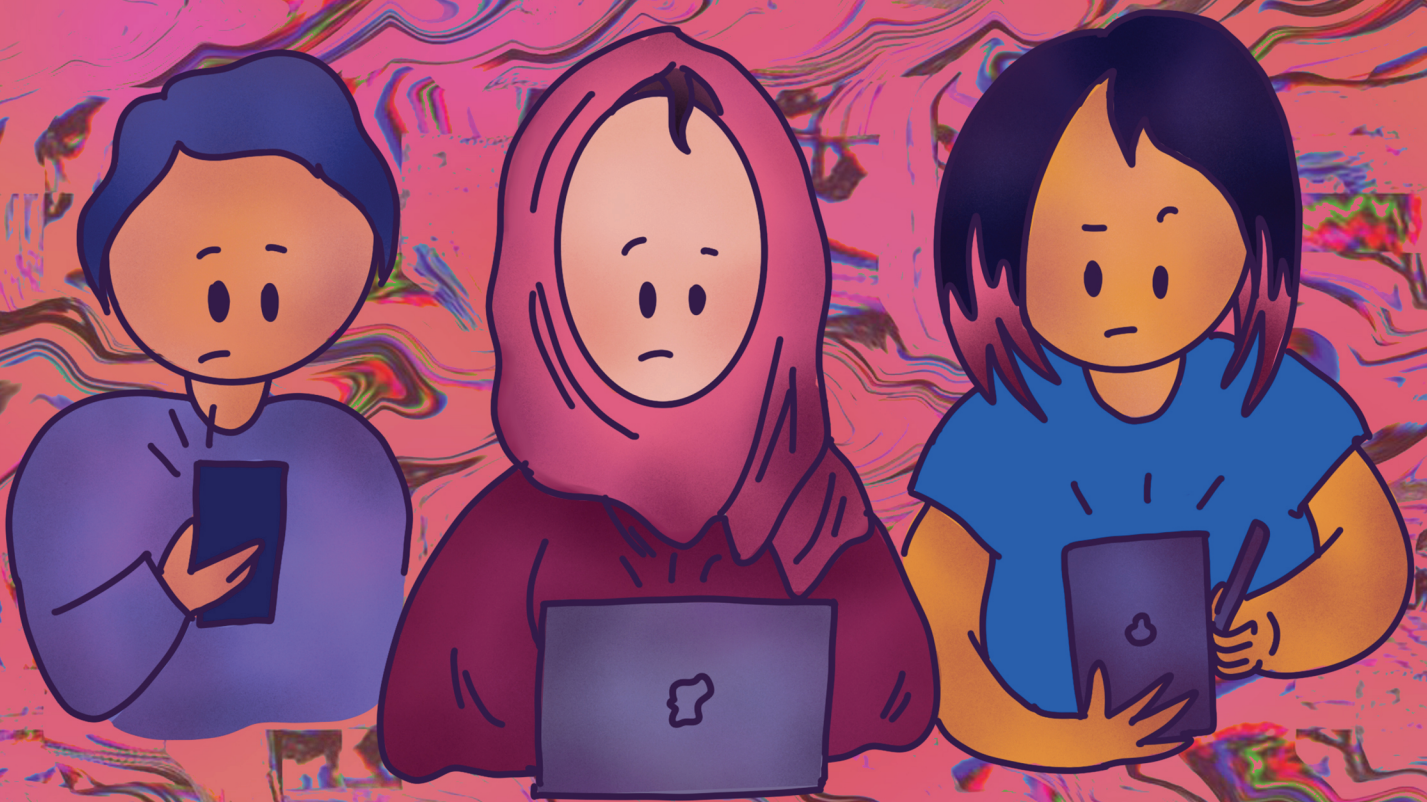


# TOOLKIT FOR DIGITAL CONTENT CREATORS IN PAKISTAN



DEVELOPED BY DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION WITH SUPPORT FROM UNESCO

NOVEMBER 2022



DigitalRightsFoundation  
"KNOW YOUR RIGHTS"

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

**CCW** – Cyber Crime Wing

**DRF** – Digital Rights Foundation

**FIA** – Federal Investigation Agency

**HRC** – United Nations Human Rights Council

**ICCPR** – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

**ICT** – Information and Communications Technology

**MOIT** – The Ministry of Information Technologies

**NGO** – Non-Governmental Organization

**PECA** – Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016

**PTA** – Pakistan Telecommunications Authority

**UDHR** – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**UNESCO** – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# INTRODUCTION

While in many ways Pakistan is still in the nascent stages of its digital transformation journey, the digital landscape is already growing rapidly. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) as of 2021, there are 110 million broadband subscribers, and telecom and ICT services cover roughly 89% of the population.<sup>1</sup> 50% of the country's population has subscribed to broadband, with the bulk (49%) consisting of mobile broadband connections.<sup>2</sup>



*Of these numbers, it is estimated that there were 71.70 million social media users in Pakistan by January 2022, which is approximately 31.5% of the population.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however, that these numbers may not represent unique users i.e one person may own more than one social media account.*

*Additionally, despite the boost in online users and mobile internet connectivity, Pakistan still suffers from a hefty gender digital divide. According to studies, women across low and middle-income countries are 25% less likely to use mobile internet compared to men.<sup>4</sup>*

## ABOUT THE DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION

Founded in 2012, Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a registered NGO focusing on ICTs to support human rights online, digital governance and accessibility in Pakistan. DRF envisions an internet where people, and especially women and marginalized groups, are able to exercise their right of expression without being threatened. Over the years DRF has launched the 'Hamara Internet' campaign to create awareness among young women and girls across Pakistan. In 2021 alone DRF conducted and took part in 81 panels, 68 training sessions, and 26 conferences on digital rights and internet freedoms. In 2016, DRF launched its Cyber Harassment Helpline 0800-39393 to provide legal advice, digital safety support and psychological assistance to victims of online harassment. Since its launch, the helpline has provided assistance on 12,231 calls. Among these 68 percent have been women.

