



**Human Rights Based,
Socially Responsible
Use of Social Media**

COLOMBO | 2019 - 2024

**social media
declaration**

Version 2.0

#EngageSMinSL

**Code of Conduct for
Responsible Social Media Use**

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Digital Rights are Human Rights

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Background

Social media are various Internet-based apps, websites and platforms which allow users to interact with each other, produce, present and promote content and affords, among other things, the ability to engage with audiences that are local, national, regional and global. Unrestrained by geographic boundaries, users of social media often enjoy or carve out freedom of expression beyond what their country, community or socio-political context may provide. This openness by default and design is both a positive and negative. Some users express themselves in a civil, progressive, respectful manner that engages with ideas and substance. Others do not. Some use social media for prosocial purposes, and to strengthen democracy. Others use it to undermine social cohesion, and increase division.

Social media gives users the opportunity to actively participate in conversations and social interactions using a range of media. Knowledge-sharing, creating critical dialogues, questioning authoritative mindsets and building alternative discourses are all possible, using expression ranging from the written to the visual. Social media also allows for collective activism, bearing witness, and organising as well as the presentation of

opinion on crucial incidents and occurrences. Often, geospatial, political and other physical boundaries are seamlessly traversed in these interactions, with interlocutors and producers spread across various regions, time zones and countries continually complementing or contesting ideas in shared spaces.

At the same time, content published or promoted over social media often creates or exacerbates socio-political disparities inimical to the public interest, contributing over the longer term to a more regressive, repressive and renegade society. We note with concern, even in Sri Lanka, the sharp rise of online harms through content inciting hate and violence based on the grounds of gender, nationality, religion, caste or sexual orientation. A few voices and actors who are highly influential at instrumentalising social media for expedient goals, and parochial gain marginalise or violently erase dissenting opinions. Worldwide, reports indicate that the harmful impact and misuse of social media include sophisticated political influence campaigns, disinformation, and

increasingly, the use of generative AI based synthetic media to undermine shared realities. Democratic foundations are at risk, with social media's use to fuel polarisation, and truth decay.

Governments and social media companies are trying hard to address these growing challenges. What social media platforms say they are doing remains, often, far removed from what they actually do. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes appropriate the threat of disinformation to introduce legislation aimed at silencing dissent, while simultaneously amplifying propaganda online. Sri Lanka's unprecedented, and draconian Online Safety Act (OSA) is a cogent example of legislation which is presented as protecting women, and children, but exists to completely stifle the freedom of expression.

This declaration is an attempt to recognise **the inviolable importance of the freedom of expression on or over social media, yet at the same time, encourage and strengthen the ethical, progressive, democratic and prosocial use of social media.**



Objective

To foster a community that encourages the responsible use of social media and the strengthening of digital literacy to allow for the right to access and an information- based society. While acknowledging the potential for social media to be misused, this Declaration recognises digital rights as intrinsic to a society founded on principles of social justice, human dignity and prominent human and social ideals, based on a 'human rights' framework.

Who?

The undersigned will promote as often and as best they can this mutually agreed-upon framework to others, across all social media platforms and digital spaces as well as in non- digital domains, including traditional media.

Why?

- As an alternative to efforts, by legal or any other means, aimed at restricting human rights including the freedom of expression online.
- As a platform to help interested stakeholders promote and protect a healthy conversational domain across social media platforms, encouraging a robust debate around ideas whilst maintaining a degree of respect for those whose opinions differ from one's own.
- As a tool, and template to raise awareness around the ethical and responsible use of social media.

Code of Conduct

To the best of our ability, and at all times across all social media platforms and domains we are a part of or interact in, we will act to minimize/eventually eradicate the generation and spread of the following:

- Discrimination based on race, religion or caste.
- Gender-based violence (including sexism, sexual violence, misogyny and the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images, video and other types of content) and other forms of discrimination against women
- Sexual abuse, and the sharing of non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) or child sexual abuse material (CSAM), including synthetic media created through generative AI.
- Harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Content inciting hate or violence, threats, intimidation, cyber-bullying and dangerous speech.
- Harassing marginalised communities.
- Illegal acts.
- Data theft and unethical abuse of sources of information and media (such as using photographs without permission).
- Misinformation, disinformation and other forms of misleading content.

We, the undersigned, will promote the following in order to improve the responsible, ethical and democratic use of social media, using a human rights-based framework:

- Protect and preserve an open, free internet, the right to information, and the freedom of expression.
- The right to information and freedom of expression must be protected and preserved as inalienable digital rights.
- Preserve and protect affordances, spaces, opportunities, and platforms on social media that feature marginalised voices.
- Promote media and information literacy.
- Make social media a secure, protected and welcoming space for marginalised and at-risk communities, especially considering trends of misogyny, sexism, anti-LGBTQIA+, and violent threats directed at other minorities, and vulnerable identities.
- Respect, and protect privacy rights. Data practices should be consensual, necessary and proportional, and transparent to users who should retain complete control over their data.

