

Trust and Safety Foundation Research Coalition

Global Majority Research Committee: Raison D'Être

Last Updated: Dec 5, 2024

Authors: Sujata Mukherjee¹

The Global Majority Research Committee (GMRC) aims to foster a more equitable and effective Trust & Safety (T&S) ecosystem by elevating the expertise and inclusion of Majority World^{2,3} voices in product design, policy development and organizational practices. Broadly, the GMRC will connect trust and safety practitioners, researchers, and multidisciplinary scholars to collectively learn about and advocate for the Majority World.

Why “Global Majority”?

- **The phrase originates from the region.** This is a term coined by Majority World scholars and thus there is less chance of it acquiring negative connotations.
- **The phrase defines this community in terms of what it has.** It is a descriptive term in terms of a factual majority of numbers and does not carry a subjective interpretation.
- **The community has formed because there is a perceived inequity.** The community exists to correct the inequity in representation and power within T&S industry, thus it is attempting to resolve any “us vs them” mindset that may exist rather than to create it.
- **The phrase is inclusive but not homogenizing.** The umbrella term Global Majority does not paint the whole community with one brush, but suggests that there are multitudes within the group with their own unique perspectives.
- **The phrase creates a space for community building and advocacy.** With the Global Majority as a unifying space, experts and practitioners have a channel and an ally network to better advocate for their regions.

Why Do We Care?

A] Decolonizing Trust & Safety Practice and Research

- I. **Challenging Western-centric Bias:** Majority World scholars express an urgent need to dismantle the deeply ingrained Western-centric bias that permeates current trust and safety practices. Many studies call out the inadequacy of applying Western definitions of harm to vastly different cultural contexts (1, 2, 3, 4). This bias also extends to the design of product interventions – tools created

¹ Trust & Safety Industry & Research (tiamukherjee@gmail.com)

² “Majority World” refers to all countries previously designated as “developing”, “post-colonial” or “global South”, including but not limited to SE Asia, Latin America and Middle East and Africa. See References 18.

³ “Global Majority” was first coined by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens to challenge the idea of a white majority or Eurocentric perspective. In this document, “Majority World” and “Global Majority” are used interchangeably. See References 19.

based on Global North experiences that fail to resonate with the realities of the majority world (1, 3). Decolonisation requires a fundamental shift in power dynamics, moving away from a Western-centric model to one that prioritises the knowledge, experiences, and voices of the majority world (1, 3, 5, 6, 7). The GMRC highlights the need for greater representation of majority world voices in decision-making positions within the tech industry (1, 4).

- II. **Addressing Power Imbalances in Data Governance:** Scholars raise concerns about the potential for data colonialism, where data from the majority world is extracted and exploited by powerful actors, often based in the Global North (2, 3, 8). This data extractivism can perpetuate existing power imbalances and undermine the digital sovereignty of majority world countries (8). The GMRC advocates for greater transparency and accountability in data governance, promoting policies that protect the rights and interests of majority world users (8).
- III. **Adopting a Care Ethics Framework:** Several researchers advocate for embedding care ethics into the design and implementation of trust and safety systems (3). This approach emphasises understanding the specific needs and vulnerabilities of users, respecting their agency, and working towards solutions that promote well-being and social justice (3). Applying a care ethics lens necessitates a move away from purely technical solutions towards approaches that consider the social, cultural, and political dimensions of online harms.

