



Social Media Guidelines

For media professionals & journalists
in Southern Africa

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Address: Arts 1.80 DEV, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK NR4 7TJ
Tel: +44 (0) 1603 593598
Email: info@publicmediaalliance.org
Website: www.publicmediaalliance.org

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Foreword

Social media is an integral part of the output for any contemporary media house. For established media companies to survive and thrive they need to embrace social media platforms as an intrinsic part of their daily editorial, production & commissioning processes.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, are all platforms where your audience will be seeking out information and news stories on a daily basis. Citizens also expect to interact and engage with you there. As a media house, you have to be present and active on the same platforms as your audience. But the key challenge for public and established media houses is not 'if' social media platforms should be used but 'how' they are used.

Most mainstream and public media companies have built their reputations and audiences by providing news and information that is accurate, credible and trusted. Used effectively, social media provides a valuable opportunity for media houses to further develop their established brands and reach. The best way to achieve this is to ensure that social media is used according to the rules and practices of public media journalism.

Social media is central to improving engagement with audiences and can lead to new revenue streams but getting it wrong can be extremely damaging to both reputations and business models alike. Citizens are becoming increasingly sophisticated in terms of their social media use and media houses need not only to 'Keep Up' but 'Keep Ahead' of this trend.

For many years, the Public Media Alliance has produced editorial guidelines for broadcast journalists. Many of these basic rules still apply to social media but it also require new rules and guidance. Remember, these platforms are just the tools, it's down to you how they are used in connection with your brand.

This IPDC project, with support from UNESCO Harare, provided PMA with an opportunity to work with media professionals in southern Africa to develop new guidelines for social media use. These guidelines are aspirational, acting as a suggestion for a set of 'House Rules' that demonstrate to professionals and users that you are aware of the implications of social media use.

Social media use and language will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction as will the laws that apply to its misuse. A clear set of published guidelines will demonstrate to all the standards you wish to set and aid in the protection of media professionals, media companies, & social media users.

We would also like to thank the Director of the UNESCO office in Windhoek Mr. Djaffar Moussa-Elkadhum for his added support and for taking part in the workshop to produce the guidelines.

Sally-Ann Wilson
CEO. Public Media Alliance

Overview

In June 2019, twenty-four journalists and media makers from the Southern African region (Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zimbabwe) gathered in Windhoek, Namibia, to strengthen the capacity of media in their region by creating and adopting a clear plan on the use of social media in news and broadcasting.

They worked collaboratively to develop these detailed, regionally relevant guidelines on aspects of social media coverage that they could use within their organisations. These guidelines were also produced to strengthen the role of the media in Southern Africa and promote the positive use of social media within newsrooms and media organisations.

These guidelines:

- Cover activities on a media organisation's social media sites and external sites by journalists and employees of the organisation.
- Exist to ensure that your social media output is as good as it can be and does not do anyone any harm.
- Serve to protect employees as well as the organisations they work for to facilitate responsible journalism.

Statement & Scope ---

In the digital age it is vital that employees understand the risks – both personally and professionally – when conducting themselves on social media.

Social media guidelines not only protect media organisations, their brand and consistency (e.g. if an employee shares something that damages the organisation's reputation) but should also be designed to protect the employee.

Guidance around etiquette, the improper usage of social media and negotiating disinformation – amongst other challenges – will help the employee embrace the technology for their professional organisation in a safer environment.

As an employee and representative of a trusted media organisation, you are expected to demonstrate best practices and appropriate etiquette on social media.

Best practices

For media organisations and broadcasters, blogs and other forms of online speech are fast becoming the most important forms of communication with audiences.

