewed up to 8.8 million times over a five year period from 2019 to 2024.³⁷

All of these ads were served to users in Ghana and Mexico, with the majority of views served in these and other countries in the Global South including India, Nepal and Pakistan. The figures represent the upper estimate that Meta gives for how many times these ads were viewed. A full explanation of our methodology is included in Appendix 1.

While anti-choice opinions are valid, Meta's decision to profit from anti-choice ads becomes contentious when ads contain misinformation or inaccurate medical evidence that is counter to the WHO's Abortion Care Guideline.³⁸

ADS CONTAINING MISINFORMATION WERE VIEWED UP TO 1 MILLION TIMES

Analysis of anti-choice ads found that those promoting false or misleading claims about abortions have received up to 1 million impressions in the period studied.

The majority of these ads heavily exaggerated the risks of abortion which when performed safely has a similar mortality rate to having a dental procedure.³⁹ Others suggested that decriminalization of abortion in Mexico would encourage termination up to birth, or that criminalization protects women.⁴⁰ Both claims are misleading.⁴¹

Researchers also discovered some anti-choice groups were promoting conspiracies in ads, claiming that global powers and international companies were behind an organized push to legalize abortion.⁴² In addition, some claimed that the "abortion industry" was "financed from abroad. . . to ELIMINATE THE MEXICAN POPULATION".⁴³

ANTI-CHOICE ADS FROM FOREIGN GROUPS WERE VIEWED UP TO 4.2 MILLION TIMES

None of the accounts that ran anti-choice ads seen in Ghana could be confirmed as being Ghanaian. 86% of the pages reported being run by foreign groups or individuals, and 64% claimed to be based in the US. Researchers noted that all of the ads were also being served in other countries as well as Ghana, including Kenya and Nepal.

Two of these foreign groups, Americans United for Life (AUL), a US-based organization, and Tree of Life Ministries, run by American-born evangelical Christians based in Israel, received up to 3.83 million views between them.⁴⁴ While ads placed by Tree of Life Ministries did not contain abortion misinformation, ads from AUL directed users to their website which features misleading claims about the abortion pill.⁴⁵

Case Study: Ads promoting abortion pill misinformation viewed up to 504,989 times in Mexico

A self-described group of social leaders, researchers and academics, UNNA began advertising on Facebook in April 2023, according to Meta's Ad Library.⁴⁶

The group claims to promote “the protection and safety of the mother”, but researchers found seven ads with up to 504,989 impressions that featured or linked to misleading medical information regarding abortion.⁴⁷

The below ad received up to 59,999 views on Facebook during a five-day period in June 2023. The ad text translates as follows: “What are the effects of Mifepristone and Misoprostol? The use of these medications for the induction of an abortion runs high risks, as women can suffer severe complications.”⁴⁸

The claim that medication abortion is high-risk is misleading as severe side effects are extremely rare.⁴⁹ An FDA study of mifepristone shows the mortality rate is 0.35 deaths per 100,000 medication abortions.⁵⁰ In contrast, the average mortality rate for the popular painkiller acetaminophen, or paracetamol, is significantly higher at 11.6 deaths per 100,000 population.⁵¹

The alternative to an abortion in an unwanted pregnancy is giving birth, which carries a far greater risk. The maternal mortality rate in Mexico is 59 deaths per 100,000 estimated births.⁵²

**UNNA_Infancia**
Sponsored • Paid for by Victor Velasco

¿Cuáles son los efectos de la Mifepristona y el Misoprostol?

