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# ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE JOURNALISM



1. As a general principle, online journalism must respect all professional ethics and core values of journalism, irrespective of the forum or format it uses.  
In particular, information published by online media must be
  - Accurate and fact-based;
  - Verified and published without sensationalism;
  - Published without intent to do harm to others;
  - Inclusive of all relevant points of view and impartial;
  - Transparent in origin of content and methods of journalism used.

Online journalists and media should always be aware that the systematic republication of third-party content, without verifying its veracity, may seriously undermine the integrity and credibility of online media and journalism, and can lead to infringements of intellectual property rights.

2. The specifics and special sensitivities of online publication and use of the Internet and technological tools such as mobile devices requires online media and journalists to take into account the following norms and guidelines.
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## **PRINCIPLES RELATED TO THE SPECIFICS OF ONLINE PUBLICATIONS**

3. Journalists and media should always respect the dignity, reputation and privacy of individuals. This cardinal principle assumes added importance in online publications due to serious harm that the latter may cause to the legitimate interests of third parties
4. The editors or operators of websites should not publish any material online, written or visual, that incites hatred or violence, or causes direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of gender, age, marital status, language, physical or mental disabilities, sexual orientation, political conviction, religion, or ethnic or social status.
5. Forums dedicated primarily to children and young adults should be monitored with special care and attention, including for the purpose of preventing cyber bullying and the publication of malicious content with intention to do harm to others.
6. There should be a clear distinction between editorial content and forums reserved for user generated content. Editors should be aware that they are ethically and, potentially, also legally liable for content generated by third parties published on their website.
7. Care should be exercised to ensure that hyperlinks used in website content do not direct users to other sites that contain deliberately harmful and false information or that do not respect the Journalism Code of Ethics.

## **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

8. Editors or website operators should monitor their websites (and their respective social media pages) and take measures to prevent or stop publication of content that is unlawful, or violates human dignity or privacy, or constitutes hate speech. Where possible such monitoring should be prior to publication.
  9. Hate speech is understood as speech intended to generate intense hatred or is incitement to actual violence or discrimination against individuals or
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groups, especially minorities of all kinds. Staff responsible for moderation of comments should be properly trained in the basics of relevant national legislation and international standards on protection of vulnerable groups.

10. Editors and website operators should adopt and prominently publish on their websites their third-party content management policies, and the rules that users must follow to add comments or other content to their pages. These rules should clearly define permissible third-party content, treatment of anonymous comments, and complaint/notification procedures for violations of website policies or the law.
  11. Content management policies should clearly indicate what kind of monitoring of user generated content the website applies (prior, ex post etc) and what technologies are used for this purpose. The editors or operators should use, whenever possible, available filters or other technologies to prevent the publication of insulting language or other easily identifiable and inappropriate content.
  12. Editors or website operators should make available to users a simple mechanism to report third-party content that users consider unlawful or in violation of website policies.
  13. With respect to comments that constitute hate speech, endanger the safety or physical integrity of individuals, or may cause other serious violations of human rights, editors and website operators must make use of effective mechanisms to identify and disable such content as expediently as possible.
  14. Editors and website operators shall act immediately to investigate and remove unacceptable content as soon as they become aware of it. They shall act on their own volition (even in the absence of a complaint by affected persons or other parties) and shall respond immediately upon receipt of a legitimate complaint.
  15. In cases when editors or website operators do not engage in prior, general moderation of third-party content, they may nevertheless consider establishing a system of prior or expedited moderation for specific topics that may generate a significant amount of extreme or inappropriate commentary. In appropriate cases they may block third-party content and comments altogether.
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16. Editors and operators should have in place special policies and mechanisms for the identification and expeditious takedown of sexual content or non-consensual intimate images (photographs, video, etc.) in view of their especially serious impact on the privacy and dignity of the affected persons.
  17. The above guidelines are also valid, to the extent they may be applicable, for the media outlets' social media pages, taking special account of the potential impact of those publications. In addition, media should be aware of and comply with the policies and mechanisms set up by social networks to prevent or stop unlawful publications on their respective platforms.

## **NOTICE AND TAKE-DOWN PROCEDURES**

18. Editors or website operators should adopt effective mechanisms for reviewing public complaints or reports about material that may be unlawful or in violation of website policies. Complainants should receive confirmation that their notices are being considered.
  19. As a rule, editors or operators should take action on complaints as soon as possible and no later than within 48 hours. Exceptionally, this timeline may be extended in cases that are especially complex from a legal or ethical perspective.
  20. Editors may temporarily disable contested content in cases that require further consideration. Whenever possible and provided the relevant third-party content is not manifestly illegal, editors should make efforts to contact the author of such content, inviting them to provide their views on the received complaint. Editors may reinstate any disabled content if they are satisfied that it is accurate and lawful.
  21. Editors should treat anonymous third-party content with particular care. Anonymity is a right to be extended to people in special circumstances (children, for instance, or victims of violence or other vulnerable groups). Normally editors and web-site operators should expect all contributors to be transparent and to provide a legitimate contact point. They may block for a period of time, or permanently, users (anonymous or not) who engage in repeated violations of community guidelines, or may subject them to pre-publication moderation.
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22. Editors may establish rules banning the use of comment space by commercial entities or for lucrative motives, as well as the use of indirect or hidden advertising on the same space.

## **ON USE OF THIRD-PARTY CONTENT OBTAINED FROM SOCIAL MEDIA OR PROVIDED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

23. Personal photographs, videos or written material published on social media are also considered to be in the public domain, and their use by the mass media exposes them to a potentially wider audience. Media should take into consideration the impact of using of such personal material and information, especially in relation to tragic events. Copyright-related implications should also be considered.
24. Photographs and video taken from social media should be carefully scrutinized and verified to establish their authenticity.
25. The facility of obtaining images from social networks or personal pages does not exempt media from their duty of care. The public interest in publication of such information should be weighed against privacy rights and protection of minors. The publication of images on social media should not lead to an assumption of consent of the original source for republication in other platforms or by the mass media.
26. Media should always be alert to the dangers of publishing images showing unlawful or anti-social behavior. Media should exercise caution to ensure that they do not become a vehicle for the promotion or justification of illegality in general, and organized crime in particular.

## **ONLINE ARCHIVES, REPUBLICATION OF THIRD-PARTY CONTENT**

27. Online media should, to the fullest extent possible, maintain online archives of their published content. Permanent archive materials contribute to the preservation of the historical record and should be redacted or taken down only in exceptional circumstances, such as when ordered to do so by a court, or when ongoing publication may seriously endanger the wellbeing
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of children or the physical and psychological integrity of vulnerable individuals, or if the original publication was inaccurate or suffered from serious ethical lapses. As a rule, every redaction should be accompanied by an explanation on the same page. Editors may opt for anonymization of sources instead of takedown of the relevant content where this is appropriate.

28. The principles of the Code of Ethics on compliance with copyright (article 15) apply fully to online publications. The repeated republication of content and other material produced by other media, without their permission or appropriate attribution is a violation of copyright and considered a serious infringement of journalistic ethics. Furthermore, any quotation (fair use) of third-party content should clearly indicate the source/author of the material and comply with other requirements of copyright law.

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