## ABOUT UNESCO

UNESCO is a United Nations agency with the mandate to promote freedom of expression and to defend its corollary, freedom of the press. In other words, UNESCO is the lead agency in promoting, defending, monitoring, and advocating freedom of expression and freedom of the press as a basic human right within the United Nations system. UNESCO highlights media independence and pluralism as a fundamental component in the process of democracy. It also provides advisory services on media legislation and policy-making to governments who are members of UNESCO.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Annual Reports | PTA, pg. 12

<sup>2</sup> Annual Reports | PTA, pg. 15

<sup>3</sup> Digital 2022: Pakistan – DataReportal – Global Digital Insights.

<sup>4</sup> The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022

<sup>5</sup> Freedom of expression toolkit: a guide for students, pg.7

# SCOPE OF DIGITAL FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN PAKISTAN

In 2022, Freedom House gave Pakistan a ranking of 37/100 on their Freedom in the World 2022 Index. The Freedom in the World Index makes a composite score measuring the degree of political freedom and civil liberties, according to which Pakistan is marked as “partly free”.<sup>6</sup> In terms of freedom of expression, Pakistan has had a variable history. In 2020, Pakistan scored a dismal 30/100 on the Freedom of Expression Assessment Index which measures “poor”.<sup>7</sup> This assessment was calculated keeping in mind factors such as legal landscape, press freedoms and digital expression.<sup>8</sup> For example in 2021 alone, media personalities, media organizations, independent journalists, media stations and channels faced backlash from authorities for reporting news which was considered ‘unfavorable’. This resulted in fines, suspensions and outright bans in some cases.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes journalists are attacked by “troll farms” cultivated by authorities and political parties on social media platforms as was seen in the case of Asma Shirazi who is a Pakistani woman journalist.<sup>10</sup> In 2021, President Arif Alvi attempted to pass a law protecting journalists, however, this law contained vague provisions regarding incitement online and publishing misinformation. The government has, in the past, presented plans to unify its various regulatory bodies that govern different forms of media (such as print, broadcast and online media) i.e. PEMRA and PTA respectively, into the PMDA (Pakistan Media Development Authority). It was intended that this body would have vested powers to take journalists to trial by tribunal over the publishing of infringing or false content which posed serious threats to freedom of expression in the country.<sup>11</sup> However, the proposal was withdrawn.

Speaking exclusively of online spaces, Pakistanis engage in several topics of discussion online and offline. However, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) enjoys disproportionate censorship powers over content as empowered by section 37 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (PECA). The biggest problem with this is the overbroad and poorly defined parameters of “morally objectionable” or “socially objectionable” content. Sometimes dissident material, critical of state institutions, is also flagged as inappropriate or violating.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the inclusion of criminal defamation clause in Section 20 of PECA also acts as an impediment to free speech, since journalists, whistleblowers, or even regular citizens can face criminal charges for making unverified “defamatory” claims against a public figure, or any other individual online.<sup>13</sup> According to the Pakistan Freedom of Expression Report 2020, put together by the Civil Society for Independent Media and Expression, the Freedom of Expression Assessment Index found that internet users in Pakistan were more likely to experience “harassment, hate-speech, coordinated digital attacks, and other cyber crimes” when expressing their opinions online.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence of this form of online harassment, it was noted that people were reluctant to share their opinions on various political, social or religious issues for fear of backlash and negative repercussions.

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<sup>6</sup> Pakistan: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report

<sup>7</sup> Pakistan Freedom of Expression Report 2020

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Pakistan: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Stifling Freedom of Speech in Pakistan - Courting The Law

<sup>14</sup> Pakistan Freedom of Expression Report 2020

Pakistan had also tried to implement the controversial “Social Media Rules” 2020, which were challenged by the Islamabad High Court. However, they were still notified as the “Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards), Rules 2021”. These rules sought to exert unfettered powers over social media platforms, empowering the state to institute blanket bans on platforms that are not compliant with the Rules, including their restrictive requirements around content takedown requests. The Rules also mandated social media companies to establish a local presence that many feared would be used to curb freedom of expression in the country by taking down content deemed “undesirable” through coercive methods. Indian authorities have used similar tactics with social media company offices located within India.<sup>15</sup> In March 2021, the PTA banned TikTok for four months for allegedly “irreverent” and “immoral” content.<sup>16</sup> This would be the fourth time Pakistan has banned TikTok, and the third major social media platform Pakistan has banned; having previously banned YouTube and Facebook in the early 2010s. In response, in the first quarter of the year, TikTok reported removing some six million objectionable videos.<sup>17</sup>

*However, it should be noted that Pakistan is not unique in its regressive trends in freedom of expression online. According to UNESCO’s World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Global Report 2021/2022 titled “Journalism is a Public Good” 85% of the world’s population experienced a decline in journalistic freedom in their country.*

## PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

The purpose of this toolkit is to help Pakistani digital content creators by aiding in their digital literacy and helping them navigate the unique challenges of being creators in the online space. These challenges may pertain to the content regulation and platform requirements of various social media companies being used, to local laws and regulations and finally, to the offline consequences of online activities.