To maintain the quality and consistency of your brand, any staff member who communicates officially on behalf of your organisation in any social media forum or platform or posts on any of your pages, should be sure to comply with the following:

- Be respectful of the audience. If you would not put it on air or have it printed on the front page, then do not post it online.
- Employees who post content on behalf of their organisation or as part of their jobs must always identify themselves.
- Anyone posting on an organisation's social media sites or any other official social media pages must uphold the values and mission of the organisation and should coordinate with their manager.
- Do not pick arguments online and do be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating or evidencing that you have done so.
- Always add value. Provide information that is worthwhile. Your brand is an important asset. Whatever you publish will affect your brand.
- One needs to be ethical and responsible in social media interactions. (Reflect what the company you work for expects of you.)
- Market your brand: Post about the organisation or relevant content, news and programs.
- Engage the audience and their responses professionally, avoid emotional attachment at all times.
- Trust is built on credibility. Verify anything you post for accuracy.
- Always seek guidance on legal related matters.

Your social media team

Define team roles_____

Who owns which social accounts? Who covers which responsibilities on a daily, weekly or on an as-needed basis?

It might be helpful to include names and e-mail addresses so that employees from other teams know whom to contact. Responsibilities to assign might include:

- *Daily posting and engagement*
- *Daily customer service*
- *Strategy and planning*
- *Advertising*
- *Security and passwords*
- *Monitoring and listening*
- *Approvals (legal, financial or otherwise)*
- *Crisis response*
- *Social media training for other employees*

At the very least, one should establish who is authorised to speak on behalf of your organisation.

User Responsibilities_____

If you are posting to your organisation's social media feeds, you are representing the organisation. Employees who post on any social media sites related to the organisation serve as the face of a company.

Account users are generally responsible for managing and handling communications in both directions and can be involved in various activities such as communications, PR, events, and content creation. As someone who manages the organisation's social media sites you should:

- Set goals to increase brand awareness and increase engagement.
- Plan content and delivery on multiple social media channels.
- Write engaging blog posts and articles.
- Practice using inclusive (gender-aware) vocabulary.

- Form key relationships with influencers across the social media platforms.
- Manage and facilitate social media communities by responding to social media posts and developing discussions.
- Educate other staff on the use of social media and promote its use within your company (in-house roles and rules) on social media.
- Monitor and report on performance of social media platforms.

Private vs Professional

Nothing on the internet is private. Understand that what we say and do could still reflect on the organisation, even if circulated on a seemingly private platform. Take care when setting your privacy preferences.

Do nothing that could undermine credibility, damage your organisation's standing as an impartial source of news, or otherwise hurt their reputation.

- Do not get carried away in your personal social media space. "If your heart and mind are in conflict about it, then do not post it."
- There is a common understanding that journalists are expected to assume responsibility over the content they post and views they express on social media.
- Self-monitor and assume responsibility for your own personal accounts and uphold media ethics or codes of conduct for the media.
- There should be no censorship by media owners towards journalists in the use of social media, in their private capacity.
- If you use social networks for both professional and private activity, then use separate accounts.
- Whilst one can and have the right to post about their lives and their environment, individuals should ensure they don't post negative, or damaging posts.
- All content has a legacy and can be referred to years down the line.
- Editorial employees may not use their positions to promote personal agendas or

causes. Nor should they allow their outside activities to undermine the impartiality of their coverage, in fact or appearance.

- Have a disclaimer attached to your personal accounts that outlines: “My opinions do not reflect that of the company or establishment I am employed at”.
- Think: “When am I me? When am I my employer?”

Remain impartial:

You are entitled to your own viewpoints, but staff should refrain from advocating for political or other polarising issues on organisation-affiliated accounts. This extends to joining online groups.

Do not express personal views on a political or other controversial issue that you could not put on-the-air. Your participation in some online groups via an organisation-affiliated account could imply that you endorse their views. Consider whether you can accomplish your purposes by just observing a group’s activity, rather than becoming a member.

Managing social media

Monitoring Accounts

All of the organisation's social media accounts should be managed and monitored internally. It is important that you read and absorb all online comments or questions and respond where required.

Most people who post on social media channels expect a response so it is vital to know you can see, read and are able to respond across all channels both quickly and accurately, with your editorial values in mind. All social media accounts should be monitored on a regular basis by trained staff for consistency, productivity, effectiveness and personal responsibility.

