

Avoiding Discrimination & Hate Speech in Media

Guidebook



**ALJAZEERA
MEDIA INSTITUTE**

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TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	1
Discrimination & hate speech	5
How do discrimination and hate speech happen in the media?	7
Discrimination in the media: Some case studies	12
Anti-discrimination and hate speech laws as a means of suppressing freedom of expression	19
Objective and ethical coverage to avoid discrimination and hate speech	23
Story planning	23
Producing the story	29
Writing the story	29
Ethical evaluation of the story (Moral Reasoning)	31
Possible mistakes	35
Important questions to ask yourself	37
About the author	41

Introduction

Some media outlets take a biased approach in their coverage of events. This presents a professional and moral dilemma, especially if this leads to negative framing of communities or individuals that may damage their public image. Often this bias becomes a form of discrimination or incitement to hatred, increasing the possibility that these communities or individuals may be exposed to violence.¹

This guidebook introduces professional practices and legal boundaries to help journalists avoid being discriminatory, inciting hatred, or promoting racial discrimination in their pieces by providing them with the necessary tools and encouraging them to ask appropriate questions to produce objective and unbiased material. At the same time, it equips readers to recognise discriminatory journalism or journalism promoting hatred.

The guidebook can be thought of as a roadmap that will help journalists to isolate their pieces from their own personal beliefs and biases and provide them with tools to deal with the moral dilemmas that confront them during their work. It also aims to familiarise them with the boundaries between legally acceptable journalism and hate speech and discrimination as prohibited by international law.

¹ Goffman, Erving. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press, 1974.



Questions

While preparing this guidebook we kept various questions at the forefront of our minds. They are questions that are worth asking and discussing, even if we do not have decisive answers:

• Does Arabic content exist based on the experiences of Arab journalists?

• Do most of the ethical codes, studies and qualification initiatives come from foreign organisations? If so, why? What influence does foreign content have translated in isolation from the Arab context?

• Can Arab experiences of journalism add anything to the content and suggestions provided by international experiences?

• Is there a constant and meaningful discussion in newsrooms regarding these ethical codes and how they are put into practice on a daily basis?

• Do newsrooms have evidence-based mechanisms and policies in place?

• How does the digital generation of journalists deal with this issue? Are there resources available to help them learn?

In light of these questions, in this guidebook we have tried to take into account the unique qualities of Arab media. We have tried hard to produce original content, rather than simply reproducing translated material suggesting an approach entirely detached from the Arab media context.

Discrimination & hate speech

5

“Discrimination” is a legal term used in international treaties and agreements to describe any case in which a person or community is singled out on the basis of race, colour, ancestry or ethnicity in a way that prejudices their enjoyment of or recognition of their human rights. In a media context, discrimination can occur through negative framing of individuals or groups based on their identity and with the aim of inciting hatred or negative feeling against them. Discrimination may not always be deliberate, but journalists must maintain a high level of commitment to professional standards when putting together material in order to avoid discrimination or incitement to hatred.

The term “hate speech” first appeared in the US media in 1989 as part of debates surrounding harmful racist speech protected under US law by the First Amendment. Although various definitions have been used in the media, in order for something to be hate speech it must be deliberate and seek to spread, promote or justify hatred towards a racial or national

community or any other form of hatred based on intolerance.²

Hate speech is thus different from discriminatory speech. Hate speech requires a clear intention of spreading, promoting or justifying hate towards a particular community. Journalism can be discriminatory, however, without the journalist or the media outlet realising. There are various reasons for this: a lack of familiarity with the professional standards that guarantee journalistic objectivity or journalists’ failure to understand a story’s context, for example. In order to avoid any ambiguity, this guidebook will use the two expressions side by side.

² https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Hate_speech_ENG.pdf

“

Discrimination is defined as:

Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights.³

“

The Council of Europe has suggested the following definition of hate speech:

All forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination & hostility against minorities, migrants & people of immigrant origin.⁴

”

³ UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 18: Non-discrimination, 10 November 1989, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fa8.html> [accessed 30 September 2019].

⁴ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation No R 97(20) 30.10.1997 on “hate speech”.

How do discrimination and hate speech happen in the media?

Journalism becomes discrimination or hate speech because of a journalist's bias in favour of one side of the story and willingness to negatively depict the other.

Bias

Bias is defined as “inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.”⁵

7

Forms of bias in the media

Bias in the media can take three main forms:⁶

1 Distortion bias:

News that seeks to distort the truth.

2 Content bias:

When news gives prominence to the voice of a particular political movement or social or religious current at the expense of others.

3 Decision-making bias:

The motives and convictions of editors shaping their attitude to the story and leading them to produce biased content.

