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GUIDELINE OF MEDIA LITERATE CITIZEN RECOGNIZE AND PREVENT HATE SPEECH IN MEDIA



We spend a most of our time in front of screens in a digital environment. Keeping that environment clean, positive and harmonious has become one of the problems of modern media. Along with endless opportunities, the digital environment of communication has also brought threats. Massive volumes of hate speech, targeting, incitement to violence and insult are challenges around the world. We need to be media literate to avoid online threats and transform our media environment into a space for healthy debate, free and responsible speech, safe and enjoyable communication, where ethics and mutual respect apply.

This guide will help identify, avoid and prevent the dissemination of hate speech in the media environment.

SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HATE SPEECH IN MEDIA



What is Hate Speech?

A comprehensive and internationally acceptable definition of hate speech is provided by the United Nations in the **Strategy and Action Plan against Hate Speech**:

any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.

Hate speech, discrimination and propaganda of violence are prohibited in Armenia by the Constitution and are punished as a criminal offense by RA Legislation.

What do we mean by saying media?

Media is the environment of communication where information, messages, content are created and distributed.

In addition to traditional mass media, modern digital platforms and the materials distributed on them are part of the media: **photos, videos, memes, songs, stories, comments** and etc..



Of course, there are also non-digital media: **advertising posters, newspapers, books**, even **petroglyphs** that convey the messages of people who lived thousands of years ago.



However, the modern communication environment is primarily digital, where we most often encounter hate speech and calls for violence.

How does the media contribute to the spread of hate speech?

Our ideas about different groups are often stereotypical, based on the images and stories we see and hear in the media: **news, movies, entertainment shows, and social media content.**

For example, soap operas reinforce the stereotype of women as bad drivers, humorous programs spread stereotypes about people living in one or another region of Armenia, TikTok videos vulgarize public perceptions of ethnic minorities... Those stereotypes turn into prejudices, which can lead to hostility, discrimination, and hatred.

Hate speech is not only expressed in words. It can be manifested through images, caricatures, memes, gestures, symbols, songs and videos, graffiti on the wall, even objects.



Image 1 Graffiti containing hate speech in Australia, "Shame on you, China!" "go home, yellow dogs!"¹:

For example, the OK sign displayed by hand (👌) became a hate symbol in the United States in 2019, as far-right groups on the Internet used it to symbolize white supremacy. Likewise, the spread of fascist symbols is a clear hate speech for Jews, as is the display of the Gray Wolves sign for Armenians.

These and other symbols often become part of hate campaigns against various groups in the media, and social networks are not always able to react quickly to the problem. The modern media environment enables everyone, including people and groups with extremist views, to create

¹ Due to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in China.

content, and it also accelerates and increases the spread of that content.

What to do when encountering hate speech in the media?

If the problematic content has been distributed by a certain mass media, you can first call the editorial office and discuss the problem. Perhaps, it could be a result of a mistake that can be rectified.

The other way to go is to apply to the Media Ethics Monitoring Body. This body composed of media specialists examines citizens' complaints and provides a professional conclusion, which is accepted by dozens of mass media affiliated to the Body. These are the media that signed the "Code of Ethical Principles of the Media and Journalists of Armenia", committing to maintain professional ethics, including not promoting discrimination, intolerance and respecting the values of representatives of various groups.

Of course, spreading hate speech is also a criminal offense, in which case you can turn to law enforcement.



Scan the QR code to see **Code of Ethical Principles of the Media and Journalists of Armenia**

(հայերեն)

Media Ethics
Monitoring Body

how to apply >



<https://ypc.am/self-regulation/#self-regulation-form>



What to do when dangerous content is on social networks?

The social networks we know (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok...) have rules and guidelines that prohibit and limit hate speech on their platforms. With the help of artificial intelligence and humans, networks try to find and remove dangerous content, but often fail, especially when dealing with less common languages.

Moreover, social networks are often accused of promoting hate speech, as algorithms suggest the most discussed, commented, sensationalized content to users, inflaming passions.

It is important that users, when encountering dangerous content, inform the

administration of the platform about it, block the pages if necessary.

The procedures for filing a complaint on social networks are very simple and similar. Let's discuss the procedure of Facebook owned by Meta company.

You can Report any post, photo or video on **Facebook** by clicking on the dots symbol.

In the window that opens, it is necessary to select the type of dangerous content (**hate speech, harassment, false information, nudity, etc.**),

and also specify **what kind of discrimination is at the basis of the hate speech** (race or nationality, religious orientation, sexual orientation, disability...).

and also specify what kind of discrimination is at the basis of the hate speech (race or nationality, religious orientation, sexual orientation, disability...).

