

ORF - Social Media Guidelines

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Prologue

“Don’t do anything stupid” – simple as that.

This rule regarding the use of social media imposed the BBC upon their journalists. It’s better to think twice than regretting a post afterwards. The informal tone of voice of this medium tempts one to be uncouth. Nevertheless, we are not only perceived as private persons on social media; we are also recognised and perceived as ORF employees. One who advocates its personal political opinion on the web might cause the questioning of one’s journalistic independency and objectivity. Our social media guidelines are recommendations for everyone who uses the virtual reality – regardless of business or private sphere. This recommendation was compiled by the editorial staff representatives and shouldn’t be seen as issuing a gag order on you. It should be rather perceived as the opposite! Those guidelines should encourage being an active, but responsible member of the social media network communities.

Those guidelines are recommendations and no commands. Everyone is responsible for their own behaviour on the internet.

The web 2.0 has also an impact on journalism; in particular how we produce and communicate. News websites are not only promoted through Google anymore; social media platforms link through recommendations the audience to news websites. Such recommendations from friends inherit a huge credibility, even though those friendships are only virtually. Furthermore, social media gives us the opportunity to reach the young generation with our stories.

These guidelines have been formulated by: Riedl Christophg, FD 8; Frank Bernhard, OD 2; Lorenz-Dittlbacher Marielouise, FI 1; Bornemann Dieterm FI 1; Stindl Gudrun, HO3; Wu Hans, FI9;

We thought through all kind of settings and concluded 10 important guidelines. Since the social media networks are constantly developing, those guidelines are just a matrix and will adapt to any important changes. Due to that, recommendations, indications and critics are not just welcomed, they are desired!

Dieter Bornemann

Council of editors

1. On the internet you are not just a private person, you are perceived as an ORF employee!

Every post on social media networks like Facebook create a so called “user image”. Everyone has to bear in mind that everything you do on the internet leaves tracks. Those tracks are available for a long time and are sometimes impossible to delete. “What image is created through my posts?” “How am I; especially how is my professional occupation perceived because of my posts on the internet?” Before one publishes anything on the web or contributes on social media networks, one has to ask oneself those questions. It is difficult to draw a distinct line between work and private sphere which makes the situation quite tricky.

It might be helpful to consider the fact that one is always perceived as an ORF employee on the internet. This thought process might hinder posting particular content on the web. This is particularly crucial when it comes to expression of opinion about colleagues or managers on social media.

Generally speaking, it is a necessity and wise to separate private and business sphere. However, this separation can be fairly difficult on the web. The informal characteristics of social media platforms create blurred lines. In reality a distinct and radical division (for example through 2 separate accounts) is not accomplishable. Therefore, one should follow certain guidelines even when using social media in the private sphere.

2. Be concerned about YOUR and the ORF reputation!

Negative comments about ORF services, your colleagues and any kind of updates about your current motivation to work, are an absolute “No Go”. Additionally, be careful when it comes to posts about competitors. It is acceptable to write: “XYZ has an interesting and great documentary”. However, other comments could destroy the business reputation: “XYZ has a far better election campaign report than ORF.” Those messages and comments on the internet could follow with employment right and legal consequences.

It’s your right to have an opinion! The freedom of sharing and expressing your opinion is of great importance. This freedom shouldn’t be restricted or hindered. Opinions based on proven facts possess a high position in the public discourse. However, crude, exaggerated and emotional comments and posts are dispensable. One should always think twice before publishing anything on social media. Moreover, if one has only the slightest hint of doubt that the public can misinterpret the shared and published content, one should not publish, because there are plenty of people who can copy and paste the information and use it (maybe against them). On this way messages which are actually only meant for your social media friends might be shared with non-friends who don’t perceive your post as friendly as you might have intended.

Examples:

- Images which are not meant for the public eg. Christmas Parties, office parties, birthday parties
- Insulting statements
- Sexual preferences are generally only meant for the private sphere!

3. Don't do anything which can harm your journalistic credibility!

According to the ORF- guidelines, all political and economic involvements which could result in the public doubting ORF's independency have to be avoided. In regards to supporting online petitions or initiatives, ORF employees have to be really careful, because they might feel self-conscious or embarrassed reporting about it. ORF employees have to be careful in the areas of politics, economy and in regards to NGOs.

"Think first" is the most important thing. The public might perceive it as strange when they see a politician or home affairs reporter participating in a political demonstration. This may lead in the public questioning the reporter's independency and credibility; especially, when the journalist has to report about the event at a later stage. The key to avoid misunderstandings is precaution. Everyone has got the right to have an opinion; so do ORF journalists. However, the public has the right on objective, independent and balanced news coverage, which shouldn't be questions due to the journalists sharing its personal opinion publicly.