This toolkit was designed and compiled in response to the findings from several consultations held with digital content creators in Pakistan conducted by DRF and with support from UNESCO. In addition to the toolkit, a policy brief was also authored centering the experiences of Pakistani digital content creators and the unique challenges they face. The policy paper details these challenges, which included: shortcomings of platform algorithms; location-based discrimination and geo-restrictions; online hate speech, bullying and harassment; flawed content moderation by social media platforms; governmental restrictions; misuse of defamation laws; the dearth of awareness of social media regulation; and lack of enforcement of digital intellectual property rights. The policy paper goes on to propose recommendations in response to these challenges, such as: calling for greater accountability and transparency by both the government and social media companies; calling for content moderation sensitive to the local context; investment in education and awareness campaigns; fair remuneration and monetization practices targeted towards the global south; increased accessibility of social media platforms; better governance; and increased collaboration between social media companies, content creators and civil society organizations.

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<sup>15</sup> Twitter’s India Offices Raided by Delhi Police After Political Tweet

<sup>16</sup> Pakistan: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report

<sup>17</sup> Pakistan lifts ban on TikTok after five months

These consultations were imperative to help us determine issues being faced by content creators in Pakistan, identify the gaps in their knowledge and gauge what resources could be made available to facilitate their cause. Furthermore, DRF draws on findings and feedback from its research report titled “Visions of Youth: Battling Myopia in Internet Regulation”, also supported by UNESCO, focusing on the digital experiences and insights from youth groups in Pakistan. This toolkit is divided into four separate sections i.e. the risks and responsibilities that come with visibility, advocacy and legal framework, copyright and intellectual property and community wellbeing.

## WHO ARE CONTENT CREATORS?

Do you have a public social media account? Do you make videos, posts, write articles, do artwork, host a podcast, create music or report news or make any other kind of long or short-form content on said social media account?

If you answered yes, then you are a digital content creator. Digital content creators include everyone from bloggers, influencers, news reporters, commentators, journalists, artists, musicians, writers, vloggers and more.



# HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is meant to be an accessible, go-to resource for fundamental information required to ensure your personal safety and the safety of your platform. We have divided the toolkit into four sections:

- 1 VISIBILITY** – this section highlights the pros and cons of visibility, including the risks associated with being a public personality with a public platform and the responsibilities that arise from this visibility. There is also information on improving your online and in-person safety, as well as reporting mechanisms for all forms of cyber harassment, bullying and hate speech. Additionally, it includes some resources and tips on how to maintain visibility online.
- 2 ADVOCACY FOR RIGHTS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK** – this section goes into the various policies that govern content on social media platforms. It is important to be aware of these policies to ensure that your content is not taken down on grounds of violating the Terms of Service or Community Guidelines of the platform. Also, sometimes content may be compliant with platform policies but may be in violation of local laws. This section serves to inform the reader of these laws and policies.
- 3 COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY** – this section goes into detail about what copyright is, copyright infringement and what tools content creators have to ensure the protection of their rights as copyright holders, how not to abuse the copyrights of others and what to do in the case of copyright infringement.
- 4 COMMUNITY AND DIGITAL WELLBEING** – this section provides some additional resources on protecting your mental and physical well-being as someone whose work involves spending prolonged hours on the internet and social media.

Feel free to use this toolkit as a guide, a reference, jump to whatever section you feel is relevant and continue to revisit it if you ever need to refresh your basic knowledge on a particular concept.

# VISIBILITY

Having a platform is a huge privilege and responsibility. Being visible means that you are known to the public, otherwise known as being “famous”. Even if you have a small following or consider yourself a “micro-influencer”, it is important to be acquainted with the risks and responsibilities that come with being a public figure or being in the public eye. Social media’s ability to let ordinary people have access to a platform that can reach millions of people means that not everyone is fully prepared for all that visibility entails. There is no guidebook or lesson on how to handle scrutiny from others, below are some of the challenges, risks and responsibilities that come with being a public figure or “online famous”.



## RISKS

### ONLINE BULLYING, THREATS, HARASSMENT AND HATE SPEECH

The most well-known consequence of being an online figure and having a following means being subjected to various opinions, both positive and negative. While negative feedback can take the form of constructive criticism, dissenting opinions or backlash, it can also veer into the territory of bullying, harassment and hate speech.

*Vicious or rude comments regarding one’s personal appearance, especially those that have nothing to do with the content, and personal attacks (attacks on one’s appearance, parents, financial status, personal life and relationships) all constitute online bullying or trolling. Comments on the basis of gender, especially unsolicited sexual comments also constitute harassment.*

Sometimes people can go beyond rude, bullying, or harassing statements and can start making threats, that call for violence against you for your beliefs, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture, ethnicity or nationality. This type of language and comments constitute hate speech. These comments can also take the shape of vile rape or death threats. While all of the above described comments (online bullying, threats, harassment, and hate speech) are a violation of all social media platforms’ Terms of Use and Community Guidelines, hate speech and incitement of violence and death threats can have legal consequences for the abuser as well (explored in later sections).

## LACK OF PRIVACY, DOXXING, STALKING

Amongst the biggest drawbacks of fame is the loss of anonymity - meaning the ability to go into certain public spaces without being recognized. If you have any amount of following online, you will always have to deal with people wanting to know more about your personal life.

*Doxxing is when your personal information (legal name, ID, address, location, employer, family information) is made public (through hacking or leaking information) against your consent.*

Doxxing poses several dangers because it can make you vulnerable to offline crimes and dangers such as stalking, kidnapping, physical attacks and blackmailing. Stalkers are not just a danger to you but also to those living with you and your family. They can use this information to track your whereabouts, physically harm you or a family member, and blackmail you.