The objective of monitoring content is to:

- Ensure unsuitable content is not published on a channel associated with your organisation.
- Ensure comments made on posts are clear and appropriate to the content or subject matter of the post in question.
- Safeguard people from expressing their opinions or views that are offensive, gender-insensitive and degrading to others.
- Ensure accuracy with regard to grammar and spelling in comments, in order to facilitate meaning.

You must monitor the content within your pages or feed to avoid potentially unlawful material. For example, content that:

- Condones or encourages unlawful acts.
- Breaches copyright law or encourages others to do so.
- Is defamatory and/or in contempt of court.
- Contributes to hacking or other technical disruption to online services and presents access to safety problems.

Appropriate & Inappropriate Content_____

It is inappropriate to bring the station into disrepute, or to damage another person's reputation. Similar principles apply to social media as do on-air, broadcasting and print media.

- Do not post messages, images and other multimedia that could potentially be perceived as bullying, defamatory or offensive.
- Use common sense: if you wouldn't be happy to say the contents of your post to a crowd of people in the same room, don't publish it! (Or, even if you might say it under such circumstances, think about how what you're saying could be perceived.)
- Posts, comments and multimedia uploads on social media sites are public, and not always appropriate for private conversations or sharing personal details with your friends.
- If you are criticised online, try to respond with respect for the other person and be understanding of their perspective. If you are unclear on what action to take, contact your manager.

Postings should be removed if they:

- Are considered likely to provoke, attack or offend others, or incite violence.
- Are racist, sexist, homophobic, sexually explicit, abusive or otherwise objectionable.
- Contain swear words or other language likely to seriously offend.
- Break the law or condone or encourage unlawful activity.
- Are seen to impersonate someone else.
- Describe or encourage activities that could endanger the safety or well-being of others.
- Contain objectionable material that has been posted by or about a vulnerable person/s.
- Contain any content that may be considered as spam (Links to external websites are permitted so long as they are not deemed to be links to disinformation, clickbait, unsuitable material).

Web pages are classed as unsuitable if it contains, or directly links to material such as:

- Pornographic and sexually explicit content
- Text and images likely to offend people
- Hate sites (on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or hate crime)
- Gratuitous violence
- Harmful to adults or children-at-risk

Public Engagement_____

What started as a way for friends to connect online, evolved into a broadcasting platform, and is now a place for brands to provide personalised, human experiences with their audience and customers. Social media is as much about engagement with other people as it is about sharing content.

It can be a great opportunity to start conversations, gather data, and consult a very wide audience. It can also be a cost-efficient way of connecting with your audience, at a time that suits them, and you, over a long period. It is important to carefully plan how social media can help your public engagement strategy and to consider how to use it responsibly, safely and inclusively.

Remember: Posts with more active and thoughtful interactions will get more reach.