⁵ Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bias>

⁶ Entman, Robert M. “Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power.” *Journal of communication* 57, no.1 (2007): 163-173.

“

When does bias constitute discrimination or comprise hate speech?

Dr. Ihsan Adel, Specialist on Global Development and International Law

When discussing discrimination, we should note that while a journalist being biased in favour of one side of a story while composing it in such a way that its objectivity is affected is unequivocally a breach of professional standards, this does not necessarily mean that he or she has fallen into the trap of discrimination or hate speech.

A journalist is discriminatory when his or her story directly or indirectly advocates distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference against the human rights of an individual or community, based on race, colour, gender, language, religion, confession or opinion or any other basis for discrimination. This includes promoting the superiority of one community over another because of their racial iden-

tity or colour, or inciting violence against a person or community for the same reason.

A journalist has engaged in hate speech, on the other hand, if in his or her story he or she negatively frames and defames individuals or groups based on their identity with the aim of spreading hatred against them, inciting ill-feeling against them, or justifying either. Hate speech is not limited to the inclusion of hateful expressions in a story. We also have to look at the context in which the story was published and the extent to which there was a hostile atmosphere meaning that hate speech might result in violence, as well as the effect that this speech might have on the group.

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Reasons for bias

- **Bias in order to influence public policy:** Media showing bias in coverage giving it (positive or negative) influence in political decisions within a particular country.

- **The readership's preferences:** Serving the public and taking into account public opinion may force journalists to be biased in their coverage of certain events or support one side over another.

- Government legislation and political pressure forcing media to provide biased coverage of specific issues serving the agenda of the government or politicians, especially in non-democratic countries. A government may try to promote hate speech against a community through the media in order to prepare public opinion for hostile measures to be taken against that community.

- **Journalists' own political opinions:** Generally journalists have their own opinions on the issues they report on. When journalists lack objectivity this can mean they show bias in their coverage.

- Agendas imposed by the organisation's financial backers: Bodies providing funding typically have a political agenda they want to implement, and so seek to provide biased coverage of particular issues supporting their agenda.

“ Not all bias in journalism means discrimination or promotion of hate speech. A piece might be biased in favour of the public and against a despotic government, the weaker voice against the dominant voice, or the truth against propaganda. This is the opposite of bias seeking to conceal the truth, mislead the public and incite negative feeling against particular groups.

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How are the public harmed by discrimination and hate speech in the media?

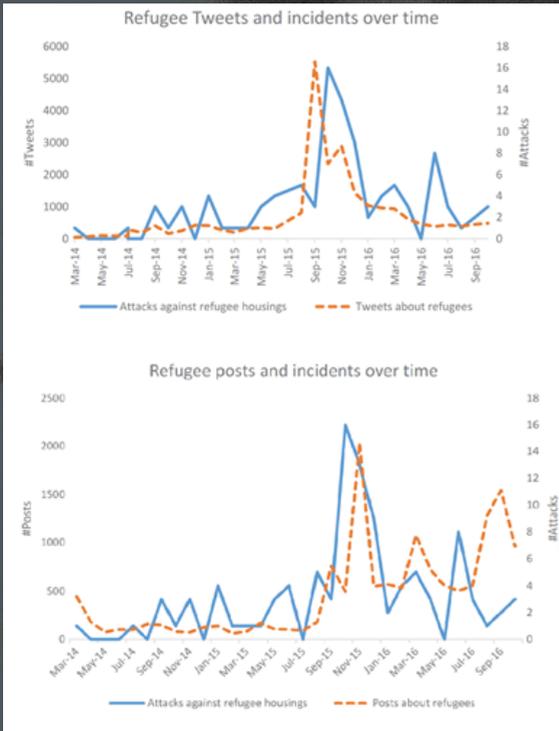
Discrimination and hate speech in media do not only hurt the feelings of the individuals or communities they target. They can also contribute to crimes committed against them and stoke the flames of armed conflict, or incite or justify the commission of crimes against ethnic or national groups, as well as encouraging violence against specific demographics such as women, children, refugees, minorities or political opposition figures.

In Sweden, a recent study⁷ shows a correlation between tweets and Facebook posts concerning refugees and the number of attacks against them in a particular period. According to the study, the greater the number of tweets and posts featuring the word 'refugee' (flykting), the more arson attacks

were committed by "extremists" against refugee accommodation.

The study explains that social media algorithms help to produce "echo chambers", that is, that individuals are exposed more to content that matches their personal preferences than to any other. In other words, these algorithms provide increased opportunities for individuals with racist inclinations to view media content depicting immigrants and refugees as a danger to society, creating a justification for violence against them.