Famously, Kim Kardashian was attacked and mugged in her hotel in Paris, France in 2016 because of over-documentation of her whereabouts on social media.<sup>18</sup> In September 2022, a similar incident occurred in Pakistan when TikToker Nadeem Naniwala conspired to kidnap YouTuber, Ahmad Ali.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, influencer Qandeel Baloch was doxxed i.e. her real ID card with her actual identity, address and family information was leaked, resulting in her eventual murder by her brother in Multan.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kim Kardashian's Paris Robber Does Tell-All Interview About The Heist

<sup>19</sup> TikToker Naniwala arrested in Sialkot for kidnapping content creator over roast videos

<sup>20</sup> Qandeel Baloch seeks security

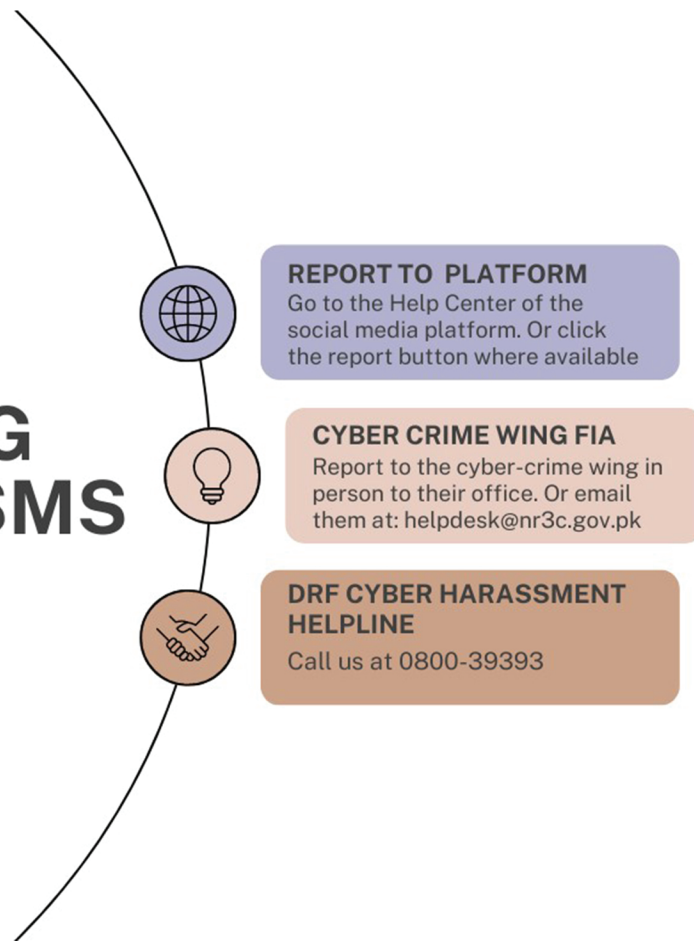
## TIPS ON HOW TO MINIMIZE BEING TRACKED/PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY ONLINE:

- Never share your private personal documents (ID card, passport etc.) with any unauthorized or unverified persons/organizations.
- Try to keep your location services off.
- Don't always live tweet or live share your location. You can post after the fact.
- Have more than one phone number if possible, one for work purposes and one for personal use. This way, if your work or public number gets hacked or leaked, your personal information is still secure.
- If your information is leaked, report it to the social media platform immediately and place a takedown request. Alternatively, you can also report this to the Cyber Crime Wing, FIA.
- If you feel you are in danger being in public for any reason, arrange for security if possible.
- Share any tips or suspicions with law enforcement.
- Stay vigilant.
- Take threats seriously.



## Q. WHAT CAN I DO IF I'M ABUSED/STALKED ONLINE?

### REPORTING MECHANISMS



If you are facing online bullying, harassment, death threats, and other abuse make sure to report the comments to the platform they are on. If your personal information is leaked without your consent such as your phone number, address, CNIC, or personal pictures/videos you can report such posts. Social media platforms often provide a "report" link directly on the post. Or if not, you can go into the platform's Help Center and upload screenshots (which should clearly show both the offending material and the username of the person posting the comment). The platform will assess your claim and take down the abusive/infringing content according to their community guidelines and policies. Until then you can also block the people making these comments.

Social media platforms also allow you to change the settings in your posts that limit who can and cannot comment on your content. Twitter, for example, allows you to choose who can comment on your tweets, you can limit it to only the people you follow.

*If you are facing death and rape threats (which you should also report to the platform), take screenshots for evidence and block the abuser. You can then report the person and profile to the Cyber Crime Wing of the FIA. You can also reach out to DRF's Cyber Harassment Helpline **(0800-39393)** for additional guidance and legal assistance. If necessary please do not hesitate to go to your local police. Stay vigilant.*

## SELF-CENSORSHIP

Journalists, digital news agencies, commentators, politicians, human rights advocates and social workers making content online must also deal with the reality of self-censorship. Certain topics can be considered too inflammatory or can lead to severe backlash that may spill into offline spaces and turn into physical threats. Additionally, in Pakistan defamation or defamatory statements are a criminal offense under Section 20 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, as a result of which one must be incredibly careful and have tangible proof behind what they say about anyone, even a public figure, online. Sometimes in the interest of your personal safety, you will find yourself practicing self-censorship. The decision on whether to share something on a social media platform is, however, a personal one but should not be taken lightly. You are encouraged to conduct a thorough and complete risk assessment based on how much risk you can bear.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

A famous quote states,

“

*with great  
power comes  
great  
responsibility.*



The same can be said about the gift and curse of visibility online. As a content creator online with a following and a platform, you need to realize that your words and actions have consequences. Not only do people look up to you as a role model but they are likely to copy your actions, especially if your following includes young people.