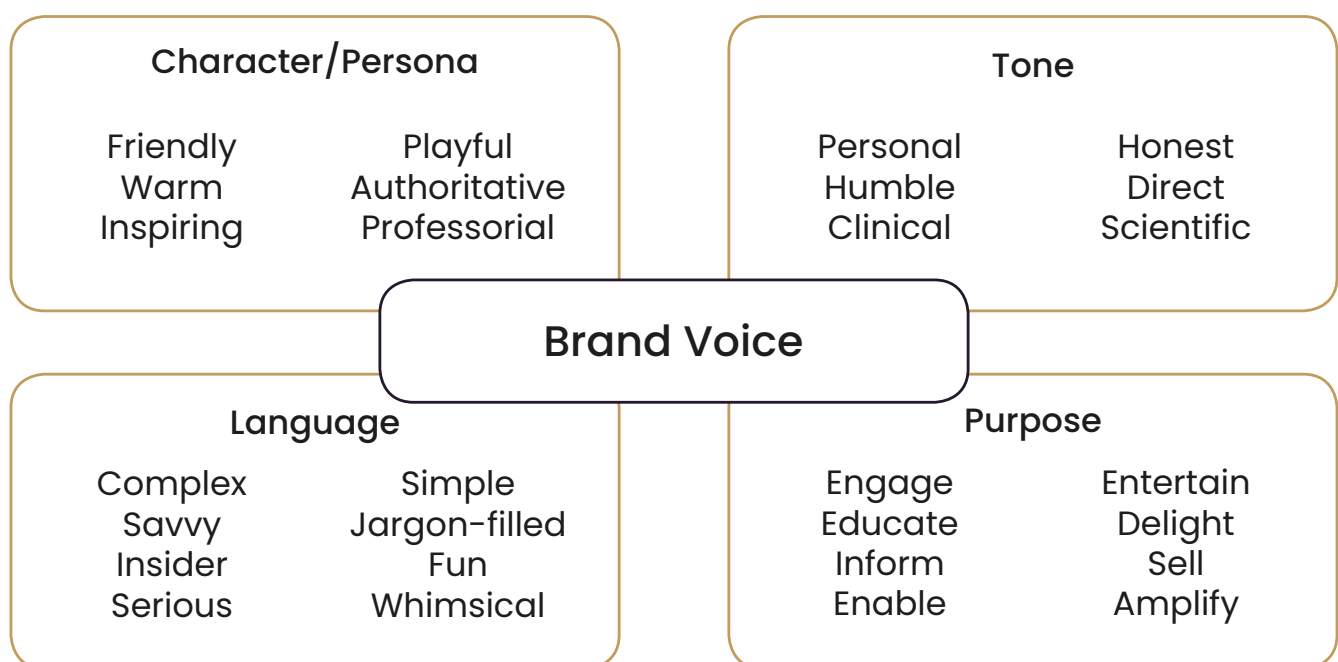
Remember: Social media is highly participatory, and dissemination is very fast.

You should:

- Use social media to learn from your audiences and community about how you can improve their experience.
- Invite discussion, create polls and ask for audience feedback or input.
- Always treat others with respect on social media.
- Provide timely feedback to queries – you can add an auto reply that will acknowledge a post and give assurance that you will attempt to respond as quickly as possible.

- If the criticism is especially aggressive or inconsiderate, it's probably best to refrain from responding.
- Journalists have the right to mute or block people on social media who are threatening or abusive (but avoid muting or blocking people for mere criticism of you or your reporting).
- If a member of the public questions or criticises your work or a social media post, and you would like to respond, be thoughtful. Do not imply that the person hasn't carefully read or viewed your work.
- If you feel threatened by someone on social media, please inform your supervisors immediately.
- Data privacy: Inform the public how you are going to handle their private information.

Develop your social media voice by considering character/persona, tone, language and purpose:



Adapted from four-part formula suggested by Stephanie Schwab, [Social Media Explorer](#)

Think before you post

Speed vs accuracy, quality vs quantity?

Access and participation are key to the success of social media. But this also makes it easy to respond to or share content before you have thought through the consequences to your own credibility and that of your organisation.

Try to be the first with accurate information, otherwise it's better to be the last but with all facts right.

"Fake news"

So called "fake news", disinformation and misinformation are again proving profitable and carrying weight. This flowering of fabricated stories corrodes trust in the media in general. Therefore, fact-checking and improved media literacy is important.

What is defined as "fake news"?

The phrase refers to disinformation or misinformation; content, stories or hoaxes created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers.

The Rise of Fake News

Fake news is nothing new. Traditionally we got our news from trusted sources, journalists and media outlets that are required to follow strict codes of practice. However, the internet has enabled a whole new way to publish, share and consume information with very little regulation or editorial standards. Social media sites can play a big part in increasing the reach of such content, with sources of information being less obvious or harder to find.

Types of Fake News

There are differing opinions when it comes to identifying types of fake news. However, when it comes to evaluating content online there are various types of disinformation, we need to be aware of. These include:

- **Propaganda**
Stories that are created to deliberately mislead audiences, promote a biased point of view or particular political cause or agenda.

- **Misleading Headings/Headlines**

Stories that are not completely false can be distorted using misleading or sensationalist headlines. Such content can spread quickly on social media sites where only headlines and small snippets of the full article are displayed on audience newsfeeds.