Responsibilities of social media platforms

- Uphold principles of information integrity (accuracy, consistency, reliability, fidelity, safety, transparency) and the respect human rights, social media can strengthen democracy and empower users.
- Increase language capacity for content moderation in local languages (both Sinhala and Tamil).
- Be transparent about the number of moderators assigned to deal with user generated reports around Sri Lankan content, their gender, language capacity and in which time zone they are located.
- Make clear commitments to review the majority of valid notifications for removal of hate speech inciting violence and hateful conduct in less than 24 hours and remove or disable access to such content, if necessary. During heightened violence, this timeframe must be further reduced.
- Have in place clear and effective processes to review notifications regarding hate speech on their services so they can remove or disable access to such content. Make public the tests and Rules or Community Guidelines clarifying that promotion of incitement to violence and hateful conduct is prohibited.
- Educate and raise awareness with users about the types of content not permitted. Make commitments to protect the privacy and security of users, through easily understandable and publicly available policies, in all local languages.
- New products should be tested to ensure that products are fit-for-purpose and do not constitute dangers to the users, or to society. Intensify cooperation between companies to enhance best practice sharing.
- Social media must remain an open platform for diverse voices, especially marginalised and underrepresented communities. Algorithmic curation and content moderation should preserve spaces for these perspectives.
- Stronger safeguards against misogyny, racism, violent threats and harassment that disproportionately impact women and minorities.
- Clearly identify and label content generated or enhanced using Generative AI

- Ensure that all political campaigning online, including through social media platforms, is clearly indicated as sponsored, bringing online advertisements and messages in line with physically published leaflets, and advertisements to maintain transparency and fidelity of information.
- Support counter-messaging campaigns that provide accurate and reliable information to combat hate speech and misinformation while ensuring the safety of marginalised communities.

Responsibilities of Media Organisations & Civil Society

- Advocate government to create a healthy, favorable environment to protect and uphold the rights of at-risk and marginalised communities, including across digital domains, in line with the United Nations Rabat Plan of Action's emphasis on promoting inclusion, diversity, and pluralism.
- Support and act as advocates for long-term public awareness campaigns on media and information literacy and digital security, which will educate users on their digital rights within the context of current legislation. Advocate the Government to include digital literacy in the national curriculum.
- Expose and correct misinformation, and disinformation published on social media, in line with the media's responsibility to report in context and in a factual and sensitive manner.
- Introduce comment moderation and content curation policies for official mainstream media websites and social media accounts that actively resist and combat hate speech,



Generative AI background

Ethical warnings around the use of generative AI in journalism include the risks of introducing errors or bias, plagiarism, and creating content that is "dull and generic". Additionally, there are concerns about the potential for AI-generated content to undermine public trust and erode the credibility of journalism. Media associations have warned against the use of AI that does not respect intellectual property rights of journalistic content, which can lead to the generation of content that is not credible. There are also legal implications, such as liability for any AI-generated content published and the potential for inadvertently infringing third-party IP rights.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of generative AI-generated content in journalism, journalists can implement strict verification processes, guidelines, and human oversight. Transparency and disclosure are crucial, with media outlets being transparent about their use of AI in news production and clearly disclosing when content is generated by AI. Combating misinformation by upholding accuracy through verification processes is essential to maintain the integrity of news reporting. Additionally, maintaining editorial standards, fact-checking protocols, source verification, and ethical considerations are vital to ensuring that AI-generated content meets the same level of accuracy and reliability as human-authored content. By upholding these practices, journalists can navigate the ethical landscape of using generative AI in journalism responsibly.



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Using generative AI tools, platforms or apps to ethically to create media content is crucial if we want credible, trusted, professional and impartial civic media. Five key aspects we commit to are,

- 1. Transparency.** AI-generated content will be clearly labelled so people know it didn't wholly come from a human or is synthetic media – i.e., created completely by generative AI. This helps build, and retain audience trust.
- 2. Accuracy.** Through so-called hallucinations, and biased visual output, generative AI can spread falsehoods, misinformation, and disinformation if not vetted carefully. Commit to fact, and bias check AI content before publishing using credible sources, and industry-standard means including new tools to aid in this process.
- 3. Accountability.** Have clear remediation processes to fix issues if generative AI content causes harm. People affected, including readers, and consumers of media, should have ways to report, and contest inaccuracies.
- 4. Respect Rights.** Generative AI tools used must uphold ethical standards and fundamental human rights, including those enshrined in Sri Lanka's constitution. They shouldn't seed, spread, or sustain harmful biases and stereotypes.
- 5. Involve Experts.** Constantly review best practices, and get input from diverse groups like industry experts, academics, and civil society when governing generative AI use. Independent auditing, and oversight helps ensure it internal processes using, and external output involving generative AI serves the public interest. Civic media should always use generative AI transparently, accurately and accountably with public oversight, to harness its potential while protecting democracy, and keeping the public informed.

SIGNATORIES

Jaffna Press Club
Eastern Provinces Journalists forum
Centre for Policy Alternatives
Human Elevation Organization
Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association
ActNow Youth Campaign
Wedabima Media collective
National Collaboration Development Foundation
Best Vision foundation
Low & Society Trust
SARVODAYA Shramadana Movement
Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform
Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum
Internet Media Action
maatram.org
vikalpa.org
groundviews.org
minormatters.org





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**“Hardwired for Life:
Human Rights Online and Offline”**

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