## NEED FOR INVOLVEMENT IN RIGHTS-BASED ADVOCACY

Oftentimes, influencers and content creators are quick to raise their voice when something directly affects them, such as changes in social media platform policies but are reluctant to participate in discussions surrounding crucial fundamental freedoms like the right to protest, freedom of expression, freedom of association, right to privacy. Anyone occupying an online space and expressing themselves in any form, whether it is through a blog, a news article, a video, art, writing, music, or dance benefits from the freedom of expression and association.

*It is your responsibility to raise your voice to safeguard these rights both for your own benefit, but also for the benefit of your audience and community.*

## SOME TIPS ON HOW TO STAY ACTIVE WITH ADVOCACY EFFORTS:

- Identify organizations and causes whose work you support and highlight and introduce them to your audience.
- Keep abreast with laws, policies and emerging issues regarding technologies and digital spaces.
- Raise awareness with your audience regarding trending human rights issues especially if they involve restrictions to the freedom of expression in Pakistan.
- Use your influence to reach out to people who can be considered stakeholders in the issue whether it's official government accounts, politicians or law enforcement agencies.
- Hold social media companies accountable when they institute policy measures that negatively affect human rights.
- Be involved in consultations, focus group discussions and roundtables where input from stakeholders in online spaces is recorded.
- Remember you are a stakeholder when it comes to policies, laws and practices that affect the rights and freedoms of you and others on the internet. People want to hear from you, value your own voice.

## ETHICAL PRACTICES ONLINE

When you have a public profile or a following you also have to carry the burden of responsibility to engage in ethical practices online. For example, you have a heightened responsibility to check the sources of the information that you share in order to ensure accuracy.

- Be mindful of spreading news that is unverified. Do not share unsubstantiated stories or rumors.
- Do not share or write things that perpetuate harmful stereotypes or can incite violence or harm against another group.
- Do not engage in bullying or harassing behavior yourself, people might follow your lead.
- Do not invade someone else's privacy by sharing their private information with your audience.
- Always ask for consent before posting someone else's information or picture (you can crop, edit, blur or cover faces/information if you don't have consent).
- Avoid abusive language, especially if targeted at someone else.
- Do not spread rumors (this can fall under defamation).
- Disclose all ads and sponsored posts.
- Maintain transparency with your followers, especially if you're selling or advertising a product or service.

As of 2022, Pakistan is at the precipice of a very crucial election cycle. Besides election time, globally there is a greater trend towards political polarization which has led to massive social media propaganda and mis/disinformation campaigns. Even if you do not consider yourself a "political" person, by virtue of having a platform you have a responsibility to speak out against misinformation or disinformation wherever you encounter it. At the very minimum, you have a responsibility to not share information without verifying its accuracy. UNESCO has published a guide on Elections in Digital Times primarily targeted towards electoral practitioners but which offers an overview of the impact of social media on elections and emphasizes the important role that youth participation can play in the electoral process. For example, in Pakistan, many political parties in opposition have been able to exercise their freedom of expression as a product of mobilizing the youth voter base via social media. Your voice matters, so it's important to use it for the welfare of your community.

# INCREASING VISIBILITY

Maintaining and increasing visibility is also an important consideration when one is a public figure. If you have a manager for social media engagement, or a company-assigned person, please get in touch with them on the latest requirements to increase engagement with your content. If you do not have access to a designated person, feel free to look at creator resources made available publicly or search new trends in driving engagement.

## EXAMPLES OF REQUIREMENTS IN THE PAST INCLUDE:

- Having your subscribers click the “bell icon” on YouTube so that they are notified about uploads.
- Asking for likes and shares. Instagram, for example, was measuring engagement by shares as opposed to likes at one point.
- Using reels to get higher views as opposed to longer videos on Instagram. YouTube recently is measuring “positive engagement” based on how many viewers commented about the content (direct content engagement) on a video.
- Tagging the “foryoupage” or “fyp” on TikTok to have your video trending on the ‘For You’ page.

## RESOURCES FOR VISIBILITY

How the YouTube Algorithm Works in 2022

How the Instagram Algorithm Works in 2022

TikTok Algorithm Guide: How to Go Viral in 202

# ADVOCACY FOR RIGHTS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Digital rights can seem like abstract concepts at times, given the apparent technical nature of the subject matter and lack of awareness amongst the population regarding our own rights. However, these are not abstract issues: they impact each and every person with or without an internet connection. Digital rights are simply the application of human rights to digital spaces and the role of technologies in our everyday lives. That basic human rights are now applicable to the internet has been recognised by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) through the resolutions A/HRC/32/L.20, 2016; A/HRC/res/26/13, June 2014; and A/HRC/res/20/8, June 2012. Rights enshrined under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) such as the right to privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information, are equally applicable online.

## CONSTITUTION OF PAKISTAN

The Constitution of Pakistan also applies to digital spaces. For instance, the right to privacy guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 uses the phrase “privacy of home”, but the honorable Supreme Court of Pakistan has posited that this extends to other intangible forms of private conversations and issues as well. In the *Benazir Bhutto versus the Federation*, PLD 1998 Supreme Court 388 case the Court ruled that the right to privacy extends to telephonic conversations and applies to acts of wiretapping.