- **Biased News**

Many people are drawn to content that confirm their own beliefs or biases, with many producers developing content to deliberately feed these points of views. Social media newsfeeds are largely generated on algorithms generated according to personalised searches and previously shared or read content.

- **Satire and Parody**

Websites and social media accounts that publish fake news stories for entertainment and parody also have their followers.

- **Clickbait**

These include deliberately fabricated stories used to gain more website visitors and increase advertising revenue for websites. Clickbait stories use sensationalist headlines to grab attention and drive click-throughs to the publisher's website, normally at the expense of truth or accuracy.



A number fact checking services and websites have set up in recent years

How to spot fake news?

- Take a closer look.
- Check the source of the story, do you recognise the website? Is it a credible and reliable source?

- If you are unfamiliar with the website, look in the 'about' section or find out more information about the author.
- Look beyond the headline – read the whole story, check sources, sensationalist rhetoric and inconsistencies.
- Often the headlines of fake news and clickbait articles are entirely in caps and use exclamation points.
- Check other sources: Are other reputable news or media outlets reporting on the story? Are there any sources in the story? If so, check whether they are reliable or if they exist.
- Fake news stories often contain incorrect dates or altered timelines. Check when the article was published – is it current or an old news story?
- Check your biases: are your own views or beliefs affecting your judgement of a report?
- Is it a joke? Satirical sites are popular online and sometimes it is not always clear whether a story is just a joke or parody, especially if you have only seen the headline via social media. Check the website – is it known for satire or creating funny stories?

Transparency & Accountability_____

The traditional principles of journalism such as accuracy, balance, credibility, information verification and accountability are challenged by the rise of social media.

Therefore, traditional news media should go out of their way to demonstrate where they source information from and how they have arrived at their conclusions. That does not mean having to give up all sources, but to do what is possible to avoid any impression of biased reporting that might stem from a conflict of interest.

- The media needs to take responsibility for its reporting.
- The Media is a transparency business and you need to be open about who you are and what you do.
- On your personal blog or social media profile, make it clear that any opinions you express are your own.

- When you post comments do so under your real name – be transparent.
- If you tweeted an error or something inappropriate and wish to delete the tweet, be sure to quickly acknowledge the deletion in a subsequent tweet.

“Values, trust, worthiness, reliability... Good hearts”

Child Protection

The worldwide spread of social media is changing the forms and rules of social relations, the boundaries of private and public spheres, and the definition of privacy and its protection. When reflecting on children’s rights in the digital age you must:

- Always use age-appropriate language in your communications and ensure all your communications are relevant to the work of the programme you’re involved in.
- Use organisational accounts to communicate with children and young people via e-mail or social media, never personal accounts.
- Use a mobile or tablet belonging to the organisation to communicate with young people, where possible.
- Understand how different social media platforms work and what their age limits are – for example you should never use Facebook to communicate with under-13 year-olds.
- Always ask children and parents if you want to take and/or share photos of a child for any purpose.
- Be careful to assess the impacts when dealing with children who may lack the judgment required to consent to interviews and publication of their information.
- When contacting children through their Facebook or other public sites, follow the standards set for children’s participation applicable to all other platforms.
- No child should be displayed in a compromising manner. If incidents involving children are reported, blur or distort the face.
- Ensure the protection of children and their relatives by not naming – refer to your editorial guidelines.

Younger audiences

When dealing with younger audiences one needs to be multimedia savvy. You need to be versatile and remain relevant. The packaging of content must be considered:

- It should be appealing and engaging to them as well as place focus on use of language, text and tone.
- The use of influencers could also assist in relaying messages to younger audiences.
- Package stories in a way that would appeal to the younger audience without losing value.
- Journalists need to pay attention to detail to avoid mistakes and losing audiences.
- Merge technology (new media/social media) with traditional practices to find balance and maintain delivery in changing times.
- Use younger people as sources and treat them with the same respect and importance as others. Be inclusive and aware of different experiences by being diligent of when and when not to use collective nouns such as “teenagers” or “adolescents”.

