



# SOCIAL MEDIA Ethics & Etiquette

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## **Disclaimer**

The contents of this guide are meant to be a compilation of best practices pertaining to social media ethics and etiquette. This guide is by no means an exhaustive list, and is a set of generally recommended guiding principles, rather than sole or comprehensive authority on online behaviour.

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## Introduction

The Internet is a wonderful tool that provides access to communication and information, and has made our lives simpler. The emergence of social networks has provided a great way to interact with people regardless of whether it's for business or socializing, and has given ordinary people a voice and the ability to express themselves freely. This is why one must abide by a social code when using social media, which should make the experience pleasant and safe for everyone. It is, therefore, important to be aware of the ethics and etiquette that comprise the code of ethics and etiquette that govern social media. Social Media Etiquette or netiquette is essentially a loose and continuously evolving set of rules governing online communication behavior. It addresses maintaining one's own and others' dignity, respect and privacy. As in offline behavior, abiding by etiquette and ethics online pays off in the long run.

## Best Practice

A best practice is classified as a method or technique which shows results superior to those achieved with other means, and can be used as a benchmark. The following tips should help with a pleasant, safe and enriching social media experience:

- In order to get respect from others, it is essential to give respect to them. It helps to be cordial and respectful as it allows for meaningful and positive engagement.
- If engagement with a person on a social network heats up, do not be too quick to react. Take a break by moving away from your keyboard to calm down lest you say something you might regret later.

- It is important to remember that whatever you write, post or share, will be seen by others. So think twice before tweeting or posting on Facebook. Even if you delete it, there are chances that someone might have taken a screenshot.
- Read your tweets, posts, messages etc carefully before clicking the send button. Sometimes messages are lost in translation or may be taken in the wrong context.
- It helps to engage with people who tag you in tweets. However there is no stipulation which requires you to reply to hostile, abusive or obnoxious tweets.
- If you can't engage with followers, do not favorite their tweets either as it can be interpreted as condescending behaviour. If you can take the time to favorite a tweet, you could perhaps take some time out to reply.
- It is always polite to attribute quotes properly.
- It is not mandatory to reply to everyone in a thread if they are not active participants.
- Do not use social media for venting anger. It may attract negative attention.
- Be direct when engaging with people instead of sub tweeting (indirectly tweeting something about someone without mentioning their name.) It is considered rude and underhanded.
- Do not live tweet movies or TV shows as it may ruin the experience for others.
- Do not quote others unless the statements are public. If there is an off the record conversation, it must not be tweeted/shared.
- If you are sharing a link or a tweet, do give credit to the source.

- Do not post pictures of people at public events, unless you have their permission.
- It is good practice and good manners to thank people who retweet your Tweets.
- Add value to conversations taking place on Facebook, Twitter or a Blog. It is essential to remain to the point, rather than beating about the bush. However if there is an urgent need to talk about an unrelated issue, you may use email, Facebook Inbox, a DM or via new thread if it is on a forum.
- It is highly inappropriate to “like” Facebook updates announcing death or major illness/injury. An appropriate comment is more suitable in such a situation.
- Do not make rash judgments when you interact with people on public forums. There is a difference between Online and Offline interaction.
- Separate your professional life from your personal life on Twitter/Facebook as it may give your professional acquaintances a bad impression.
- If someone has given you a Follow Friday recommendation (#FF), make sure you thank them.
- Thank all those who RT your tweets. Small gestures help you go a long way.
- Do not try to add friends to Facebook even if you have interacted with them. It is polite to ask for their consent, before sending the friend request.
- Do not send friend requests to strangers on Facebook especially if you have had limited interaction with them on a Facebook Page/Group.
- Do not attack people based on their gender, ethnicity, orientation, etc.

- Make sure you know about the fine line between stalking and lurking. Harassing a person, sending inappropriate messages, liking all their posts, adding Tweets to your Favorite list will place you in the stalker category.
- Do not use the layer of anonymity afforded by social media accounts to attack people. It helps to be you without being rude and obnoxious.

## Annoying Behavior

Certain types of behaviour on social media, many a time even innocent behaviour, can be annoying or irritating for others. The following tips should help avoid such behaviour and maintain your friends and followers.

- One of the worst ways of alienating your audience is to tag them in unnecessary tweets to get attention. Always keep the tagging relevant and thoughtful.
- Twitter is not meant to be used as a chat room. Focus on quality, not the quantity of tweets. Restrict all private conversations to direct messages (DMs).
- Tweeting incessantly is not recommended as it can flood your followers’ Timelines causing annoyance and/or loss of interest.
- Social Networks are a great place to share your thoughts, but do take care not to overdo it. There is no need for you to constantly inform people about your activities.
- The hashtag feature on Instagram should not be abused to promote your pictures or get more likes on Instagram. It is appropriate to limit your hashtags. Too many hashtags is perceived as a sign of desperation and is frowned upon.
- It is in bad taste to tag someone in a humiliating post or picture.