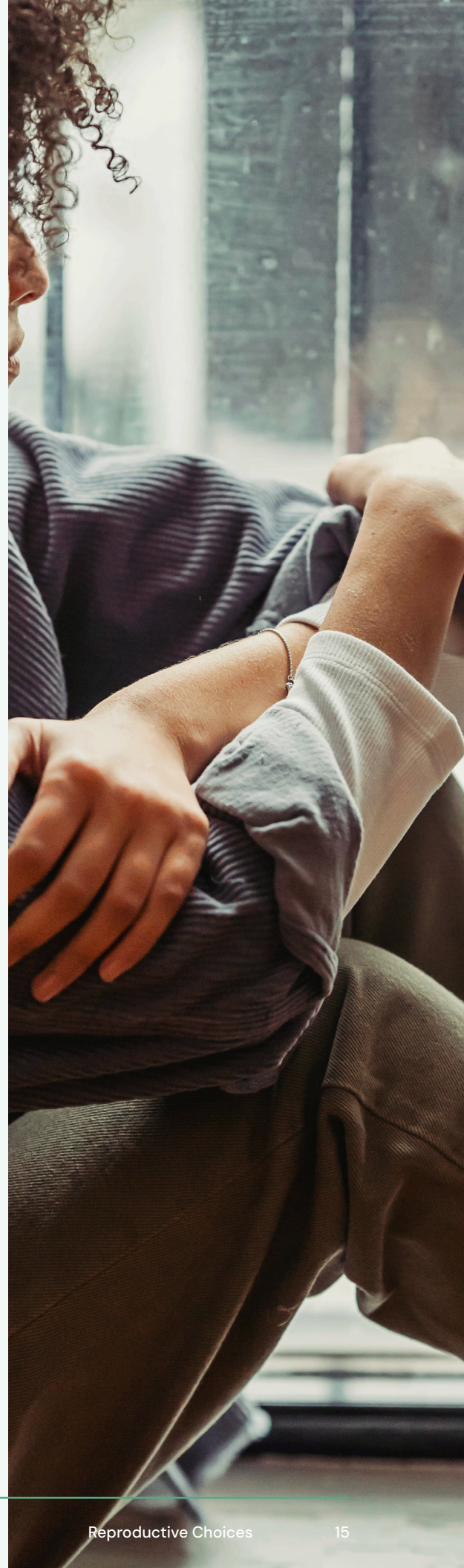
El uso de estos medicamentos para la inducción de un aborto corre riesgos altos, ya que las mujeres pueden sufrir complicaciones severas.

Lee la nota completa aquí: [https://unnainfancia.org/2023/06/18/sobre-el-misoprostol-y-la-mifepristona/...](https://unnainfancia.org/2023/06/18/sobre-el-misoprostol-y-la-mifepristona/)



UNNAINFANCIA.ORG
Sobre el misoprostol y la mifepristona - UNNA
En los últimos años, se ha observado que los medicamentos misoprostol y mifepristona se están usando para terminar un embarazo en su primera etapa. Al combinarlos para este fi...

Learn more




Case Study: Meta approved ads promoting conspiratorial claims about abortion

The Contextos.co Facebook page describes the group as a news and media website, offering “relevant news for us defenders of life”.⁵³

According to LinkedIn, its founder is also CEO of another anti-choice group that features in our dataset, Actívate.⁵⁴ Ads placed by Contextos.co commonly link to their Substack, which is devoted to the topic of abortion.⁵⁵


Many of the ads run by Contextos.co contain conspiratorial themes. Researchers found several ads that referenced manipulation by small groups pro-choice actors. One ad encouraged users to subscribe to the Contextos.co newsletter to find out about the “52 companies that financed abortion in Mexico during 2022”.⁵⁶ Another ad links to a post claiming to reveal the secret strategy of manipulation to impose abortion up to the ninth month of pregnancy.⁵⁷

The prime example of this type of conspiratorial language is this ad from Contextos.co which translates to “The global power game that abortion weaves in the world”.⁵⁸ The ad links to a Substack article that suggests “small, but very powerful, power groups” are applying pressure on Mexican legislators to further the pro-choice cause.⁵⁹

**Contextos.co**
Sponsored • Paid for by Contextos.co

¿Existe realmente un poder global que está impulsando el aborto en el mundo? Este es una análisis profundo del Contexto.

