

CODE OF ETHICS FOR JOURNALISTS 2025



Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority

Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment

Royal Government of Bhutan

Thimphu

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In exercise of the powers conferred under Sections 71(2), 71(5) and 71(10) of the Information, Communications and Media Act of Bhutan 2018, the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority hereby issues the Code of Ethics for Journalists as follows:

CHAPTER I PRELIMINARY

Title

1. This Code shall be called the Code of Ethics for Journalists 2025.

Commencement

2. This Code shall come into force on the 1st day of April 2025

Application

3. This Code shall apply to:
 - (1) all journalists working in print, broadcast, or online media within or for Bhutan; and
 - (2) all media entities operating in Bhutan.

Revocation

4. Any prior Code of Ethics for Journalists issued before the commencement of this Code is hereby revoked

CHAPTER II ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM

Ethics of Journalist

5. Journalists shall:
 - (1) maintain the highest professional and ethical standards;
 - (2) provide independent and accurate news and information with integrity, remaining accountable for their actions, neutral in their position and keeping the national interest foremost in their minds at all times; and

- (3) conduct themselves in consonance with the principles provided under this Code and observe the principles both in letter and in spirit.

Professional Integrity

6. A journalist shall:

- (1) present news with accuracy, integrity, and decency, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest, and respecting the dignity and intelligence of both the audience and news subjects;
- (2) not use information obtained for public dissemination for personal gain or interest;
- (3) not engage in journalistic activities while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or other intoxicants that may compromise objectivity;
- (4) clearly distinguish and label opinion, commentary, and factual reporting;
- (5) ensure that extended coverage of events or individuals adds meaningful context and contributes to public knowledge;
- (6) avoid direct engagement with participants in violent situations while such situations are ongoing, except where public interest necessitates such engagement;
- (7) refrain from paying news sources that have vested interest in a story;
- (8) refrain from using deceptive or surreptitious newsgathering techniques unless an overriding public interest justifies such actions;
- (9) not offer or accept payments or gifts in exchange for influencing news coverage;
- (10) Not engage in activities that may compromise their integrity or independence;
- (11) disclose any personal or financial interest that may affect reporting and refrain from using privileged information for private gain;
- (12) remain accountable for journalistic actions and decisions to both the public and the profession;

- (13) address public concerns and complaints, correcting errors with prominence equal to that of the original publication;
- (14) educate the public on journalistic processes when controversies arise;
- (15) uphold ethical principles as a core duty of the profession;
- (16) create an open environment for ethical discussions and professional objections within media organizations;
- (17) ensure that no journalist is compelled to act unethically under institutional or external pressure;
- (18) use identification, press credentials, or other privileges strictly for professional purposes;
- (19) protect the identities of children when their family members are involved in crimes; and
- (20) refrain from reporting judicial proceedings in a manner that could unfairly influence the outcome of a trial.
- (21) not offer or make payments to any person who has been accused or convicted of a crime or any person who is, or is likely to become, a witness in a criminal trial, unless it can clearly and objectively be demonstrated that there is an overriding public interest in doing so. The onus of demonstrating the overriding public interest shall be on the journalist.

Social Responsibility

7. A journalist shall:

- (1) uphold their duty to serve the public interest and the nation;
- (2) safeguard media freedom as a fundamental right that protects the public's access to information, and shall actively promote, defend, and uphold this freedom from undue internal and external influence;
- (3) ensure that any allegiance beyond their professional duty does not compromise journalistic integrity, credibility, or objectivity;
- (4) provide accurate, comprehensive, and balanced information to enable the public to make informed decisions;

- (5) seek accreditation and encourage fellow professionals to do the same to uphold journalistic standards; and
- (6) refrain from publishing any material that is against public morality and ethical standards, particularly content that:
 - i. is obscene, vulgar, or sexually explicit;
 - ii. disregards Bhutanese cultural values and sensitivities; or
 - iii. promotes or glamorize:
 - a. gratuitous violence,
 - b. gambling; or
 - c. the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs.

Right to Truth

8. A journalist shall:

- (1) Uphold Truth and Accuracy by:
 - i. Prioritizing truth at all times, refraining from publishing false, inaccurate, misleading, or distorted material;
 - ii. Ensuring that every story is thoroughly researched to the best of their ability, clearly distinguishing between fact, comment, and conjecture; and
 - iii. Promptly issuing corrections and apologies for any errors discovered post-publication, regardless of intent.
- (2) Refrain from distortions that misrepresent the importance of events;
- (3) Disclose the origin of information unless confidentiality is explicitly requested by the source;
- (4) Never knowingly report false information or present staged/re-enacted events as genuine without clear disclosure.

- (5) not manipulate images, audio, content or multimedia in ways that mislead audiences. Minor edits for technical clarity (e.g., lighting adjustments) must not alter context or meaning.
- (6) Credit all sources appropriately and ensure direct quotes, ideas, or content from other, whether published or unpublished, are clearly attributed with proper context.

