[GB] BBC Introduces Guidance on Individual Use of Social Media

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The BBC has introduced guidance on how BBC representatives should use social media, whether for their work or in a personal capacity. The Social Media Guidance (Guidance) is to be read in conjunction with the BBC's Editorial Guidance on impartiality.

The Guidance is to help preserve the BBC's reputation for impartiality, as well as to promote compliance with both its own and Ofcom's editorial guidelines. The BBC and its representatives have an obligation to ensure that the BBC's editorial decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any personal interest or bias.

The Guidance list of dos and don'ts is not definitive. The overriding principle of the Guidance is that anyone working for the BBC is a representative of the organisation, both on- and offline, including on social media; the same standards apply to the behaviour and conduct of staff in both circumstances.

The Guidance emphasises that individuals working in news and current affairs and factual journalism production, along with all senior leaders, have a particular responsibility to uphold the BBC's impartiality through their actions on social media, and so must abide by the specific rules set out in this Guidance.

Nevertheless, there will be some non-journalists or persons not involved in factual programming, who will have an additional responsibility because of their profile on the BBC. Such individuals are to avoid taking sides on party political issues or political controversies, including those concerning public policy matters.

The Guidance rules apply even if the person does not identify themselves on social media as a representative of the BBC.

The rules and expectations of social media use include being courteous and professional, as well as not bringing the BBC into disrepute. Furthermore, if the person's work for the BBC requires impartiality, then they must avoid giving their personal opinion unless it is an issue in which they have a personal interest and that interest is flagged, for instance a planning decision near where they live; moreover, representatives must not express criticism of colleagues in public and must ensure the confidentiality of meetings.

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Even if the representative is expressing an opinion to a private group on social media, it must be assumed at all times that their comment is open to scrutiny and is considered in the light of their BBC role.

Representatives of news and current affairs and factual journalism production and all senior leaders need to be careful not to show express and inadvertent bias or prejudice, for instance sharing a like, retweeting, or using a certain hashtag or emoji. In the case of “live tweeting”, representatives need to indicate that it is a developing story and that posts are not a final or settled view. Representatives expressing a personal judgment must ensure it is about their specialism and is fact-based. BBC representatives must not reveal personal voting tendencies or support any political party

News and current affairs staff should not rush to break a story at the expense of accuracy, nor should they do this through a personal social media account.

BBC representatives, without exception, must not be lured into ill-tempered exchanges, or exchanges that will reflect badly on them, or the BBC; also, they should not post when their judgement may be impaired. Likewise, they should not use their BBC status to seek personal gain or pursue personal campaigns.

The impartiality requirements begin when you start working for the BBC: they are not retrospective.

A BBC representative using a disclaimer such as "my view" or "my opinion", such as in a personal biography, will not be sufficient to circumvent the Guidance rules.

Any breach of the Guidance could include disciplinary action, even dismissal, and in the case of self-employed contracted representatives of the BBC, the termination of their contract. Independent production companies that produce social media content which is directly or indirectly associated with the BBC should ensure that the Guidance is followed.

Actors, dramatists, comedians, musicians and pundits who work for the BBC are not subject to the requirements of impartiality on social media.

The extent to which a non-staff member, whether a contributor or a presenter, is required to comply with the Guidelines will be set out in the BBC’s contractual relationship with them.

BBC Guidance: individual Use of Social Media

https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/individual-use-of-social-media

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