- Promote others with RTs rather than yourself.
- Forcing others to follow back or Retweet your post is best avoided. However, one can request people to RT a post if they like what they have read.
- Do not add people to groups on Facebook unless you have their permission. The same rule applies to Facebook messaging where multiple people are added to group chat without their permission.
- If you follow someone on twitter, do not request them to follow you back or expect them to do so. The best way to get them to follow you is to engage with them till they notice you.
- If a friend has shared pictures of family members, do not make inappropriate comments.
- If you want to promote yourself on a Social Network, try not to overdo it as it may make you look narcissistic. Any tweet which is posted more than three times in a single day falls in that category.
- Try not to tag your friends in posts on Twitter and FB unless you have their permission. Posts with multiple people tagged in it get a lot of traffic and can be distracting because of comment notifications.
- Stealing tweets verbatim and quoting them as your own is unethical and frowned upon.
- If someone gives you a Follow Friday recommendation on twitter in a list, do not reply to all as it will only lead to a lot of noise. Simply thank the person individually.
- Hijacking twitter hashtags to plug something unrelated is not looked upon favorably. Try and stay on topic instead of adding something unrelated.
- Adopt a wait and see approach when you tweet breaking news. The

best suggestion is to confirm the news before you tweet it.

- Tweeting in all Caps denotes shouting, and best avoided.
- If you are a LinkedIn user, be responsive to referrals or links. Let the party know whether you can entertain their request or decline. It pays to be polite.
- Do not modify a tweet to change its meaning. Modifying a tweet to make it look like someone is saying something different to what they intended is unethical.

## Gender Sensitivity

Gender sensitivity means being aware of the ways people think about gender, so that individuals rely less on assumptions about traditional and outdated views on the roles of men and women. Being gender sensitive is important such that inappropriate remarks/behaviour, and the resultant unpleasant consequences, are avoided.

- Do not 'poke' acquaintances or strangers on Facebook as it can make them feel uncomfortable. Due to cultural sensitivities in our society, one should especially refrain from 'poking' women.
- Never allow an argument to degenerate into an attack based on gender.
- Do not hijack gender issues and invert them to represent issues related to a different gender.
- If a woman is not comfortable with a man being in her online space, or vice versa, leave them alone.
- It is not advisable to share or promote Misogynist/ Misandric Tweets/Posts on Social Networks.
- If you are at an event, whether public or private, do not share photos

of people on social networks unless you have their consent, as doing so would constitute invasion of privacy. Given the Pakistani cultural context, be extra vigilant with photographs of women.

- Repeated follow or friendship requests on a Protected Twitter Account/ Facebook are considered harassment. Harassing women in such a manner is insensitive and seriously frowned upon.

## **Security/Privacy**

People spend a lot of time on social networks by interacting with others, playing social games, updating their profiles, etc. However all good things come with a catch. Security and Privacy issues are part and parcel of all social networks. There is no social network which is immune to these issues. There have been many instances of stalking, identity theft, doctored images and blackmail on social networks. Victims are selected regardless of gender or age. The following tips are important as they help avoid being targeted.

- If you are a constant target for harassment, then it helps to keep a pseudonym. There is no harm in using an image other than your own as your profile picture, if you do not want others to see what you look like. However please remember that using someone else's personal pictures is illegal as well as unethical.
- It is best not to share any private information or photographs on Twitter, Facebook or other social media. If you must share, do so only in a very restricted circle where there exists a level of trust that the information will not be made public via tagging or re-sharing. However, be aware that sometimes such information can leak out.
- Remain aware that sharing your location, private/personal plans or daily activities on social media such as Foursquare, Twitter or Facebook can attract stalkers.
- If you are in the company of a friend/relative/acquaintance, do not tag or mark their location unless you have their permission.

- Tagging people in inappropriate/embarrassing photos is not a good idea. A good way to avoid seeing tagged posts is to enable the Timeline review on Facebook. Click at the top right of any Facebook page and select "Account Settings> Timeline and Tagging> select Review posts friends tag you in before they appear on your timeline?" and click Edit to the far right and then Select Enabled from the dropdown menu.

- In the event that the news is about someone not in the public sphere, it is important not to share the news on a public forum unless it is a matter of grave concern or if the person is a threat to the safety of others.

- Do not share your credit card details, ID card, or any other documents on social networks.

- It is highly recommended to document all instances of abuse/harassment on social networks. However it is unethical to share private conversations with others.

## **Criminal Behavior on Social Networks**

Criminal behaviour can be defined as comprising activities which may cause harm to others either physically, psychologically, financially or socially. Such behaviour can result not only in serious harm to others, but may also lead to criminal prosecution of the perpetrator. Thus, it is important to be aware of actions that may constitute criminal behavior such that one might avoid these. Acts of defamation, impersonation, hate speech, incitement to violence, harassment and invasion of privacy all have potential to cause grievous harm and therefore may attract criminal prosecution. As in real life, such behaviour should be avoided online.

Bytes for All (B4A), Pakistan is a human rights based think tank with a focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It experiments and organizes debate on the relevance of ICTs for sustainable development and strengthening human rights movements in the country. At the forefront of the digital and Internet rights movement and struggle for democracy, B4A focuses on capacity building of human rights defenders on their digital security, online safety, and privacy.

Working on various important campaigns particularly against Internet censorship and surveillance in Pakistan, B4A focuses on cyberspace issues, awareness raising, and policy advocacy from civil liberties & human rights perspectives. The globally recognized and award winning Take Back The Tech! campaign is the flagship of B4A, which focuses on the strategic use of ICTs by women and girls to fight violence against women in Pakistan.

B4A partners and collaborates with a wide network of local & international human rights defenders and civil society organizations, and its team's commitment lies in protecting civil liberties in Pakistan.

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