⁷ Wahlström, Mattias, and Anton Törnberg. "Social media mechanisms for right-wing political violence in the 21st century: Discursive opportunities, group dynamics, and co-ordination." *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2019): 1-22.



The first part of the graph shows the number of tweets containing the word “refugee” against the number of attacks against refugee housing in Sweden between March and September 2016. The second section shows the correlation between the number of Facebook posts including the word “refugee” and the number of attacks in the same period.

Another study ⁸ on digital hate speech in Bulgaria conducted by the Sofia Development Association tracked the reactions of the public, the media and politicians to the different stages of the refugee and migrant crisis. This study found that there is a link between people’s attitudes to refugees and migrants and the extent to which hate speech circulated in digital media. The study found that

“the opinions of the Bulgarian citizens are influenced and shaped mainly by the media”, and that as a result “a large part of the population perceives the refugees as a national security threat”.

A 2016 report ⁹ by the Bulgarian Helsinki committee likewise stated that television was the medium that the public saw as most responsible for spreading hate speech, while the internet came in second place.

⁸ <https://bit.ly/2mcMazd>

⁹ <https://bit.ly/2kf07vV>

Discrimination in the media: Some case studies

The Rwandan Civil War

Discussions of discrimination in the media always reference the Rwandan Civil War. It is an important case study both because of the barbarity of the crimes committed and also because the trials that followed it concluded that the media was responsible.

The Rwandan broadcaster RTLM played an important part in fomenting conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups in 1994, calling for the killing of Tutsis and describing them as “cockroaches” in its coverage of events.¹⁰ In cases of this kind, hate speech is a crime punishable by law. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda sentenced the RTLM’s director Ferdinand Nahimana and its executive chairman Jean Bosco Barayagwiza to life imprisonment for promoting hatred against the Tutsis through its broadcasts.

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNbUeLnxQEI>

Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan

Both the Lebanese and Jordanian media have produced biased coverage of Syrian refugee issues. This has contributed to negative societal attitudes towards them which have in turn produced opposition to their presence. In Lebanon this is more clearly noticeable because racist speech on social media has developed into incidents of physical violence against refugees. Politicians have played a part in exacerbating this tendency, with some of them promoting racist speech: the Lebanese Foreign Minister has [tweeted](#) equating refugees with delinquents.

A piece published by the Lebanese news outlet MTV titled “Cancer afflicting Lebanon... And two reasons it is spreading”, 5 September 2018. Here MTV quotes a doctor who considers Syrian refugees to be a major factor in rising cancer rates in Lebanon. The doctor gives no evidence for these claims, but the channel nonetheless treats them as scientific truths without any attempt to verify them. MTV has since removed the piece from its website.



mtv 28°

السرطان يجتاح لبنان... وسببان يساهمان بانتشاره

5 أيلول 2018 06:22 خاص موقع Mtv

إلى ذلك، يلفت نمر إلى أنّ "الالتهابات المتزايدة بفعل تكاثر النازحين السوريين في لبنان تتسبّب مباشرة بمرض السرطان، فـ"هؤلاء، بسبب الظروف السيئة التي عانوا منها مرغمين، يأتون ببكتيريا خطيرة قد تخلق الأمراض لدى الإنسان".

The Jordanian newspaper Al Rai, meanwhile, has published a story ¹¹ on its website titled “Sewage Overflows Because of Syrian Refugees”. The newspaper later amended the title to “Population Pressure and Misuse Lead to Sewage Overflow”, but kept the government official’s statement about Syrian refugees in the introduction to the story used on social media, without citing a source and without attempting to verify this claim. The story was published in a [tweet](#), and received a great deal of criticism.