**THERE ARE MANY CONSTITUTIONAL AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS THAT APPLY TO YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE, THE FOLLOWING IS A NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST:**

- (1) Article 19: Freedom of Expression
- (2) Article 19A: Right to Information
- (3) Article 14: The dignity of man and, subject to law, the privacy of home, shall be inviolable
- (4) Article 17: Freedom of Association and Assembly
- (5) Article 25: Equality of citizens and non-discrimination: all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of law

## EXERCISE:

Try to think of ways in which these rights apply to your online presence by thinking over the following questions:

- (1)** Which of the above-listed rights were violated when the government banned YouTube for three years between 2012-2015? Were you able to access information without any encumbrances? Were you able to express yourself freely?
- (2)** In your opinion, are all internet users equal online? Does harassment or targeted attacks against some users lead to differential treatment online?
- (3)** Has your personal data ever been shared without your consent?

## HOW ARE DIGITAL RIGHTS RELEVANT TO US?

Many of us think of digital rights as dry subjects that are the exclusive domain of engineers, lawyers, activists and policymakers. However, by abdicating the responsibility for such important subjects to others, we are giving control over our online speech, data and activities to others.

Another common argument is that digital rights issues only concern journalists or activists, not ordinary users. This misguided view discounts the fact that your online rights determine every aspect of your day-to-day life. For instance, while activists might be the ones talking about the illegality and disproportionate nature of internet shutdowns, you are the ones most affected by these issues. If you're someone who uses ride-hailing applications such as Uber, Careem or InDriver for your daily commute, internet shutdowns in your area could impact your mobility. Additionally, imagine you have an application for university admission on the same day there is an internet shutdown due to a political rally in your area—what will you do? Who will compensate you for the loss to your education and future prospects?

Others might feel they use the internet only for entertainment or creating light-hearted content, not serious discussions such as politics. They might feel that they are immune from the benefits of or discussions about digital rights. Again this attitude could not be further from the truth as even seemingly trivial mediums such as video games are impacted by censorship in terms of their content<sup>21</sup> or resulting in complete bans based on arbitrary powers exercised by state regulators.<sup>22</sup>

Others might think of these issues as individual ones: while it is important to ensure one's own digital safety by taking measures such as strengthening your passwords or turning on two-factor authentication—many of these issues are faced collectively. For instance, you can be mindful about what you share online and take practical measures like covering your webcam lens, but this doesn't change the fact that the legal structures around you might put your online speech and access to information in jeopardy. The sooner we realize that these issues are collective, the better we can start to work towards addressing them by treating them as structural issues. Often your privacy will depend on the privacy of the person you live, work, and hang out with. Additionally,

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<sup>21</sup> Video game censorship is authoritarians' latest tool to muzzle speech.

<sup>22</sup> PUBG ban: PTA explains why game remains blocked in Pakistan.

we all have a social responsibility to ensure security, data privacy and online freedoms for all. Advocacy for digital rights is not just the job of civil society organizations and activists—it is our collective responsibility.

The UNESCO Freedom of Expression Toolkit is an excellent resource if you want to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of freedom of expression, which is the foremost guiding principle behind your right and ability to be a content creator online. The toolkit includes a series of hands-on activities that enables the reader to be better equipped to defend the ideals of freedom of expression and encourages active rather than passive involvement in the discourse around freedom of speech. As mentioned earlier, advocacy for our freedoms is a collective effort. The Toolkit has several tips on community engagement, such as how to be a citizen reporter (stressing the importance of verified facts when sharing news about an incident in your community etc.) that is one way of bringing awareness to and fighting for your digital rights.

Platform transparency is also a key factor in ensuring your digital rights, which encompass both the freedom of expression and the right to privacy. Part of being an informed consumer of the internet is being aware of what data you allow social media companies to access, how these companies keep your data safe, what this data is used for, and how social media companies enforce their platform guidelines especially as it relates to balancing freedom of expression against other human rights. For more information, see: Letting the Sun Shine In: Transparency and Accountability in the Digital Age (UNESCO).

# KEY LEGISLATION ON DIGITAL FREEDOMS AND SAFETY

In Pakistan, there are a number of laws that relate to your digital rights and safety, the following is a summary of the primary laws you should know about as a responsible digital citizen:

## **PREVENTION OF ELECTRONIC CRIMES ACT, 2016 (PECA):<sup>23</sup>**

PECA performs several functions: (a) it is a cyber crime legislation that criminalizes many online activities and designates a punishment to these crimes; (b) it provides procedures and processes for investigation and trial of these crimes through the designated investigation agency, the cybercrime wing of the Federal Investigation Agency which is further governed by the Prevention of Electronic Crime Investigation Rules, 2018;<sup>24</sup> (c) lays down a framework for content moderation to be performed by PTA.

## **REMOVAL AND BLOCKING OF UNLAWFUL ONLINE CONTENT (PROCEDURE, OVERSIGHT AND SAFEGUARDS), RULES 2021:<sup>25</sup>**

These Rules have been passed under section 37 of PECA that gives powers to the PTA to remove or block content if: "necessary in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court or commission of or incitement to an offence under this Act." The Rules have been challenged at the Islamabad High Court and under review as of November 2022.<sup>26</sup> These Rules give the government wide powers to remove content on criteria such as "glory of Islam," security of Pakistan, public order, decency or mortality, and integrity and defence of Pakistan.

## **THE PAKISTAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS (RE-ORGANIZATION) ACT, 1996:<sup>27</sup>**

The Act establishes the PTA and authorizes it with the power to regulate telecom and internet service providers through licensing and control over telecommunication infrastructure. The Act also gives the Federal Government wide powers in terms of monitoring telecommunication services: "in the interest of national security or in the apprehension of any offence, the Federal Government may authorize any person or persons to intercept calls and messages or to trace calls through any telecommunication system" (Section 54(1)).