<https://www.contextos.co/p/el-juego-del-poder-global-que-teje>

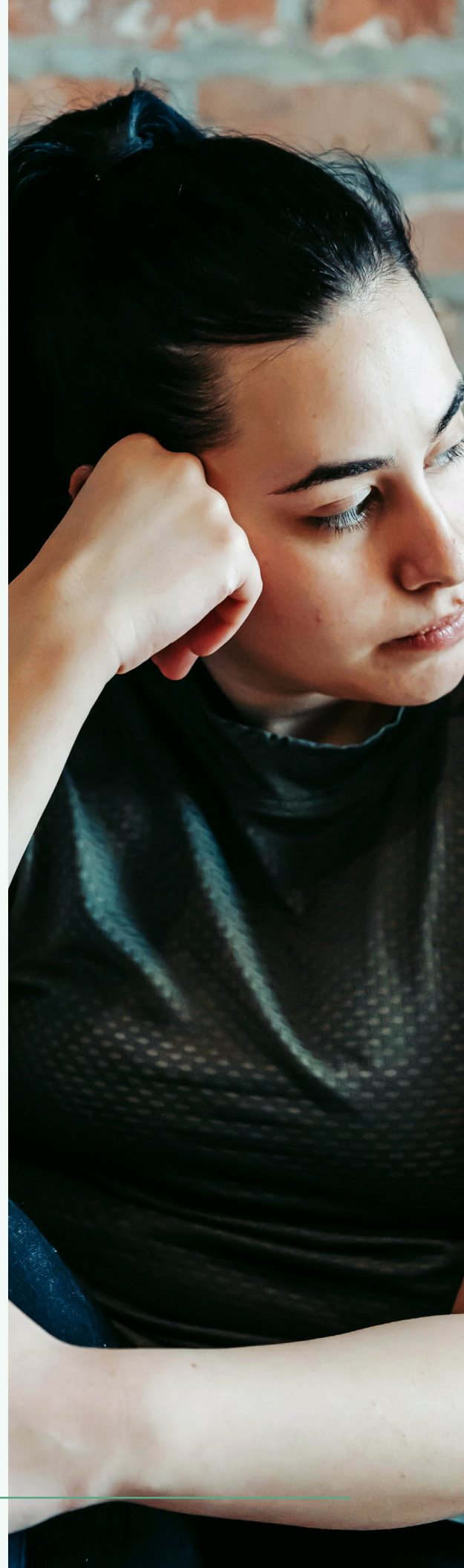


El juego de poder global que teje el aborto en el mundo

CONTEXTOS

Contextos.co

Learn more



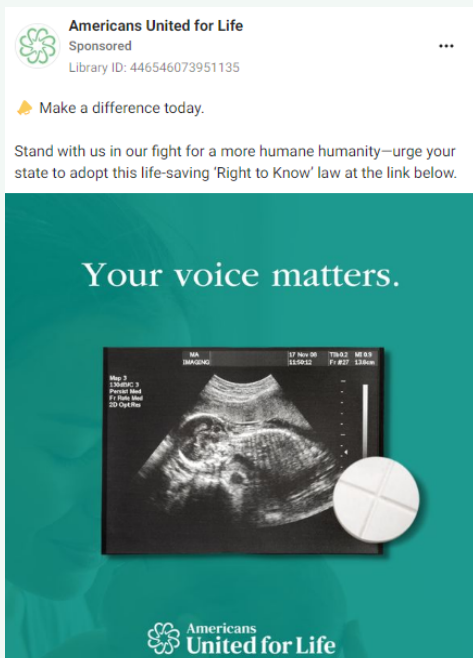
Case Study: US-based group promotes misinformation in developing countries including Ghana

Americans United for Life (AUL) is an anti-choice organization whose stated mission is to “advance the human right to life in culture, law, and policy”.⁶⁰

In June 2022, the organization ran six ads that were seen by users in Ghana as well as many other developing countries.⁶¹ The ads directed users to misleading information about abortion. The ads were removed after it was found they did not include a verified “Paid for by” disclaimer.⁶²

The ads directed users to an online petition urging lawmakers to adopt the “Abortion Drug ‘Right to Know’ Law” as part of their Pro-Life Model Legislation.⁶³ The act strives to “ensure that every woman considering an abortion receives complete information on abortion and its alternatives” and to “protect an preborn child from a woman’s uninformed decision to have an abortion”.⁶⁴

While the act sounds relatively benign, the anti-choice organization is “almost single-handedly responsible for the wave of pro-life legislation that state legislatures have passed in recent years”.⁶⁵ The organization also has a page dedicated to the abortion pill, exaggerating its risks and calling it “unsafe and unjust”.⁶⁶



7 Recommendations

Healthcare providers like MSI Reproductive Choices – and countless others worldwide – are unable to provide people with necessary advice and care because social media platforms act as gatekeepers, deciding whether and how they can post.

The evidence captured in this report demonstrates that the ‘global’ policies touted by platforms are not only inadequate, but applied in inconsistent and irresponsible ways. This has a real impact on people seeking reliable information about their reproductive healthcare.

CCDH has previously documented how both Meta and Google fail to address medical misinformation in ads promoting so-called abortion pill “reversal” in the United States.⁶⁷ As this report shows, abortion misinformation is not localized to a single country or state – as providers like MSI redouble their efforts to reach people with reliable information, it’s clear that major platforms neglect to understand how these issues persist in multiple countries and how uneven application of their policies can seriously impact lives.

By failing to address abuse and misinformation targeting healthcare providers and, worse still, choosing to profit from anti-choice ads, Meta and Google are failing their users.