2 Two headlines from Al Rai attributing a sewage overflow to Syrian refugees

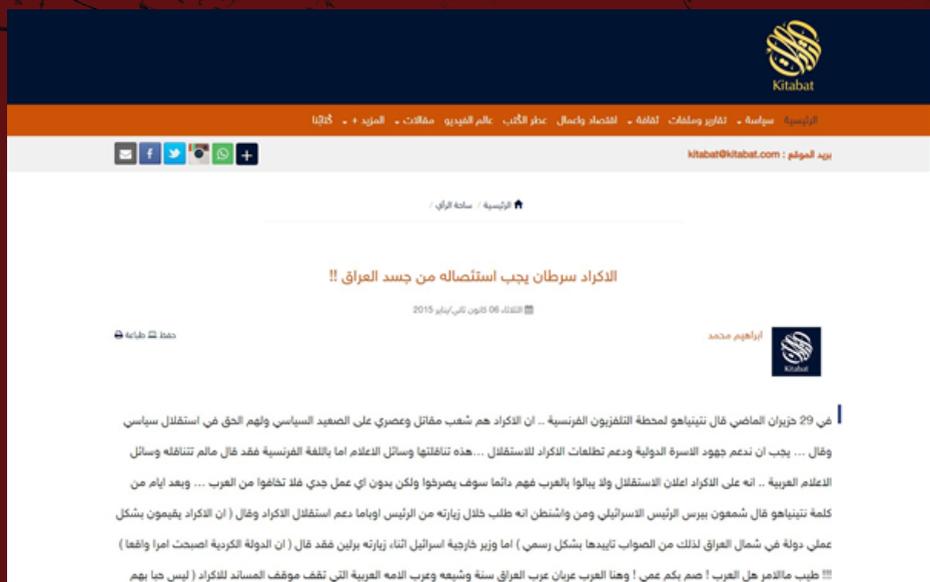
¹¹ <http://alrai.com/article/10455224/>

Iraq

Iraqi Media House has produced a report titled [The Hate Dictionary \(in Arabic\)](#)¹² documenting examples of hate speech in Iraqi media and on social media. The report tracks the most prominent words and expressions used in the media “which call for murder, violence, retribution, contempt [or contain] discrimination or swearing”.

There are many other cases of discrimination in Arab media. Examples include incitement against the Egyptian Rabea protests during the Egyptian army’s take-over and sectarian discrimination between Sunnis and Shi’a in Iraq.

15



A headline from the Iraqi website Kitabat stating that the Kurds are a “cancer that must be cut out of the Iraqi body”.

¹² <http://www.imh-org.com/uploads/files/الكر اهية20%قاموس/الكر اهية20%قاموس.pdf>





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The Media and Moral Panic Theory

Maha Omar – Journalist and Academic

Moral panic is defined as a moment in “a situation in which public fears and state interventions greatly exceed the objective threat posed to society by a particular individual or group”. The idea of moral panic has been used to understand many social problems, including drug gangs, schoolyard violence, child abuse and mistreatment of immigrants and refugees.

Any observer of the current climate surrounding refugees in the West can easily grasp the essence of the ideological discourse used

by populists worldwide. This discourse creates a wide space in which lies about migrants will be accepted, and is based on moral panic. Moral panic accounts for “panicked” majority reactions in a given society towards cultural groups like refugees or immigrants: this majority sees that the migrant minority threatens the central values of society and the economic privileges that citizens enjoy. Political campaigns then base their rhetoric on this discourse by giving ever more space to fake news and conspiracy theories.

”

Anti-discrimination and hate speech laws as a means of suppressing freedom of expression

The United Nations is making a great effort to fight discrimination and hate speech, and in its new strategy dedicates a lot of attention to both traditional and social media. This is where the role of media outlets themselves comes in: we need to put together codes of conduct that encourage journalists to avoid discrimination and incitement in their reporting. But news organisations may worry that some governments will exploit efforts to combat discrimination and hate speech in order to restrict freedom of expression and the free flow of information, by passing laws explicitly intended to regulate the media.

Loosely worded laws, lacking a clear definition of discrimination or hate speech may expose all journalism to being targeted by the authorities, particularly in non-democratic countries.





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“Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, which is prohibited under international law”.

- António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

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When is it acceptable to limit the freedom of the media?

Banning discriminatory speech in international law

Yahya Shuqair – Journalist and Media Law Expert

Limitations on freedom of expression are divided into two categories:

- Optional, under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹³

- Obligatory,¹⁴ under Article 20 of the ICCPR, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969).

For such limitations to be legitimate, they must first pass a “three part test” derived from Article 19 Para-

graph 3 of the ICCPR. They must:

1- Be an exception prescribed by law (i.e. not random) and not an extension of the law by which the limitation becomes the rule. They must be necessary in a democratic society (and be a last resort).

2- Pursue a legitimate aim and not simply be a demonstration of power, like criminalising criticism of the government or making officials immune to criticism.

3- “Public interest overrides”, which is to say that if the public interest conflicts with the right to privacy then the public interest is given priority. For example, a story that an official has diabetes should not be published, because the right to privacy prevails in this case. But if an official has an infectious disease or an illness that affects his or her conduct in office then the public interest prevails.

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¹³ Article 19 reads as follows: “1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. 3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.”

¹⁴ Article 20 stipulates that “1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law. 2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”

A photograph of two men in a meeting. One man is in the foreground, looking towards the right. The other man is behind him, also looking towards the right. They are both looking at a laptop screen which is partially visible on the right side of the image. The background is blurred, suggesting an office or meeting room setting.

