

# [BE] Ethical Directive on the Way the Media Should Deal with User Generated Content

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On 12 March 2009, The *Vlaamse Raad voor de Journalistiek* (Flemish Council for Journalism Ethics) issued a directive on the way the media (audiovisual, as well as print media and the internet) should deal with User Generated Content (UGC). This Council is an independent self-regulating institution that supervises journalistic work in all Flemish media upon the filing of a complaint by a member of the public, thereby ensuring that journalistic ethics are upheld. It can also issue ethical directives and recommendations on its own initiative. Up until now, the Flemish Council has not been in the habit of controlling the online news media. This directive can be seen as a step towards filling this lacuna.

By means of digital media and the internet, users can now more easily send information and comments to newsrooms. The Flemish Council recalls in this directive some deontological principles on the use of this type of content. The directive makes a distinction between how to handle news material on the one hand and how to handle opinions/comments on the other, when either is supplied by media users. The term “news material” would include clues, photos, video images, etc. On this topic, the directive is relevant to all media, including audiovisual media. As to opinions/comments, the directive is of particular relevance to print and online news media.

News material should be treated and sources should be checked by the editorial staff according to traditional journalistic standards. Hence, the newsroom is also responsible for published news material.

As to opinions/comments on discussion forums, however, the authors bear the prime responsibility. Yet, the medium that publishes the contributions is also deontologically co-responsible for governing the forum properly. As concerns digital discussion forums, the media can approach that responsibility in three ways: checking the comments’ admissibility before publication (the so-called pre-monitoring), reading the comments and selecting them for publication (the so-called active moderation) or supplying the necessary techniques in order to rapidly and adequately remove inappropriate content (the so-called post-monitoring). In order to prevent or rapidly remove inappropriate content, the following techniques are conceivable: prior user registration, clearly mentioning

conditions for use and recommendations on the website, using electronic filtering mechanisms, installing the possibility of an alert as to inappropriate comments and prior moderating and continuously checking discussions on delicate subject matters.

Anonymous contributions should only be published in exceptional circumstances. In any case, the newsroom should have access to the identity of the supplier.

***Richtlijn over de omgang van de pers met gebruikersinhoud***

[http://www.rvdj.be/pdf/aanbeveling\\_gebruikersinhoud.pdf](http://www.rvdj.be/pdf/aanbeveling_gebruikersinhoud.pdf)

*Directive on the way the media should deal with user generated content*

***Judgment by the European Court of Human Rights (Second Section), case of Kenedi v. Hungary, Application no. 31475/05, 26 May 2009, available at:***

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-92663>