Example:

- Initiatives regarding the abolishment of the federal armed forces, topic abortion
- Lobbying, press advocates

4. Be careful regarding political and economic “friendships”

In general, social media pages of politicians, corporations, rating agencies, market researchers, opinion researchers and others are public. In other words, you don’t have to become “Facebook friends” with them, in order to view the content and activities. On the other hand, this doesn’t apply to Twitter. Following someone, for example, a politician on Twitter, is equivalent to being “friends” with them; therefore, might leads to questions regarding your personal objectivity.

It is really important to be careful when it comes to real life friendships with politicians, political party advocates, business people, press advocates and decision makers. A practical advice: pay attention to balance and comparativeness on your personal social media account. From the public’s perspective there is a difference if one is only friends with one representative of one party, NGO or religious community or being friends with different advocates and members of different groups.

Examples:

- If an employee of the home affairs editorial department is mainly Facebook friends with advocates and member of one party, the public might start questioning the editors objectivity
- An editorial employee of the health magazine is Facebook friends with press advocates of pharmaceutical companies; this could result in the impression of being biased regarding certain topics.

5. Don't publish information which you don't want to be associate with in a couple of years!

Social media platforms are based on the present of its users – snapshots and comments are uploaded and given instantly. Actuality is the most important characteristic of Twitter, Facebook and co. However, once published the information stays there for many years and can always be associated with the publisher. The created image on the internet is not only created by the user but also through complex logistics of search engines; in other words, a lot is interpretation. In the end the perspective of the searcher is all that matters. Searchers could be the audience, interview partners, press advocates and editors.

Recommendation: You constantly should re-evaluate and question your created social media image. Could someone misinterpret my posted opinion? How can the picture of the funny private party be misunderstood? It is crucial to bear in mind not to leave space for double meanings and misinterpretations. The careful handling of personal and private information on the web can save you tedious deleting of information.

Examples:

- Pay attention to “time bombs”: Only a few people can say today where they will work in a couple of years’ time; statement which appear to be harmless today might have some negative outcomes in a couple of years’ time.

6. Social media platforms are tools not toys!

The importance of using social media in terms of journalistic activities is growing. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are a great tool to get information about people, groups, actions and communities. Additionally, social media platforms allow you to keep contact with the above mentioned groups. In the business sphere research is in the foreground. It is important to remember that the information presented on the internet doesn't have to be true and accurate. There is no guaranty for authenticity.

The interactivity and direct engagement of users is the main characteristic of social media networks. Playful components like chats, posts and picture comments, allow direct engagement and interactivity on social media. The lines between journalistic information (which is associated with professional added value) and private information is blurred; so called grey zone of social media.

Recommendation: Don't publish anything on social media which you wouldn't say at a podiums-discussion.

7. Engage with our users and audience!

Social media gives us the opportunity to directly engage with our audience in a way which hasn't been possible before. We are able to announce program schedules, content and receive instant feedback for it.

Being able to promote content or guests brings a lot of responsibility with it. Furthermore, through social media we can research and find out what our audience is interested in. Additionally, it is not enough to only seek information and get the feedback from the internet; many reactions need to be dealt with and answered. It is crucial to be responsive towards critics and to answer questions. This leads to more work, however, also bigger usage and opportunities.

The main threat which comes from using social media are "hate-postings". Hate postings appear in debates about the ORF. It is crucial to constantly check your account, in order to be able to react quickly to hate-posts. Generally speaking, you can try to prevent hate posts, by not discussing certain topics on the internet.

The interaction with followers and friends should be executed with a friendly tone of voice (the one we use when we are out and about with an ORF camera or microphone).

8. Pay attention to your privacy settings!

All social media operators offer privacy settings, in order to secure the customers privacy. ORF recommends using this tool. You should familiarise yourself with the privacy settings and see what is the most appropriate to you. It is important to read through the privacy setting guidelines in order to not agree with the operator even though you don't agree with the regulations of the settings. Facebook and Google+ offer you in their privacy settings to make content only visible for particular people. You can find an instruction regarding setting up your privacy settings on this link: <https://www.facebook.com/help/safety>

9. Stay polite!

In this particular kind of virtual communication one has to make use of the “netiquette”. “Netiquette” has been formulated by many social media platforms in order to secure polite manners on the internet. Basically, this means to be nice on the internet as you are in reality. You as ORF employees are perceived as part of the communication industry, it is crucial to stick to the polite tone of voice. Please bear in mind you should always practice the polite tone of voice, even though you might think you are not being recognised as an ORF employee.

10. Property is property – even on the internet

As a journalist you have to protect the copy right laws. Although content sharing on social media is wanted, you have to watch out not publish images or videos, which are not made by you or which you haven't got the rights to.