B] Mitigating the Risks of a Fragmented Internet

- I. **Balancing Global and Local Needs:** Researchers recognise the tension between the need for global standards in trust and safety and the importance of respecting local contexts and norms (4, 10). Disparate and potentially conflicting approaches to content moderation, Anglocentrism in product development and a lack of understanding of the diverse user needs of the majority world can lead to the creation of a fragmented internet, where discrete groups of users have starkly different experiences online, mediated by moderation policy, algorithmic curation and regulatory regimes that are not consistent. Finding the right balance involves developing flexible frameworks that can be adapted to local needs, ensuring that global policies do not inadvertently exacerbate inequalities or suppress legitimate expression (10). The GMRC believes that collaboration across platforms, civil society, and policymakers is essential to achieve this balance (4, 10).
- II. **Reconsidering Data and Technology Development:** Emerging research urges a critical examination of how data is collected, used, and controlled in the context of trust and safety (8). The current dominance of English and a few other Global North languages in technology and knowledge systems leads to the marginalisation of Global South languages, impacting data sets used to train AI models (5, 6, 9). This reinforces the need for investments in language technologies that support the diverse linguistic landscape of the majority world, promoting digital inclusion and more equitable access to information and services (2, 5).
- III. **Countering Tech Hegemony:** Scholars and advocates call for vigilance against tech hegemony, where a handful of powerful tech companies, predominantly from the Global North, exert disproportionate influence over the digital landscape (2, 8). This dominance can stifle innovation and limit the choices available to users in the majority world, perpetuating dependence on Western-developed technologies. The GMRC believes that promoting a more diverse and competitive tech ecosystem, with greater participation from majority world actors, is crucial to mitigate the risks of a fragmented internet driven by narrow commercial interests (2, 8).

C] Enabling Greater Innovation

- I. **Harnessing Diverse Perspectives for Problem-Solving:** Research emphasizes that including majority world voices leads to richer, more nuanced understandings of online harms and a broader range of potential solutions (1, 7). The lived experiences and perspectives of majority world users are invaluable in identifying emerging threats, developing culturally relevant interventions, and designing technologies that are truly inclusive (1, 7, 11). The GMRC argues that relying solely on Western-centric viewpoints limits innovation and results in solutions that are inadequate or even harmful in other contexts (1, 3).
- II. **Unlocking the Potential of Local Languages:** Existing literature highlights the immense potential for innovation in developing technologies that support non-English languages (2, 5, 7, 14). As more people from the majority world come online, the demand for digital tools and services in local languages will continue to grow. Investing in machine translation, natural language processing, and other language technologies can unlock economic opportunities, improve access to information, and promote cultural expression in the digital realm (2, 6).
- III. **Meeting Unmet Needs of a Diverse User Base:** There is a lack of comprehensive research and understanding of online harms and user experiences in the majority world (3, 10, 12, 13 15). The GMRC believes that understanding the needs of the Global South can ultimately offer innovations and design practices that benefit the globe, especially considering aspects of gender-based online harm (13, 15, 16 ,17), device sharing practices (13), and adoption of safety features by less tech-savvy users (13).
- IV. **Fostering Inclusive Design and Development:** Researchers from industry, civil society and academia advocate for design and development processes that actively engage with majority world communities, ensuring that technologies are tailored to their specific needs and preferences (2, 3, 5, 6). This includes understanding local social norms, cultural values, and economic realities to create products and services that are relevant, accessible, and empowering (2, 12, 13). Fostering such collaborations can lead to the development of novel solutions that address challenges unique to the majority world, potentially benefiting users globally (11).

Committee Goals

The GMRC is dedicated to the sharing of completed and in-progress research, to the extent possible within confidentiality agreements, and collaborate on new research projects relevant to the community and the topics above. Over three years, the committee aims to:

- Build a community of diverse members with expertise in Global Majority research and practice, trust and safety, ethics, and relevant research methods. We hope to produce a series of talks, papers, and events that illustrate the current state of literature and practices related to the Majority World within the T&S ecosystem.
- We hope to build partnerships with universities, civil society, and industry players to address the challenge of scalable co-design. We will facilitate participatory design workshops and iterative prototyping to outline tools, guidelines, and processes that directly incorporate Global Majority insights into practice.
- Finally, we hope to graduate successful prototypes to industry-wide adoption. We may accomplish this by embedding expertise within T&S-wide policy consultation and review processes, or by other means, with the focus being on doing so in a scalable, sustainable manner.