After filing the complaint, Facebook investigates it and removes the material if it finds direct aggression against people, violence and



dehumanization, degrading language, profanity or calls for discrimination.

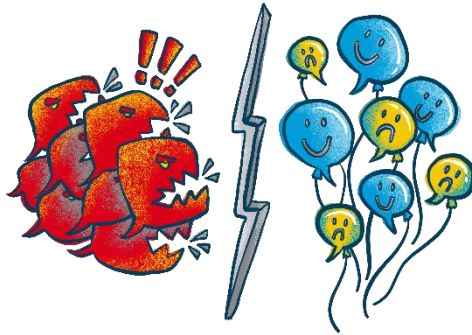
Similarly, it is possible to report personal or corporate pages, as well as to block these pages in order not to see the shared content, to prohibit correspondence.

Do these restrictions violate the right to freedom of speech?

Freedom of speech is one of the fundamental human rights, which can be limited only in cases defined by law, when the rights of others are violated, when there is a threat to state security. And hate speech and crimes committed on that basis violate the rights of individuals and groups, endanger the peace and security of society.

Of course, sometimes the concept of hate speech is misused to criminally limit the freedom of speech of journalists and human rights defenders, to silence them. It is important that the restrictions on freedom of speech derive from the principles of democracy and take into account people's rights.

SOME EXAMPLES OF HATE SPEECH IN THE MEDIA



In 2022, the National Commissioner of Television and Radio of Armenia submitted a complaint to the Media Ethics Monitoring Body regarding the insult, discrimination and hate speech uttered by the "Hayeli Club" representative and guests at the press conference broadcast by the H2 TV channel. Investigating the complaint, the Monitoring Body confirmed that **"discrimination with political characteristics, hate speech"** were broadcast on the air, and urged the media to "take into account the general tense atmosphere of the country, monitor their own broadcasts and, as far as possible, exclude the spread of hate speech and calls for violence among the public."

In the videos of the same press club, which are spread on online platforms, there are many insults and hate speech caused by political views. For example, one of the former MPs calls the intellectuals who do not support the opposition "shoe-lickers of Turkey's "intellectuals"", another declares that "it is time to shoot the prime minister under the wall of the government".

Especially before the early elections in 2021, we witnessed hate speech, insults and calls for violence from different political camps. Nikol Pashinyan threatened with a "steel mandate" by waving a real hammer in his hand and promising to "smear on the asphalt", the candidates called each other "traitor" and "Turk", questioned each other's "manhood". According to the assessment of the international organization Freedom House, these actions of political parties "contribute to the polarization of society and the spread of hate speech."

Later, answering Factor.am's question about the statements he made, Nikol Pashinyan said: *"As for the general vocabulary, tone, etc., I think we should all think that, especially in order*

to improve the atmosphere, we all have something to do, including me."

Intolerance in the discussions of the Armenian domain of Facebook

In 2017, there was a big uproar over a photo posted by the Marashlyan photo studio on Facebook, which showed an Armenian woman with her black husband and child. Many posts were circulated, criticizing the woman, insulting her and her family, humiliating black people. A teacher of one of Yerevan's schools made a public post on Facebook that "xenophobic and pacifist Armenians should be dealt with so that they do not spread over our nation" and called blacks "people who live by instincts and lack intellectual abilities". Under the pressure of offensive comments and heated discussions, the photo was removed from Facebook.

The "Fight against Discrimination and for Equality" coalition responded to this situation, considering it **"a classic manifestation of discrimination based on race and ethnicity"**,

which **"has led to catastrophic events in history: genocides, ethnic cleansing, etc."**

Social media is a media regardless of how users perceive it to be. And the teacher is a public person who has a huge responsibility. He/she educates not only through school programs, but also through his behavior and public speech. It is important that social media users, especially public figures, think about the consequences and impact of their words and behavior in the media.

From hate speech to mass violence and genocide

In 2017, there was a wave of mass violence against the Rohingya Muslim community living in Myanmar. Thousands of people were raped, tortured and killed, more than 700,000 people were displaced. This ethnic group is not recognized by the Myanmar authorities, they do not have citizenship and have been persecuted and oppressed for years.

According to the report of the international human rights organization Amnesty International, in

2017, the campaign of hate speech and calls for violence against the Rohingya people was greatly contributed to the mass violence. Myanmar's military structures and extremist groups have been spreading dehumanizing materials and falsehoods on this platform for months.

In 2021, the representatives of the Rohingya community, who survived mass violence, applied to the court, demanding compensation of 150 billion dollars from Meta.



Image 2 A poster from Amnesty International's report showing Facebook's culpability in the genocide against the Rohingya people

Meta, which owns Facebook, admitted that it did not do enough to prevent violence. Only after the incidents did Facebook block many extremist accounts in Myanmar and promised to increase tools and staff to better understand the local language.