It is important to note that Pakistan does not have any data protection legislation, unlike the rest of the world, which means that personal data remains unprotected from misuse, collection without consent and extractive processing by public and private bodies. The Ministry of Information Technologies (MOIT) has made public a draft 'Personal Data Protection Bill 2021', however, it has yet to be discussed in parliament.<sup>28</sup>

One must always be mindful of the fact that the increasing use of online spaces for professional and educational pursuits puts your personal information increasingly at risk of abuse and exploitation. You can learn more about the ways online users (specifically students or those using online for formal education purposes) are vulnerable to breaches of their privacy and ways stakeholders can work towards protecting this personal data in UNESCO's *Minding the Data: Protecting Learners' Privacy and Security*.

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<sup>23</sup> Protection of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016

<sup>24</sup> PECA Rules 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Removal Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Rules 2021

<sup>26</sup> Court refers social media rules to NA speaker for review - Newspaper - DAWN.COM

<sup>27</sup> The Pakistan Telecommunications (Re-organization) Act, 1996

<sup>28</sup> Personal Data Protection Bill 2021.

# LAWS FOR ONLINE SAFETY AND PROTECTION

The following sections from PECA provide remedies for harassment, blackmailing or impersonation through electronic means:

**Section 3 – Unauthorized access to information systems or data** carries imprisonment of 3 months and/or fine up to PKR 50,000.

**Section 11 – Hate speech through preparation or dissemination of information, through any information system or device that advances interfaith, sectarian, or racial hatred** carries imprisonment of 7 years and/or fine.

**Section 16 – Unauthorized use of identity information** carries imprisonment of 3 years and/or a fine up to PKR 5,000,000.

**Section 20 – Offenses against the dignity of natural persons** whoever intentionally and publicly exhibits or displays or transmits any information which they know to be false, and intimidates or harms the reputation of a natural person, carries imprisonment of 3 years and/or fine up to PKR 1,000,000.

**Section 21 – Offense against modesty of natural person and minor** whoever intentionally and publicly exhibits or displays or transmits any information which: (a) superimposes a photograph of the face of natural person over any sexually explicit image or video; (b) includes a photograph or a video of a natural person in sexually explicit conduct; or (c) intimidates a natural person with any sexual act, or any sexually explicit image or video of a natural person; or (d) cultivates, entices or induces a natural person to engage in a sexually explicit act carries imprisonment of 5 years and/or a fine up to PKR 5,000,000.

**Section 22 – Child Pornography** whoever intentionally produces, offers or makes available, distributes or transmits any sexually explicit image of a minor through electronic means, carries imprisonment of 7 years and/or a fine up to PKR 5,000,000.

**Section 24 – Cyber Stalking** Whoever, with the intent to coerce or intimidate or harass any person, follows a person, repeatedly contacts without consent or takes and displays a photograph or video without consent shall be punished with imprisonment of 3 years and/or fine up to PKR 1,000,000.

# INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS ON THE INTERNET

## WHAT IS COPYRIGHT?<sup>29</sup>

Copyright law is designed to protect the intellectual property of a creator and protects the ownership rights associated with original created works. Copyright covers all kinds of creative works and exists the moment an original piece of artistic, literary, intellectual, musical etc. work is made or when any original idea takes on a material or tangible form, otherwise known as being “fixed”. Copyright cannot exist for an unrecorded or unpublished idea or thought but will exist when an idea or thought has been “fixed” in an original work.

*Copyright grants the owner the exclusive right to own, profit off, perform, distribute, recreate, display their work or authorize reproductions of their work.*

### FOR INFLUENCERS AND CONTENT CREATORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, COPYRIGHT COVERS THE FOLLOWING:<sup>30</sup>

- Writing
- Blogs
- Websites
- Architecture
- Movies
- Computer software
- Artwork
- Novels
- Songs
- Music
- Photos
- Videos

The only instance where a content creator is not the copyright owner of the work they have created is when they create said work as part of an agreement with an employer or as a commissioned work for another person. In that situation, the ownership of the copyright will belong to the employer or third party and not the creator. The creator will have voluntarily given up the copyright<sup>31</sup> by being contractually bound to the employer or being in a mutual agreement with a third-party.

<sup>29</sup> Intellectual Property and the Internet

<sup>30</sup> Social Media Copyright Laws & Protections | ZenBusiness Inc.

<sup>31</sup> What Is a Copyright? | ZenBusiness Inc.

It should be noted that product names, titles and slogans are not protected by copyright law but instead fall under trademark law, and unlike copyright law, trademarks have to be registered for you to own the rights associated with them.<sup>32</sup>

### **COMMON FORMS OF TRADEMARK INCLUDE:**<sup>33</sup>

- Company names
- A word
- Company slogans
- Symbols
- Logos
- Specific colors

Given that a majority of social media platforms are based in and headquartered in the United States, their copyright policies are based on the following laws:<sup>34</sup>

- The Copyright Act, 1976 - which details and extends the rights, protections, and limitations, on all creative works (in the US)
- Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 1988 - which extends these rights, protections, limitations to online content.

In certain cases where regions have their own specific copyright regulations (such as the EU), social media companies will make special allowances and comply with those copyright requirements as opposed to the ones applicable to the US. Therefore, different regions and countries can have different copyright requirements, which can be more or less strict. Always check the copyright policy for your region to be sure.

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<sup>32</sup> What Is a Copyright? | ZenBusiness Inc.

<sup>33</sup> What Is a Copyright? | ZenBusiness Inc.