Meta’s policies explicitly allow organizations to run advertisements promoting sexual and reproductive health or wellness, as long as the focus is on health—which the MSI ads fall under. Specifically, Meta’s policy states “as a global company, we need to take into account the wide array of people from different cultures and countries who see ads across our technologies to avoid potential negative experiences”.⁶⁸ Ironically this report shows that the policy has generated the ‘negative experiences’ Meta anticipates.

Google’s policy, which is limited to specific countries for abortion-related ads, only currently offers abortion advertiser certifications in the United States, United Kingdom, and Ireland.⁶⁹ The countries in this study are not listed as prohibited countries for ads for contraception on Google. Yet again, Meta and Google’s uneven application and failure to uphold their own policies risk the health of women.

Given the urgency for reliable reproductive health information and platforms’ continual failure to address medical misinformation, CCDH and MSI Reproductive Choices recommend the following:

1. PROACTIVELY ADDRESS ABUSE, MISINFORMATION, AND PROVIDE ACTIONABLE REPORTING PATHWAYS.

On Google Ads, legitimate healthcare providers can be outbid by well-funded anti-choice organizations. People searching for terms like ‘abortion clinic’ may be shown ads that divert them to an anti-choice website or unregulated, crisis pregnancy centers, which aim to block access to choice. CCDH documented this in *“Profiting from Deceit”*, finding that anti-choice organizations were using deceptive ads to target women seeking abortion care.⁷⁰

2. ANTI-CHOICE, UNREGULATED SERVICES SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO BID ON THESE SEARCH TERMS.

Google has introduced a policy in US, UK, and Ireland to mark those that do not provide abortion and those organizations that do, but these are not consistently labeled and mean that in most countries, anti-choice groups are still able to mislead those seeking care. This policy must be extended to more jurisdictions. Google's 'global' reach necessitates taking all of the countries it operates within with the same level of discretion and seriousness for its policy enforcement.

3. WORK WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS TO ENSURE ACCURATE INFORMATION IS UNRESTRICTED.

MSI content on reproductive healthcare is regularly blocked or restricted by Meta and Google as it is largely categorized as social and political content (in line with e.g., elections) rather than healthcare or medical information. This goes beyond abortion content. Across MSI programmes, content has been blocked and pages suspended, including for content on contraception, IUD insertions (for referencing vagina and uterus), breast and cervical cancer awareness, fertility services, maternity services – primarily on Meta. This is a problem that has been documented by the Center for Intimacy Justice.⁷¹ Response and decisions from platforms appear to be inconsistent and arbitrary. Once pages or ad accounts have been suspended, accounts are restricted, limiting ability to promote content.

CCDH and MSI call on tech firms to view these services as healthcare, not political or social issues, and simplify the process for healthcare providers to report, discuss and resolve issues (named contact, clear timeline), e.g., in line with YouTube's trusted flagger scheme. Good health requires good information – platforms should proactively collaborate with trusted organizations to create policies that reflect the nuance and reality of abortion and reproductive care.

4. PROVIDE TRANSPARENT, SEARCHABLE AND GLOBAL AD LIBRARIES AND PROVIDE A PROTECTED CATEGORY FOR RELIABLE HEALTH INFORMATION ADS.

Transparency is an important principle when allowing advertising to alter users' experience, particularly when it is inserted into search results. Moreover, when advertising is permitted on searches that can have a systemic effect on fundamental rights or civil liberties, e.g. health-related terms or terms relating to the election, there is an even greater expectation that users would be able to gauge what is being sold, to whom, and how that alters the user experience.

Meta's ad library currently only retains data for ads classified as "social issues, elections, or politics".⁷² Classifying abortion and reproductive health related ads in these categories does not recognize the critical importance of ads containing healthcare information by authoritative providers. A new, protected category for healthcare ads and transparency around the spend, reach and audience, purchasing information, and policies for these ads is needed in order to make sure users are receiving reliable information. A global, searchable database of search ads would be a welcome addition to Google's transparency and allow for meaningful accountability and user awareness of how their experience may be undermined by commercial demands.

Appendix 1: Methodology

This appendix outlines the methodology used to collect and analyze anti-choice ads in Ghana and Mexico using Meta’s ad library, and provides further detail as to how we collected testimonies from MSI’s local teams.

META ADS COLLECTION

CCDH researchers used the Meta Ad Library to examine how anti-choice groups use Meta’s platforms to push their narrative.⁷³ All data collection took place between the 2nd and 3rd of January 2024.