Before the creation of social networks, traditional types of media were also used to incite hostility towards groups of people, conduct information warfare, and even commit genocide. Before the Tutsi Genocide in Rwanda, it is well known that nationalists used local newspapers and radio to incite hatred, pit Hutus against the Tutsi minority, and implicate them in genocidal acts. In 1994, more than 800,000 people were killed in 100 days.

Conspiracy theories behind hate speech

In 2020, a criminal case was filed against the founder of the Veto movement, Narek Malyan, after he **poured red paint on the entrance to the office of the Open Societies Foundation** (known as the Soros Foundation), declaring: *"Through this blood, you will go to collect your filthy grants every day. I will dedicate my whole life and all my activities to calling scumbags like you to justice, to kill you, death to traitors."*

The head of the "Helsinki Citizens' Assembly" Vanadzor Office, human rights defender Artur Sakunts, based on whose complaint the case was initiated, announced in court that Narek Malyan had spoken **words of violence and hatred towards human rights defenders**, even **calling for physical reprisals**, called all human rights **defenders traitors to the nation**, and made lists of "Sorosians" and promised to retaliate against them. This case against Narek Malyan was still ongoing in the court at the end of 2022.

At the core of these woven around the person of George Soros, an American businessman of Hungarian origin, is a conspiracy theory - an unsubstantiated, unproven theory about a big conspiracy. As if Soros wants to destroy Armenian national values and the state, and the authorities elected after the revolution in 2018, as well as the civil society, are financed and controlled by Soros to carry out this conspiracy.



Image 3 An example of a cartoon depicting the conspiracy theories woven around the person of George Soros.

In fact, conspiracy theories about Soros originated in his homeland, Hungary, where they created a hostile image of Soros for political purposes. Then that same thesis went around in

other countries, it was widely used in order to scare and manipulate the public, for example in Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, where the offices of the Open Society Foundation were closed.

It's interesting that both Azerbaijani and Armenian "AntiSorosians" put forth the same thesis. Particularly, In Azerbaijan it is widely believed, that Soros wants to destroy Azerbaijan and "take Karabagh" from them, thus finances Armenians and Armenian Government.

The screenshot shows a website header with the logo 'EU vs DisInfo' and navigation links: 'NEWS & ANALYSIS', 'DISINFO DATABASE', 'STUDIES & REPORTS', 'LEARN', 'ABOUT', and 'GUEST CONTENT'. The main headline reads 'DISINFO: Soros wants to destroy Armenia through the Karabakh war' in large, bold, black letters. Below the headline is the word 'SUMMARY' in a large, bold, black font. A black box contains the text: 'The conflict in Karabakh is an attempt to liquidate Armenia. George Soros was behind the (election of) Armenian leader Nikol Pashinyan and their goal was that.' To the right, a grey box contains the text 'PUBLICATION/MEDIA' and a link '→ tsargrad.tv (Archived)'.

The screenshot shows a website header with the text 'Key | September 7, 2017 17:21' and a red 'EXCLUSIVE' tag. The main headline reads 'George Soros, Enemy of Azerbaijan' in large, bold, black letters.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ANALYZE MEDIA MATERIALS

A media literate person analyzes and asks questions while watching, listening and reading any media material: post, film, news, advertisement, poster, program. **Let's remember the five media literacy questions that help analyze information.**

Who is the author?

It is important to understand the message of the media by analyzing its layers, values and stereotypes in it, separating facts from opinions and comments, judgements, emotional expressions and images.

What is the message?

It is important to understand the message of the media by analyzing its layers, values and stereotypes in it, separating facts from opinions and comments, judgements, emotional expressions and images.

Who is the audience of the message?

If we know who the media material is targeting, the tricks and goals to influence that audience become more obvious.

When we are the distributors of a content, it is again important to remember the audience. Do our wordings not offend anyone?

What techniques are used?

Media content is always packed with colors, music, graphics... They are an integral part of media language. But when the media aims to manipulate the audience, it resorts to more effective tricks: sensational headlines, sensational photos, conspiracy theories, image and word distortion...

What is the purpose of the material?

Finding out who the author of the material is, what they want to say, who are they addressing and what tricks they used, you should try to understand what the purpose is, why this information is being reported now, what interests can be here, who can be the client and what consequences the information may have.

Some tips to recognize, avoid and not to spread hate



1

Before trusting any information, turn on your critical thinking, analyze, try to find the source of the information, understand the motives and goals. The 5 questions of media literacy will help in this matter.

2

Examine your beliefs. They are often shaped by the influence of others and the media. It is important to discuss and understand where our idea of this or that group comes from, what its basis is, how stereotypical it is, and whether it contributes to the formation of intolerant and discriminatory attitudes.