Journalists' awareness of international treaties

There are many international agreements concerning human rights. Awareness of these agreements and other guides and codes of conduct are an important resource that can help journalists to avoid any kind of discrimination in their coverage:

[- Reference materials on human rights from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

[- Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality](#)

[- The Rabat Plan of Action](#)

Some publications from Al Jazeera's library:

[1\) Journalism in Times of War](#)

[2\) Covering Refugee Stories](#)

[3\) News Verification](#)

Objective and ethical coverage to avoid discrimination and hate speech

When dealing with controversial topics, discrimination and incitement to hatred can only be avoided if journalists are careful to maintain professionalism and keep to the rules of ethical coverage. As long as they do this journalists can be safe in the knowledge that their coverage will not cause any harm.

Step 1: Story planning

1) Building up a base of knowledge about the incident

Before working out sources and writing a news story, a journalist should carry out thorough research into the issue he or she will be working on and gather all available information from specialised sources (reports, statistics, academic studies etc). The following are some major platforms that provide journalists with reports and studies on the topics of their stories:

Google Scholar: A search engine from Google that specialises in

academic studies, making it possible to access various studies published in peer-reviewed journals as well as reports giving journalists a deeper understanding of the stories they work on.

Microsoft Academic: A similar platform to Google Scholar containing approximately 227 thousand research papers as well as an academic CV search feature, helping journalists to identify expert sources.

UN databases: ¹⁵ This database includes all reports issued by the UN and its legal and human rights arms as well as all treaties, agreements and statistics released by the UN itself and by member states.

¹⁵ <https://bit.ly/2NNC6W5>

The Verification Handbook: ¹⁶

Published by the European Journalism Center (EJC), this handbook provides tools and techniques allowing journalists to search the internet more broadly and helping them verify reports & information.

2) Selecting sources (all sources) for the story

Look at all sides of the story and select people or organisations that have been affected. For example, in a story about the effect of refugees on job opportunities in a particular country, concerned parties include: refugees, local authorities, unions and workers' associations, local residents, employers, and economic experts. The absence of any of these parties means the story will not be objective and will be biased towards one side's narrative over the other, meaning the story is more likely to constitute bias.



This story headline attributing a high rental prices to Syrian refugees published in the Jordanian newspaper Al Ghad used the narrative of one side of the story (property owners) as its main source without presenting the opinions of any other relevant parties, such as Syrian refugees themselves or economic experts. This means it takes a particular direction in its reporting.¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://bit.ly/2oJ5qIW>.

¹⁷ <https://bit.ly/2KI5RIT> (Retrieved October 6, 2019)

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Biased Libyan media coverage of the Battle for Trablus

Ismail Al Giritli – Libyan Journalist

It is obvious to anyone familiar with Libyan media that outlets are biased in favour of particular parties to the conflict. They rely on sources from their preferred party, and use language glorifying one side and demonising the other. The same applies to the lists of guests and analysts interviewed, the adverts and commercials broadcast during the breaks, the titles of news pieces, the questions asked, the issues presented and the topics discussed on discussion programmes. And the correspondents of a given media outlet always operate in the areas controlled by the group their employers support.

Bias also appears in how mental images are drawn for the public. Outlets neglect to define the warring parties and their geographical, ideological and political affiliations, and use images and background music promoting not just bias but broader social division.

Many journalists and media officials show their bias for specific parties and use the space provided to them by social media to openly declare these biases.

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The most important sources that a journalist should refer to when putting together a story are:

- Parties directly affected by and affecting the story (citizens, refugees, workers, property-owners, traders etc).

- Official bodies relevant to the story (mayors, relevant government ministries, etc). The story has to be within their jurisdiction.

- Experts (experts are expected to give methodical evaluations without personal opinions).

- NGOs or semi-governmental organisations (unions, civil society organisations, rights organisations etc).

- Raw data (reports, studies, statistics).

- User-generated content.

3) Verifying information before using it

Information from traditional sources:

Some sources may give mistaken or inflammatory information. Journalists should not publish this information as fact without verification, even if they state its source clearly in the story. Professionalism requires us to cross-reference it with other sources and present all of the information together in the story. This will encourage the public to question how accurate the information provided by a particular source is and compare it with other sources appearing in the story.

Open source content:

The vast quantities of content made available on social media sites (“user-generated content”) are an important source of information that journalists can use in parallel with traditional sources. But despite its importance, OSC can be fabricated and used to promote lies and rumors that may constitute hate speech. Journalists who use information from social media have to verify and fact-check this information. We have already mentioned a few relevant sources: the [News Verification Guidebook](#), [Finding the Truth Amongst the Fakes](#), and the [EJC’s Verification Handbook](#).