References

1. Feteih, Nadah, et al. “Advancing Trust & Safety in the Majority World | TechPolicy.Press.” *Tech Policy Press*, 1 May 2024, <https://techpolicy.press/advancing-trust-safety-in-the-majority-world>.
2. Kupfer, Meital, and Jason Muyumba. *Language & Coloniality: Non-Dominant Languages in the Digital Landscape*. White Paper, Pollicy.org, 2022, <https://pollicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Languages-Coloniality-Report.pdf>.
3. Shahid, Farhana, and Aditya Vashistha. “Decolonizing Content Moderation: Does Uniform Global Community Standard Resemble Utopian Equality or Western Power Hegemony?” *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM, 2023, pp. 1–18. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3581538>.
4. Mukherjee, Sujata, et al. “TrustCon 2023 | Workshop Readout: Trust & Safety in the Majority World.” *TrustCon 2023 Workshops*, 11 July 2023,
TrustCon 2023 | Workshop Readout: Trust & Safety in the Majority World
5. Held, William, et al. *A Material Lens on Coloniality in NLP*. arXiv:2311.08391, arXiv, 14 Nov. 2023. arXiv.org, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2311.08391>.
6. Sengupta, Anasuya, et al. “State of the Internet’s Languages Report.” *Internet Languages*, 15 Jan. 2020, <https://internetlanguages.org/en/summary/>.
7. Mukherjee, Sujata, and Nadah Feteih. “TrustCon 2024 | Global Majority Research Salon Debrief.” *TrustCon 2024 Workshops*, 23 July 2024,
[TrustCon 2024] Global Majority Research Salon Debrief.docx
8. Townsend, Beverley, and Arthur Gwagwa. “Authoritarian Alliances and the Politicking of Data in Africa.” *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, Sept. 2023. *tsjournal.org*, <https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v2i1.111>.
9. Nicholas, Gabriel, and Aliya Bhatia. “Toward Better Automated Content Moderation in Low-Resource Languages.” *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, Sept. 2023. *tsjournal.org*, <https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v2i1.150>.

10. Mukherjee, Sujata, and Jan Eissfeldt. "Evaluating the Forces Shaping the Trust & Safety Industry | TechPolicy.Press." *Tech Policy Press*, 25 Sept. 2023,
<https://techpolicy.press/evaluating-the-forces-shaping-the-trust-safety-industry>.
11. Maung, Barani Maung. "When Conflict Goes Online: How T&S Systems Need to Adapt during Crises in the Global Majority | Tech Global Institute." *Tech Global Institute*, 12 Apr. 2024,
<https://techglobalinstitute.com/research/when-conflict-goes-online-how-trust-safety-systems-fall-short-in-handling-crises-in-the-global-majority/>.
12. Houtti, Mohamed, et al. "A Survey of Scam Exposure, Victimization, Types, Vectors, and Reporting in 12 Countries." *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, vol. 2, no. 4, 4, Sept. 2024. *tsjournal.org*,
<https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v2i4.204>.
13. Umbach, Rebecca, et al. "'Your Protection Is in Your Hands Only': User Awareness and Adoption of Privacy and Security Practices in Five Majority World Countries." *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, Sept. 2023. *tsjournal.org*, <https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v2i1.114>.
14. Elswah, Mona. *Moderating Maghrebi Arabic Content on Social Media*. CDT Research Report, Center for Democracy & Technology, 2024,
<https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2024-09-26-CDT-Research-Global-South-Moderating-Report-English-Arabic-final.pdf>.
15. Schoenebeck, Sarita, et al. "Online Harassment in Majority Contexts: Examining Harms and Remedies across Countries." *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM, 2023, pp. 1–16. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3581020>.
16. Morrish, Lydia, et al. "Online Sexual Harassment: Girls and Young Women across Nine Countries Report Facing Harm Online Regularly." *CNN*, 23 July 2024,
<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2024/07/business/online-sexual-harassment-girls-survey-as-equals-intl-cmd/?ref=everythinginmoderation.co>.

17. Hada, Rishav, et al. "Akal Badi Ya Bias: An Exploratory Study of Gender Bias in Hindi Language Technology." *The 2024 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, ACM, 2024, pp. 1926–39. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1145/3630106.3659017>.
18. Alam, Shahidul. "Majority World: Challenging the West's Rhetoric of Democracy." *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 88–98. 001, *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.34.1.I3176027k4q614v5>.
19. Campbell-Stephens, Rosemary M. *Educational Leadership and the Global Majority: Decolonising Narratives*. Springer Nature, 2021.