Non-Discrimination

9. Journalist shall:

- (1) defend the independence of all journalists from those seeking influence or control over news content. They shall gather and report news without fear or favor and shall vigorously resist undue influence from any outside forces, including advertisers, sources, story subjects, powerful individuals, and special interest groups
- (2) Uphold equality before the law, ensuring reporting is free from bias rooted in political, economic, business, or social prejudice.
- (3) Resist any person or organization attempting to purchase, manipulate, or politically influence news content, and oppose intimidation targeting journalists or news organizations.
- (4) Base editorial decisions on independent journalistic judgment, free from coercion, incentives, or external agendas.
- (5) Guard against personal, financial, or peer-driven pressures that compromise journalistic integrity or service to the public and nation.
- (6) Ensure sponsorships or external funding do not dictate, restrict, or distort news content.
- (7) Refuse to let ownership or management interests inappropriately sway editorial decisions or coverage.
- (8) Report news fairly and impartially, prioritizing public interest, significance, and relevance.
- (9) Avoid indirect participation in prohibited activities through proxies. This does not restrict relatives from lawful political, financial, commercial, religious, or civic engagements under Bhutanese law.

- (10) Treat all individuals in news coverage with dignity and respect, exercising sensitivity toward victims of crime, tragedy, or injustice.
 - (11) Deliver analysis grounded in professional expertise, not personal opinion or bias.
 - (12) Maintain neutrality in political debates, avoiding partisan alignment or endorsement.
- 10. A journalist's coverage shall never glamorize or discriminate against political parties, organizations, individuals, or the government, except as permitted by Bhutanese law.
 - 11. A journalist shall avoid prejudicial references to a person's sex, race, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, or other protected characteristics unless directly relevant to the story.
 - 12. If a person or organization is inaccurately portrayed or quoted, the journalist responsible must promptly provide a reasonable opportunity for correction, rebuttal, or inclusion of their perspective in the same platform where the original report appeared.

Sensationalism

- 13. A Journalist shall avoid sensationalism in reporting events and shall take all necessary precautions to ensure that published material does not incite violence or illegal acts.
- 14. A Journalist shall exercise utmost sensitivity when reporting on children or young persons. Specifically:
 - (1) A Journalist shall not interview a child under sixteen (16) years of age without the presence or consent of a parent or legal guardian.
 - (2) A Journalist shall not publish any story about a child or young person based solely on the fame, notoriety, or position of their parent(s).
 - (3) In court proceedings involving a child or young person, a Journalist shall not publish any details that could identify the minor, except where permitted by law in exceptional circumstances.
 - (4) In cases of sexual offenses against a child or young person, a Journalist shall never reveal the identity of the victim, but may identify adult parties involved if legally permissible.

Protection of Sources

15. A journalist shall protect the confidentiality of sources unless disclosure is required by law or such sources has consented to disclosure, or if there is an overriding public interest.

Respect for Privacy and Human Dignity

16. A journalist shall:
- (1) not publish any content that is defamatory of any person or organization;
 - (2) not invade the privacy of any person without their consent and shall respect their private and family life, home, health, and correspondence, except in circumstances where it can clearly and objectively be demonstrated that there is an overriding public interest in the invasion of privacy. The burden of proving the overriding public interest shall rest on the journalist;
 - (3) not publish any matter that would result in the identification of any complainant in a case involving sexual offenses, except with the written consent of such person or under an order or direction from a court of competent jurisdiction;
 - (4) respect the sentiments and privacy of individuals who have suffered grief or shock. When conducting inquiries in such situations, the journalist shall exercise utmost sensitivity; and
 - (5) not identify relatives or friends of any accused or convicted person or imply guilt by association unless there are compelling reasons such as relevance to the story or evidence that might reasonably point to such guilt.

Recordings of Conversations

17. Except in circumstances where it can clearly and objectively be demonstrated that there is an overriding public interest in doing so, a journalist shall not:
- (1) harass, intimidate, or deceive any person to obtain or attempt to obtain information or images; and
 - (2) install listening devices on any person's property, record conversations without consent, or enter any property surreptitiously or through subterfuge. The burden of proving the overriding public interest shall rest on the journalist.

Competition and Fairness

18. A journalist shall adhere to the principles of free competition in the Bhutanese media and shall not monopolize or attempt to monopolize the market through the use of power, influence, authority, financial means, or any other unfair practices.
19. A journalist shall maintain a professional, courteous, and harmonious relationship with fellow journalists and media professionals.

National Interest

20. A journalist shall place national interest and security above all other considerations.
21. A journalist shall refrain from reporting any content that may:
 - (1) Incite religious, ethnic, regional, or communal conflicts;
 - (2) Undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the Kingdom; or
 - (3) Breach or compromise the security of the country.

CHAPTER III COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement and Accountability

22. Any person aggrieved by a violation of this Code may file a complaint with the Authority.
23. Any journalist who contravenes or fails to comply with the provisions of this Code shall be guilty of an offence, and the Authority shall, subject to the degree of violation, impose the following penalties:
 - (1) For the first violation, a written warning letter shall be issued.
 - (2) For the second violation, a penalty equivalent to a maximum of six months' daily minimum wage may be imposed, depending on the gravity of the offence.
 - (3) For the third violation and/or notwithstanding the above provisions, if the violation is proven to be severe, the Journalist may be barred from practising Journalism in Bhutan for a period of one year.

CHAPTER IV MISCELLANEOUS

Revision

24. The Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority may revise this Code as and when necessary.

Definitions

25. Unless the context otherwise requires:

- (1) “Act” means the *Information, Communications and Media Act of Bhutan 2018*;
- (2) “Authority” means the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority;
- (3) “Journalist” means as defined in Section 464 (64) of the Act.