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Ayman AL Zubeir – Madrid Correspondent for Al Jazeera

When a local girl was murdered by Moroccan immigrants, the Spanish far right was quick to exploit the crime to incite the population against the Moroccan community, using incorrect information in order to influence the electorate. One of the lies circulated by the right was a story that 70% of those detained in sexual harassment cases have foreign citizenship. Statistics made available by official Spanish bodies like the Instituto Nacional de Estadística and the General Council of the Judiciary show that in 2017 Spanish courts handed down prison terms to 2280 people accused of sexual assault, whose nationalities break down as follows:

- Spanish: 1705
- Americas: 184
- EU: 167
- Africa: 137
- Asia: 58
- Eastern Europe: 27

These numbers show that 70% of these crimes are committed by Spanish citizens. But despite this data, more attention is given in some media outlets to crimes committed by Moroccan immigrants. This can lead to incidents of racist violence, as in some towns in Catalonia, where refuge centers for underage migrants have been attacked.

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[The Ethical Journalism Network \(EJN\)](#) suggests that journalists always ask themselves the following questions when dealing with information taken from social media:



1 Have I corroborated the origin including location, date and time of images and content that I am using?

2 Have I confirmed that this material is the original piece of content (i.e. not modified or abridged)?

3 Have I verified the social media profiles to avoid use of fake information?

4 Is the account holder known, and has it been a reliable source in the past?

5 Have I asked direct questions of the content provider to verify the provenance of the information?

6 Are there similar posts or content elsewhere online?



For example, a clip from a [video](#)¹⁸ of a Friday sermon given at a Saudi mosque in which the speaker asks non-Saudis not to attend prayers was shared widely on social media. The clip implied that the preacher was discriminating against non-Saudis. In this case journalists should watch the whole video, which shows that the clip was taken out of context and that the preacher was in fact criticising racism by acting out an example.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRbJ0LnpQrY&t=39s>

Step 2: Producing the story

1 Always make sure to ask questions appropriate to each source or side.

2 Do not produce your piece from behind a desk. Go down to the scene of the events to see what is going on for yourself. Do not rely only on your sources' accounts.

3 Make sure that you understand the local society and the cultural, social and religious context etc.

4 When interviewing or following up authoritative personal accounts that may have a real influence, think about whether these statements constitute incitement or discrimination or encourage hatred or violence. Only use them if there is a clear editorial justification, and make sure to contextualise them and include responses from other affected parties.

5 Make sure to evaluate content, whether statements, pictures or video clips. Think about the possible consequences of using it.

6 Look at existing news pieces on the topic you want to write about. Work out what aspects of the story have been ignored or given incomplete or unprofessional coverage, and try to draw them out in your own story.

Step three: Writing the story

Having completed steps one and two and started writing your story, you should arrange the different narratives by importance, ensuring an equal distribution of opinions. In some cases the opinion of one party will be based on inaccurate information, and may constitute a kind of incitement against a particular individual or group. Here it is the journalist's role to respond to these inaccuracies by providing correct information.

Advice for writing an objective story

1 Avoid generalisations and language implying value judgments or stereotyping communities or individuals.

4 Put your expectations to one side, and avoid stereotypes and prejudices.

7 Balance information gathered from sources & divide it across the themes of the story without giving one side a louder voice. Some media outlets adopt the perspective of one party, provide no space for those with dissenting opinions to lay out their own position & do not consult experts in order to verify the information given by sources.

2 Do not treat information given in official or unofficial reports as unquestioned fact (for journalists, any report should simply be one source among many).

5 Make sure to use objective and value-free language.

8 Make sure that the information attributed to different sources lines up with what they have said. Put quotation marks around any expressions that express a value judgment.

3 Do not draw personal conclusions in your story.

6 Provide minorities with a voice equal to that of the majority.

9 Assess the sensitivity of pictures and information appearing in the story. Make sure that they do not contradict professional standards or infringe on the rights of particular individuals or groups.

10 Meet with editors to evaluate your story if you feel that there might be an ethical dilemma in its current form, or if it contains information that may be sensitive for some members of the public.

Step four: Ethical evaluation of the story (Moral Reasoning)

Sticking to the principles of objective journalism is not enough to ensure that a journalist does not accidentally engage in discrimination in a story. He or she has ethical responsibilities that must be carefully considered before deciding to publish.

Journalists often produce stories that seem to conform generally to the rules of journalistic professionalism and objectivity but whose general orientation helps to reinforce speech promoting discrimination or hatred. This might be because of the nature of the sources chosen or the language used, or because of other decisions that give one side a louder voice than others. Journalists may reinforce speech promoting discrimination or hatred without meaning to or without realising the consequences of this speech and its effects on the reader.