Elections

Activists and governments alike have turned to social media as a new form of political mobilisation and an opportunity to reshape political engagement.

Even though different codes of ethics, different media laws and different cultural traditions exist throughout the region, journalists should be guided by generally-accepted principles summed up as:

- Tell the truth
- Be independent
- Strive for impartiality
- Avoid harm to self and others
- Be accountable
- Passwords & safety
- Verify facts and sources for accuracy

Breaking news & crisis reporting

During different crisis events information infrastructures may be affected, shut down altogether and traditional media outlets may have considerable difficulties in getting to locations and verifying information. Verification of information is one of the cornerstones of journalism.

With the deluge of information that social media can produce, information verification is a real challenge and social media content, especially images, are treated with particular caution for use in news. You must consider:

- Your criteria for running breaking news on social media, online and on-air.
- What the community needs to know?
- Is there a public safety issue or risk?
- Who are the stakeholders involved?
- Evaluate the story from a broad perspective to ensure the team is providing the most relevant content with context.
- Determine how your coverage can inform and alert the public without causing panic or unnecessary alarm.
- Be factual and resist speculation.
- When using social media, it is important not to say anything that would not be acceptable on-air.
- Broadcasting live, whether on air or via social media, carries special risks – do you have procedures to avoid putting people at risk while broadcasting live?
- Vet all user-generated content including calls, pictures, video and information before publishing it on social media.
- Avoid quick tweets or posts. Consider the harm caused by reporting names of victims of injury or death before loved ones have been properly notified.
- When in doubt, do not report.

Keeping secure

Passwords

It is important to keep your accounts secure and your information safe. If you take the right steps, you can secure your social media accounts from unwelcome hackers. Apart from not writing your password down, here are some best practices to follow:

- **Choose a strong password**
A strong password should include numbers, symbols and capital letters
- **Change your passwords often**
You should change your passwords at least four times a year and when an employee leaves the organisation.
- **Use two-factor authentication**
This is the best way to keep an account secure. Some social media accounts automatically require two-factor authentication when you log in with a new device.
- **Inspect page roles and who has access to accounts**
Along with changing passwords often, you should always know who has access to your accounts.

While you want to limit the number of people with access to your accounts, more than one person should know the password. If only one person has access to an account and they're fired, it will be a hassle regaining control of the account.

Most social media platforms allow you to add administrators or managers to the same organisation's profile. In this way you can protect your page's account information but allow others to access through their own account.

- **Keep your information offline**
It is very easy to let your username, email and password slip up on the Internet. To avoid having your information on the Internet, ensure you sign out of your accounts when you're done, removing any permission of applications once you are done using them.

Do not copy and paste your password.

Safety online

Safety and security online are important for all users, but especially for journalists in the field conducting difficult and sometimes dangerous reporting.

Journalists are susceptible to a number of risks:

- In countries where freedom of expression is limited and oppressive regimes target journalists.
- Newsrooms can fall victim to phishing attempts by malicious hackers.
- Online news sites can be taken down by DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks.
- Journalists' data can be at risk from cyber-attacks.
- Online trolling, harassment and abuse.

Journalists are often encouraged and sometimes required to promote their work and interact with audiences online. But audience engagement can have unintentional repercussions as some people use Twitter, Facebook and other online platforms to attack journalists.

Recent research by the [International Federation of Journalists](#) (2018, IFJ) showed that almost two-thirds of women journalists have been subjected to online abuse.

News organisations should develop a protocol and procedures to protect and support their staff when using online platforms. This should include:

- Educating staff on the different forms of harassment & abuse
- Understanding what is acceptable and what is not
- How to address the harassment
- A process of reporting online harassment and keeping a log of it.
- Managerial investigations into any form of harassment or abuse against their staff

Managerial support and protection for staff by using free tools like :

- [Project Shield](#) which helps protect news sites from DDoS attacks.
- [Digital Attack Map](#), a data visualisation of DDoS attacks around the globe.
- [Password Alert](#) helps protect and defend against password phishing attempts.

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