

# GNM social media guidelines

Social media has transformed the relationship between journalists and readers and in the right circumstances can be used positively in a number of ways. It is an integral part of our journalistic processes, enabling journalists to collect information, promote our stories and engage with readers, and allowing audiences to provide instant feedback and take part in our journalism.

Social media is constantly evolving and much has changed since we last updated our guidelines in 2018. What to post and how to respond to other users can sometimes be challenging, and the situation can change quickly.

It has also increasingly become a place where journalists can be harassed and targeted, either for their work, or personally, or both. Women in particular are experiencing incidents of online harassment or abuse; in a recent UNESCO survey, nearly three quarters of female respondents said they have experienced online violence in connection with their work in the field of journalism. Journalists and all GNM staff should know how to protect themselves and how the company can support them if they are the target of online harassment or abuse.

The primary aim of these guidelines is to help GNM employees navigate their own use of social media and to provide advice, guidance and support where possible.

The guidelines below have been updated to better reflect how GNM employees and contributors use social media. They incorporate recommendations from a team of editorial colleagues and feedback from staff across the company. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important piece of work.

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## General

- These guidelines apply equally to all GNM employees and contributors, regardless of their role, and should serve as an important reference as to how GNM expects employees to behave online. The aim of the guidelines is to help GNM employees navigate their use of social media, as well as providing details of support and advice available.
- We expect managers and editors to support their staff and also to help make sure these guidelines are followed and applied consistently.
- GNM employees are responsible for what they post on social media, and failure to follow these guidelines could be a disciplinary matter. Editorial staff must also adhere to [GNM's editorial code](#). You have a responsibility to protect the reputation of the Guardian and Observer.
- Personal social media accounts are personal and we do not own them. But always remember that if you are associated with GNM then everything you post, like or link to on social media - regardless of the platform - can easily become public and on the record, and may be seen as representing an official GNM position, even if that is not your intention. Your role working for GNM, in whatever capacity, comes with considerable responsibilities on social media.
- Use common sense and think before you post. It's always worth waiting a while before deciding to post something. Don't post late at night or if you're angry, unsure or upset. Put down your phone.
- Do not post anything that could be classed as confidential (this includes discussions from morning conference and other internal GNM meetings).
- GNM does not require you to tweet or post on any social media platform. Most staff can do their jobs extremely well using social media either occasionally, such as to share Guardian and Observer stories; for monitoring ('listen-only' mode); newsgathering/finding sources; or not at all. You are not expected to have a presence or a following on social media.
- All employees should read our [staying safe online guidance](#), particularly if they use social media. If you experience online abuse or harassment please talk to your manager/editor.
- Please remember that you are legally responsible for what you post on social media. When using social media, the laws of privacy, libel, copyright and contempt apply. You can read more about the importance of these in our [legal guidelines for social media](#).

## Staying safe online - responding to abuse and harassment and where to get support

- There are many bad-faith actors on social media platforms. It is usually best not to engage. We advise you not to retweet or quote offensive comments about yourself or others, even if your intention is to show your disapproval - it simply rewards offensive accounts with attention. If in doubt, don't respond.
- If you experience abuse on social media we are here to support you. We recognise that journalists and other GNM employees can experience online harassment or abuse as a direct result of their work with us, or simply for working at the Guardian, and that these can cause serious harm, both personally and professionally. If you are receiving abuse in any form on social media please make sure you are safe. If someone is in immediate danger dial 999 (UK), 911 (US) or 000/112 (Australia).
- We support employees' right to block or mute accounts which are abusive, offensive, discourteous, threatening, or provocative. It is quick and easy to lock your account, block problematic followers, and to take a break from social media. You may also want to use [Twitter's conversation settings](#) which provide advice on how to block and mute replies as well as further information about effective management of online conversations.
- In the first instance please talk to your editor or manager about any concerns.

- If you feel at all threatened or overwhelmed by other users on social media, we have [information and support](#) in place to help you. If you are the subject of continued or co-ordinated attacks, please take a break from social media and talk to your editor or manager. We strongly recommend you take a break from social media when you're not working.
- You can also access the Guardian's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
- If you do use social media we advise that you take regular breaks from the platforms. If you feel your use of social media is affecting your wellbeing, please talk to your editor or manager and take a look at the [support we have available](#).
- If you are a manager or editor and are unsure how to support a member of your team who is suffering online abuse or harassment, please read the [managers' guidelines document](#) for more information.

## Controversy and personal opinions

- Ask yourself if you would be happy for senior editors or line managers to read your post. If not, don't post it.
- **The Guardian and the Observer are renowned for fair and accurate reporting, and being trusted matters. Editorial colleagues - particularly those working in news - should remain especially mindful of blurring fact and opinion when using social media. Be aware that expressing partisan, party-political or strong opinions on social media can damage the Guardian's reputation for fair and fact-based reporting, and your own reputation as a journalist. The same applies to likes and retweets.**
- If you are associated with the Guardian or the Observer, either staff or freelance, and you have a large following on a platform, you have a particular responsibility. Your behaviour, more than most, will reflect on GNM and may have a disproportionate impact on those you engage with on social platforms. Think carefully before you [quote-tweet](#).
- Tone is important. Always treat people on social media with the respect and professionalism you would apply offline, even if you disagree with them, and try to avoid public arguments on social media.
- Be aware that sharing personal information can carry risks for all staff, not only public figures such as journalists. Think twice before posting private or personal information, which could be used against you in the future.
- GNM encourages open debate about issues that are important to our staff. However, it is never acceptable to criticise colleagues on social media either directly or indirectly, eg through [subtweets](#).
- We strongly discourage the use of social media to air any form of internal disputes with colleagues or contributors, or with GNM. This is a serious matter. Always address problems or disagreements offline. If a staff member attacks a colleague on social media, they may be subject to our disciplinary procedures. Freelancers on contract who abuse colleagues may be in breach of their contracts, while occasional freelancers may see future opportunities with GNM impacted.

## Journalists and social media - breaking news, accuracy and newsgathering

- In breaking news situations accuracy is crucial. Only share or retweet verified information - including images - from trusted sources. Beware of propaganda, false information and fake accounts. If in doubt, it is safer just to retweet official Guardian accounts or those of trusted Guardian colleagues.

- Remember, as a journalist your job is to break news for GNM, on GNM's platform, not on social media. Only tweet breaking news if the news editor is happy for you to do that, rather than report it for the website.
- Sometimes mistakes or misjudgements happen - inaccurate information is posted or opinions are aired which in hindsight are ill-considered. If you make a mistake or repost inaccurate or unverified information which is later proven to be false, correct it as quickly as possible. This is particularly important if you are live tweeting a breaking news situation. Delete posts with errors to prevent them spreading further, and make another post explaining what has happened. If you are unsure about how to do this, speak to your manager/ editor and/or where appropriate Editorial Legal.
- Social media can be a helpful source in a breaking news situation but always consider people's safety first. Before making contact with eyewitnesses on social media, consider their state of mind if they have been involved in a distressing incident. Be aware of the potential consequences of drawing attention to posts by someone who does not have a large social media following.
- It's worth keeping in mind that just because a story is generating interest on social media, or a handful of people have tweeted about it, that does not necessarily mean it has news value and needs to be reported or circulated further on social media.
- Transparency is key. Editorial colleagues should always identify themselves as journalists when seeking information on social media for a story. Make sure you declare any personal interests and be clear about your affiliations.
- We strongly encourage staff to regularly delete historical tweets and other social posts. We recommend using the [Tweetdelete](#) service to do this. The cost of this can be expensed.