A group of European journalists' associations in Europe have made a number of general recommendations relevant to this topic. These recommendations are sum-

marised in a list of questions that journalists can ask themselves to help ensure diversity in their stories:¹⁹

- 1) What are my own personal assumptions about the people I am reporting on?
- 2) Am I open to accepting ideas for stories that go beyond my own cultural standpoint?
- 3) Have I any prejudicial attitude to the issue that might negatively affect the subject of the story?
- 4) Are any references to colour, race, or physical appearance in the story relevant to the topic?
- 5) Have I used correct terminology to describe individuals and their culture?
- 6) Have I discussed the topic with experienced colleagues familiar with the subject?
- 7) Have I used different opinions and sources in the story, including those of minorities?
- 8) Does the story simply follow prevailing attitudes? Have I questioned these attitudes?
- 9) Have I made sure that the story does not reflect stereotypes?
- 10) Have I directly considered the needs of those involved in the story?
- 11) Have I taken into account the effect of the story or the images used on the lives of others?

¹⁹ Aidan White, To Tell You The TRUTH: The Ethical Journalism Initiative.

Models for ethical evaluation (Moral reasoning)

There are various different models that can help journalists to make ethical decisions using moral reasoning. Journalists can apply these models to news stories in order to make sure that they are both ethical and professional:

The SAD formula (situational definition, analysis, decision)²⁰

This model can be subdivided into three stages:

1) Situational definition:

- a) Describe the facts appearing in the story.
- b) Establish the conflicting values and principles in the story – for example, conflicting figures for the same topic or conflicting values (publish accurate information that may be against the public interest or ignore that information in order to protect the public)?
- c) Try to formulate a single ethical question that sums up the ethical dilemma presented by the story.

2) Analysis:

- a) Try to create a discussion with your colleagues concerning the conflicting facts and values within the story.
- b) Take account of external factors that might affect the story.
- c) Look at what your organisation normally does in similar cases or make use of similar experiences.
- d) Establish the parties affected by this ethical decision (you, your colleagues, your sources, society, etc).
- e) Take into consideration your own emotional attitude to the decision as opposed to your rational attitude.

3) Decision:

- a) Make a final decision.
- b) Justify that decision logically in response to possible criticisms.

²⁰ Day, L. A. (2005). Ethics in media communications: Cases and controversies. Cengage Learning.

The Dilemma Method²¹

This model is based on the creation of a dialogue within the newsroom. A journalist dealing with an ethical dilemma concerning an aspect of a story works with his or her colleagues to produce a consensus decision:

1 Introduction: A general introduction is given to familiarise the journalists with the ethical sensitivity of the story and demonstrate the importance of the decision they are going to make.

2 Presenting the issue: The journalist presents the facts that he or she has collected (facts only, with no influence from his or her opinion).

3 Formulating the ethical question and defining the dilemma: The ethical question that the journalist who has prepared the story wants colleagues to help him or her to answer is laid out in the following form: “Should I [first suggestion], [second suggestion] or [third suggestion]...?”

4 Brainstorm: The journalists ask questions about the story and its different aspects and then discuss some general questions, citing previous experiences and similar stories.

5 Analysing the dilemma: We begin to analyse the dilemma by comparing it with professional and societal values, the possible response on publication and the parties that may be harmed by each suggestion.

6 Beginning to search for alternatives: Here the journalist asks colleagues to think about alternatives to the suggestions he or she initially presented.

²¹ Adapted from: Tan, Daniel YB, Bastiaan C. Ter Meulen, Albert Molewijk, and Guy Widdershoven. “Moral case deliberation.” *Practical neurology* 18, no. 3 (2018): 181-186.

7 Individual decisions by each journalist: Colleagues submit their individual decisions using pen and paper by answering as follows:

- a) I believe that the best decision is to (one of the suggestions), because (giving a professional justification of the decision).
- b) Although this choice may lead to (the potential negative effects),
- c) this can be avoided by...
- d) And so (the decision he or she has chosen) is the ethical option that should be taken, given... (professional justifications).

34

8 Opening up discussion: The answers are then collected and colleagues discuss them, with the aim of expanding discussion points in order to look at all aspects of the dilemma and weigh them up against one another in order to reach a consensus decision.

9 Summarising conclusions: At the end of the discussion, the team takes a single ethical decision by majority vote.

10 Assessing the dilemma: After an ethical decision is made and the story is published in a particular form, the effects of the decision are assessed (positives and negatives) in order to benefit from the experience.

