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GUIDELINES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

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OVERVIEW

Social media networks have become a primary source of information and an integral part of daily life for billions of people the world over.

The management strongly encourages AFP journalists to open accounts with popular social networking sites. Twitter and Facebook remain the most important among these, but others such as Google Plus, LinkedIn and Tumblr are growing in influence. Active participation in social media has become a vital tool for building contacts and finding new sources, as well as monitoring and reporting the news.

This guide provides an overview of how to do this and outlines AFP's rules on the use of social networks. These guidelines will be regularly updated to stay abreast of evolving trends on the Internet.

The presence of AFP journalists on social networks helps build the agency's credibility across the Internet and shows that AFP has a solid presence across the spectrum of digital and traditional media.

These networks bring together a global mass of web users, who are often at the forefront of current events as witnesses or experts, and news organisations keen to build up their brand and credibility.

AFP journalists are encouraged to be part of this process and to be active on social media, using the networks in a measured and credible way in keeping with the agency's strong and historical journalistic traditions. Many journalists active on social networks, especially Twitter, have built strong followings and boosted their own visibility and clout. At the same time, social networks pose new challenges for agency journalists because they allow us to interact directly with the public without the filter of an editor or a client.

HOW?

AFP journalists can play a vital role in protecting the credibility of the agency's work and championing the quality of our journalism. Twitter, for example, allows journalists to quickly spot and address false information or unfair criticism online. By building up networks on Twitter, AFP journalists not only develop useful sources of information, they also help to gain visibility for AFP's journalism across the Internet.





Journalists on social networks should be mindful of the agency's image and principles. All information posted online – whether on Twitter, Facebook or any other social network – is or can easily become public, even if it originates from a personal account.

As a result, two overarching principles should govern online activity by AFP journalists, whether on social networks or other online forums, even if personal accounts are being used. All content should:

- Broadly conform to the spirit of the AFP stylebook, the ethical values of the agency, and its guiding principles of fairness and balance. Even if a freer tone is encouraged on social networking sites, no one should use insults or profane/offensive language.
- Respect the independence and impartiality of AFP.

These rules apply to social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as blogs and other online forums. The agency's presence on social networks and the application of these guidelines will be reviewed and updated each year in the agency's annual report.

1) MANAGING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA IDENTITY

- If AFP journalists are using social media such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or Tumblr in a professional capacity, it is essential they are clearly identified as AFP journalists.
- Journalists should include a disclaimer on their Twitter profiles such as: "The views expressed here are my own. Links and re-tweets are not endorsements" or "On Twitter I speak only for myself."
- A journalist who wants to be active on a social network beyond simply monitoring other people's posts should inform his or her manager.
- If you feel strongly about having a personal social media presence, then open separate work and private social media accounts. The private account should make no reference to your role as a journalist at AFP.
- Journalists who've already opened professional accounts under a pseudonym should modify these to clearly state their name and role within the agency.
- Individual services and bureaus are also welcome to open accounts, such as @AFPTokyo and @AFPRennes. Please let the social media team in Paris and redchef know before you launch.
- Be security conscious: Choose strong passwords that are at least eight characters long and include a mixture of upper and lower case letters, as well as symbols and numbers. Change your passwords regularly, and don't store these in an easily accessible file. Watch out for phishing attacks and fraudulent emails. Please contact the social media team or the main technical department if you have any questions.
- AFP will keep a list of the professional social media accounts of all staff.



2) GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

- Avoid all vulgar or overtly opinionated comment.
- Conversations can sometimes include very lively exchanges and journalists often receive criticism over reports or observations. If this is the case, refrain from reacting in the heat of the moment; take time to write a considered cool-headed post.
- Before Tweeting or posting comments, bear in mind that your words will be public and will be archived and referenced by search engines. Breaking news stories often attract tweets that are speculative in nature, contain unverified information or are just plain wrong. Journalists should bear this in mind and avoid retweeting any information that could turn out to be problematic. However, if a journalist sees a tweet they know to be wrong and that runs counter to verified information that is already on the wire, they can point this out.
- Respect the user rules for each individual site.
- If an AFP journalist sees the agency challenged or criticised on a social network, he or she should immediately alert the social media team, as well as a senior editorial manager such as a bureau chief, desk chief or redchef.

3) WHAT TO POST ONLINE?

- Do not post any internal AFP correspondence.
- You should not post online any exclusive information gained in the course of your work for AFP. This sort of material is proprietary, and belongs first on the wire or with the web & mobile department.
- Journalists can, however, post any observations, colour or anecdotes which will help them to build up a network of followers. Journalists commenting on a subject outside their normal beat should be mindful that the topic may well be covered an AFP colleague.
- Journalists are encouraged to use their smartphones to take photos and short videos, and to include these in their tweets. To distinguish between these and official AFP photos, journalists are encouraged to use filters, such as those found in the Twitter mobile app, Instagram, Hipstamatic, etc.
- Avoid criticising other media, regardless of whether they are clients or not.
- Remain neutral when commenting on the regions, countries or governments you cover. You should also refrain from any comments that could harm the agency's image of impartiality.

Recommending or re-tweeting links is an essential part of the social network experience and is encouraged. However, it is important this process is done with care. A retweet or link is often considered a sympathetic recommendation.

- AFP journalists shouldn't post or tweet alerts, exclusive news or major breaking news without first checking with the regional or central redchef. It is important for AFP to have a social media



presence on many news stories, but management needs to make sure there are enough reporters on the ground to ensure the quality of coverage and to ensure information is prioritised for the wire or Live Reports.

- Corrections: Mistakes happen in tweets and social media postings. As soon as you realise you've published something incorrect, send out another posting on the same platform that describes the mistake and contains the correct information. Do not delete a tweet or posting without first sending a corrected version. For serious errors or messages that have already been widely shared, please contact the social media team or redchef before deleting anything.

4) POSTING OR TWEETING AFP CONTENT

- Avoid tweeting AFP alerts or breaking news on social networks. Alerts are an important part of AFP business, so it's vital not to disseminate them too freely. Journalists should only retweet alerts that have been tweeted from the company's @AFP account or published by an AFP client.
- Journalists are strongly encouraged to disseminate information that has already been posted on the company's social media accounts, including Facebook, Google+, Tumblr, LinkedIn, YouTube and Dailymotion, and to retweet posts on @AFP (or other agency accounts such as @AFPphoto, @afpr, @AFPespanol etc.)
- Journalists should try to link to articles, photos, videos, infographics and other products hosted on client sites.
- Include @AFP or #AFP in every tweet containing agency information. This serves a dual purpose: It flags your tweet to social media editors, so will more likely be retweeted on @AFP, and it increases brand recognition.
- Journalists should refrain from posting AFP content culled directly from the wires or platforms such as ImageForum. This can be done in a very limited way in exceptional circumstances (such as a photographer using a low-resolution version of an image on a personal blog).

5) LEGAL ISSUES

Journalists should remember that social networks such as Twitter and Facebook are hosting sites which essentially give space to users to express themselves under their own responsibility. Journalists should understand they are responsible for the information on their Facebook page or Twitter account, and can be held legally accountable for any issues arising from that information.

If information is posted while the journalist is carrying out official AFP business, AFP could also face legal ramifications. As a result it is essential that journalists respect the agency's social media guidelines, the principles laid out in the AFP stylebook and laws relating to the freedom of information.

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