We focused on two countries, Mexico and Ghana. In both instances an initial set was created by searching for ads that referenced abortion and were categorized under “Issues, elections or politics”.⁷⁴ This returned a substantial number of ads seen by a Mexican audience, so in this case researchers selected only ads launched by advertisers deemed to be anti-choice who had placed more than ten abortion related ads on Facebook. Political parties and news organizations were also excluded.

Researchers then went through each ad and selected only those that were anti-choice, leaving a total set of 187 ads: 158 ads for Mexico and 29 ads for Ghana. In the case of the latter, the ads all ran in a number of mostly economically developing countries so therefore only some of the impressions for each ad can be attributed to Ghanaian users.⁷⁵

In order to discover where the pages that placed the ads were based, researchers first referred to the “About” section for each page. Where no location was specified, we conducted background research on the organizations or individuals associated with each page.

We preface all impressions figures with the phrase “up to” as we used the upper estimate for impressions given by Meta for each ad.

MISINFORMATION CLASSIFICATION

All ads in the set were assessed and fact checked. Where it was necessary to translate the text of an ad we used Google Translate. Any ad found to be containing misleading, false or conspiratorial information was marked as misinformation. In addition, we also noted any of these ads that referred to misoprostol or mifepristone. Longer videos were excluded from this analysis due to the potential for translation error. A list of misleading narratives along with their fact checks can be found in Appendix 2: Fact Checks and Types of Conspiracy.

LIMITATIONS OF META'S AD LIBRARY

Meta's policies state that its "Ad Library" displays all "currently active" ads as well as retaining inactive ads "that are about issues, elections or politics". The platform also promises that ads in the latter category will display data on "who funded the ad, a range of how much they spent and the reach of the ad across multiple demographics".⁷⁶

However, this implies that inactive ads outside the "issues, elections, or politics" category are not archived, leaving us unaware of the number of ads that may have been run but no longer exist in the ad library.⁷⁷ Because of this, we were unable to collect ads that were not labeled as in the "issues, elections and politics".

TESTIMONIES

CCDH researchers conducted interviews with MSI to get testimonies from their local teams in Ghana and Mexico about their experiences using and advertising on social media, in particular on Meta's products and services. Researchers used testimonies to inform and complement the data taken from Meta's ad library.

The interviews were guided by the following discussion points:

- Difficulties MSI's local teams have faced making posts or ads about abortion on social media
- MSI teams' experience of online abuse faced on social media
- How online misinformation has affected MSI's work

Testimonies were transcribed manually from video recordings of the interview and selected quotes have been included in this report, along with evidence sent from the local teams. MSI approved the use of testimonies in the research before the report was launched.

Participants have been anonymized in the report where requested. For purposes of confidentiality, we are unable to share video recordings and transcripts with external actors.

Appendix 2: Fact Checks and Types of Conspiracy

This appendix outlines the types of narratives that appeared in ads labeled as misinformation or conspiracy. In each case we provide a rebuttal as well as the top estimate impressions figures for all ads that contained each type of narrative.

Narrative	Fact Check	Impressions (up to)
Abortions are dangerous and high-risk	Severe complications following an abortion are extremely rare, with mortality estimated at less than 0.2% for safe abortions, in contrast with 4.7-13.2% where unsafe abortion is practiced due to restrictive laws. ⁷⁸ Complications are rare and severe complications even rarer.	574,988
Decriminalizing abortion allows abortions up to the point of birth	In countries where abortion is broadly legal, the vast majority of abortions happen in the first trimester. ⁷⁹ Abortions late in pregnancy are very rare and usually only happen in cases of medical emergencies. ⁸⁰	15,996
Criminalizing abortion protects women by enabling prosecution of perpetrators of attacks on pregnant women and negligent doctors.	This narrative misrepresents the reality of abortion prosecutions, which primarily affect women and doctors engaged in voluntary abortion procedures, rather than violent perpetrators or negligent practitioners causing miscarriages. ⁸¹ Contrary to the claim that keeping abortion illegal “protects women,” it often leads to women resorting to unsafe self-managed abortions due to fear of legal consequences, and doctors refusing necessary healthcare procedures that could be categorized as abortions. ⁸²	175,996
Powerful groups (international companies, politicians or feminists) are working in secretly in concert to legalize abortion for nefarious purposes.	Conspiratorial narratives like this seek to make the viewer believe that the movement to legalize abortion is the work of a small, elite and shadowy group of people. However, it is often a grassroots movement supported by local citizens. For example, in Mexico a recent poll found that almost 50% of the population believed women should have the right to a legal abortion. ⁸³	233,979

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