Possible mistakes

Stage	Possible mistake
Observing news	Deciding which news is worth covering based on unobjective preferences (personal position, serving politicians, etc).
Verifying news	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Accepting the official narrative without verification.2. Not having a methodical verification mechanism.3. Using information taken from social media without verification.4. Not visiting the actual scene of events.
Choosing sources	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Focusing on the opinions of one party in the story at the expense of others.2. Failing to be even-handed in choosing suitable sources to represent each party (quality of the source, extent of their familiarity with the issue).3. Not referring to expert opinion.
Writing the story	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Using unobjective and biased language.2. Giving more space to one source and marginalising others.
Choosing pictures and video clips	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Publishing pictures or videos that negatively stereotype a community or individuals without any professional justification.2. Publishing pictures or videos that expose the identity of sources who have requested anonymity.3. Publishing pictures or videos without verification.4. Publishing pictures or videos infringing on the privacy of individuals or endangering members of the public.
Publication	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Using shocking headlines or unobjective terms in order to be controversial.2. Failing to ethically evaluate the story before publication.



Important questions to ask yourself

The steps to compiling a story given here are familiar to all journalists. But our focus has been on professional practices that can help journalists avoid discrimination and hate speech. As part of this, we have put together a list of questions that we advise journalists to ask themselves when working on a story:

1 – Story planning

• Why should I cover this story?

Summarise each reason then evaluate it according to its importance to the public as compared to other stories you could cover.

• How is this story expected to benefit the public?

• What aspects of the story are absent from the media?

Try to find a new approach to the story.

• What is the worst way the story could possibly be produced?

Think of an unprofessional and

unobjective way the story could be approached. Why would it be unprofessional and unobjective? Analyse in order to avoid.

• What is the ideal way to cover the story?

Think about the best form the story could possibly take, even if it would be difficult for you to achieve in reality because of limitations. Try to come as close to it as possible.

• What are the sources I should use to achieve balance in the story?

• Have I conducted enough research and informed myself sufficiently about the various aspects of the story, allowing me to understand all of its different dimensions?

• Have I considered the sources' individual circumstances and peculiarities?

Try to understand their circumstances in order to ask them appropriate questions while respecting the specific nature of every case. See [the guidebook on covering refugee stories](#)

2 – Producing the story

- Have I informed sources of the nature of the story? Have they given their consent to be quoted or to appear?

- Have I been balanced in the sources that I have chosen? Have I given them the right to comment on information concerning them?

- Were the questions I prepared appropriate to the topic?

If the answer is “no”, then come up with more relevant questions and return to the sources.

- Did I obtain the information in the story from a range of different sources?

Some sources may give you incorrect information or figures in order to serve a particular agenda. Try and cross-reference information as much as possible.

- Have I assessed the possible risk to the source if information about him or her is published? Have I informed him or her of this risk?

Not all sources are aware of the possible consequences of appearing in a story. Make sure to consider sources’ circumstances before making a decision to publish information about them. The same applies to them appearing on camera.

3 - Writing the story:

- Have I formulated the story objectively? Have I presented different sources' narratives faithfully?

- Have I put quotation marks around expressions that express a value judgment and attributed them to the source?

- Have I given all sources' statements similar weight in the story and provided important information from all sides?

- Have I assessed the statements appearing in the story and the risks associated with publishing them?

- Have I used language that may be harmful to a particular community or described them negatively?

- Have I avoided any unobjective conclusions or value judgments concerning the story?

- Have I excluded my personal opinions from the story and distanced myself equally from all parties?

- Have I made sure not to include any information that might harm sources or the public?

In cases where journalists face the ethical dilemma of deciding which is more important, the publication of the information or the risks associated with it, go back to one of the ethical evaluation models given above.

- Have you only included important information in your story?

Not everything sources say is actually important. Make sure you only include information relevant to the story and its context.

- Have I only included information that sources have given me permission to use in the story?

- Have I protected the anonymity of sources who have asked me to do so?

4 - Ethical evaluation of the story:

If you can't answer a question decisively, go back to the ethical evaluation methods.

- What are the possible risks associated with publishing the story? What are the possible benefits?

- Do I have sufficient professional justification to publish the story? Can I avoid any possible risk?

- Was serving the public interest my only criterion in assessing the story? If not, what were my other criteria, and did this affect the balance of the story?

- What is the worst that could happen if this story is published? What is the best that could happen?

List the possible negative and then the possible positive outcomes of publishing the story. Try and find ways to forestall the negatives as much as possible. Use one of the ethical evaluation models from Chapter 4.

- Will this story lead the target demographic to feel hatred towards a person or group on the basis of their identity?

- Will the general context in which the story or the headline is being published lead to the creation of an atmosphere of hatred or discrimination towards a given person or group of people on the basis of their identity?

- Does the story stereotype or misrepresent a person or group based on their identity?

About the author

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