3

Be suspicious of headlines with sensational expressions, offensive words, vulgar and shocking photos. Quality media, reliable journalists avoid tricks that play with people's feelings. If the material is frightening and horrifying, or vice versa, as if it was written from your heart, it is possible that it has the intention to mislead. It is worth controlling emotions and switching on a sober mind.

Think carefully before getting into online arguments. If your interlocutor is an acquaintance, a friend, it is advisable to move the discussion to another area, call, meet, discuss the problem in a calmer environment. If it is a stranger, then the argument is riskier, because you do not know who the other person is, what problems and goals they have, how sensitive and important the topic under discussion is for them. In the comments on social networks, it is almost impossible to convince and explain anything to a stranger, therefore, it is better to avoid such situations.



4

Beware of letters from strangers. Of course, it happens that we get to know each other, cooperate, and become friends on social media. However, emails from strangers may contain computer viruses, phishing scams, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, threats, and other risks. When receiving an email from strangers, never click on links, open files, or share personal information.



5

Close the "door" well. The "locks" of user accounts in the online domain must be strong, that is, you must have long, complex, non-repeating passwords, activate two-factor authentication, regularly check privacy settings.

6

Don't do anything online that you wouldn't do offline. In the online domain, it is easy to be "bold" to insult, ridicule, even threaten others, thinking that anything is possible here. These virtual actions affect real people, real relationships, real lives, and can have real consequences for you and others.

Respond smartly when encountering insults and hate speech online. Instead of getting into an argument, it is important to take active steps:

- report the violations of social network rules, block the page of the person spreading that content, helping to reduce dangerous content,
- discuss the problem with someone you trust, a friend, parent, teacher, if the content targets you,
- hate speech is a criminal offense. If you consider the content directed at you to be dangerous, you should also contact the law enforcement authorities.



QUIZ

some definitions of hate speech and media

1. Differentiation of people and groups of people due to national/ethnic affiliation.
2. Differentiated treatment of people and restriction of rights based on their views and characteristics.
3. A word, an expression that violates human dignity.
4. Mocking, humiliating and threatening a person online.
5. According to the RA constitution, it is the basis of human rights and freedoms.
6. News based on evidence and facts.
7. A person's assessment and judgment on any issue.
8. Social media uses these formulas to offer users interesting content and targeted ads.
9. Human freedoms, which are guaranteed by the state and protected by law.
10. Distortion of media content that tends to mislead the audience.
11. Respecting and accepting the ideas, views and approaches of others.
12. Rules of online conduct and behavior, following which we make the Internet a more positive and safer environment.

13. Generalized, frozen image and attitude towards other nations and religions, different social groups.
14. The manifestation of deep contempt, humiliation, hostility towards others.
15. Deliberately upsetting, insulting, or involving others in an argument in the online domain.
16. Unfriendly disposition and attitude towards anyone or group.
17. Different groups of people based on national, religious, social, sexual orientation and other grounds, which do not constitute the majority of society.
18. A person whose profession is to raise public issues and report reliable information.
19. Aggressive action applied to anyone, which can be of a psychological, physical, or sexual nature.
20. Fake news.

Answers

1. racism, 2. discrimination, 3. insult, 4. cyberbullying, 5. dignity, 6. credibility, 7. opinion, 8. algorithm, 9. entitlement, 10. manipulation, 11. tolerance, 12. netiquette, 13. stereotype, 14. hate, 15. trolling, 16. hostility, 17. minority, 18. journalist, 19. violence, 20. Misinformation

Useful Links

1. Guide for the media literate citizen, CMI, MFA
2. <https://media.am/hy/lab/2022/05/02/32646/>
3. Media science: Online course of media literacy, CMI
4. <https://elearning.media.am/course-category/մեդիա-իգիտություն/>
5. Computer games on the topics of media literacy, fact-checking and digital security
6. <https://media.am/hy/medialiteracy/2020/05/02/21336/>
7. The line between hate speech and freedom of speech. where does one begin and the other end, ILP
8. <https://liberalinstitute.am/publications/>
9. Bookmarks. Combating online hate speech through human rights education, CoE
<https://rm.coe.int/168070b324>
10. Media Ethics Monitoring Body
11. <https://ypc.am/hy/self-regulation/>
12. Facebook's Hate Speech Rules
13. <https://transparency.fb.com/policies/community-standards/hate-speech/>
14. Discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech in Armenia. data collection Situation analysis report, A. Ghazaryan

15. <https://rm.coe.int/situational-analysis-armenia-hye/16809e49f2>
16. Understanding Hate Speech, UN
17. <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech>
18. We can. Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives, COE <https://rm.coe.int/wecan-eng-final-23052017-web/168071ba08>