<sup>34</sup> Intellectual Property and the Internet

# WHAT IS COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT?

Copyright infringement is when someone uses, shares, or reproduces copyrighted content without the permission of the copyright owner.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes this can take the form of stealing, where a person will wrongfully take credit for the original work and claim it as their own. Other times it can be unintentional when a part of copyrighted work is used in another's work. Even if one gives credit to the original owner and source, reproducing someone's copyrighted work without permission, even in part, can constitute copyright infringement. Copyright infringement is illegal and has penalties under the law (even though it is at the discretion of the copyright holder to pursue legal action).

## WHEN IS IT OKAY TO USE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL?

Despite the exclusive rights of use that copyright gives to its owner, there are some special exceptions when copyrighted material can be used by others. These exceptions are:

### **FAIR USE**

Fair use is when copyrighted material is used in a "reasonable and limited way". The use of this material should also be considered "transformative" or considerably different from the copyrighted material and "adds something new, with a further purpose or different character, altering the first with new expression, meaning or message".<sup>36</sup> Examples include using a quote from a book for an article, using short clips from movies or videos for educational purposes, or reproducing text, audio or visual content from a copyrighted work for the purposes of comment, news reporting, or criticism. Use of copyrighted content for non-commercial purposes, such as uploading part of a song in the background of video on your private, non-monetized social media, also falls under the fair use allowance.<sup>37</sup>

### **FOUR FACTORS DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT USE OF COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL FALLS UNDER FAIR USE:**

#### **NATURE AND PURPOSE OF USE**

Traditionally copyrighted content used for non-commercial purposes, educational or instructional purposes, or the purposes of comment, criticism or news reporting falls within the scope of fair use.

#### **NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED WORK**

The more commercial or creative (as opposed to factual) the copyrighted work (for example, a song, a video that is normally paywalled), the less likely its use will be considered fair use.

#### **THE AMOUNT OF COPYRIGHTED WORK USED**

If a large amount of copyrighted content is used the less likely it is to fall within the fair use allowance.

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<sup>35</sup> Social Media Copyright Laws & Protections | ZenBusiness Inc.

<sup>36</sup> Copyright and Fair Use | Office of the General Counsel.

<sup>37</sup> Intellectual Property and the Internet

## **THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE USE**

If the use of copyrighted material in your content causes the copyright holder to lose sales because you have reproduced large amounts of their work, it is unlikely that this will be considered fair use.

## **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

When content is considered part of the public domain it means it is not or is no longer protected by copyright law and can be used in any way by the public. Creative works normally enter the public domain after the duration of the work's copyright has expired. In the US, for example, the copyright of a book expires 70 years after the death of its author.<sup>38</sup> Old folk legends such as "Laila-Majnu" etc. are examples of stories/content that are part of the public domain. All of Shakespeare's works, for example, are also part of the public domain.

Another reason something can be part of the public domain is if it's not fixed in a tangible form. A speech, lecture or improvisational comedy routine that hasn't previously been written or recorded in any manner isn't protected by copyright and therefore is in the public domain. A conversation overheard between two people that is not recorded in any form is another example of something in the public domain.

## **LICENSING/AUTHORIZED USE**

If one has the explicit permission of the copyright holder to use, reproduce, reshare or make a derivative work of their content, this falls under the category of authorized use. People can get permission from copyright holders directly without a fee, or they can buy a license to use the content. For example, whenever music is used in movies it is "licensed", i.e. the movie studio has purchased a license to feature the song in their movie. Buying or giving someone the license to your work does not transfer copyright to the licensee, but gives them permission to use your work in a one-time and limited capacity.

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<sup>38</sup> What Is the Public Domain? - Copyrightlaws.com: Copyright courses and education in plain English

# FAIR USE FAQs

## **Q: CAN I USE A SONG FOR A TRANSITION VIDEO?**

**A:** It depends on the platform. TikTok and Instagram are the primary platforms where transition videos are viral and part of the norm. Oftentimes these transition videos use copyrighted material (such as popular songs by big-name artists). TikTok and Instagram have licensing agreements with the companies that own the music that allow users to use copyrighted material. However, a platform like YouTube has a different agreement with these companies, which shifts the liability of use and costs to its users. So uploading a transition video with copyrighted music on YouTube may result in your ad revenue being taken by the company.

## **Q: CAN I POST A VIDEO WHERE A FAMOUS SONG IS PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND?**

**A:** Once again, it depends. The general rule is no. If you post a video with a famous song playing in the background it may be taken down for copyright infringement, or your ad revenue may be claimed by the original owner. Non-influencers or private social media users normally don't have these issues because they are using the content in a "non-commercial" way with a "limited" or "private" audience. Instead of using big-name songs in the background of your video, consider using songs available in the public domain or those created to be used "royalty-free" with a "creative commons license".

## **Q: CAN I POST/REPOST SOMEONE ELSE'S VIDEO AND GIVE THEM CREDITS/TAG THEM IN THE DESCRIPTION?**

**A:** No. Unless you have permission from the original creator to do so, re-uploading or reposting someone else's content constitutes copyright infringement. Even if you tag them and give credit in the description, the original copyright holder can still report the video or your profile for copyright infringement.

## **Q: WHAT IF I SHARE A VIDEO SOMEONE ELSE POSTED FOR A NEWS REPORT?**

**A:** If you post or share a video or part of a video for news reporting it is important that the news report must be "transformative" or that you have added your own elements to the video. For example, using a clip or reproducing a (short) video and adding commentary, analysis or criticism on it falls within the fair use allowance and is okay.

## **Q: WHAT IF I HAVE PERMISSION FROM THE ORIGINAL POSTER TO USE THEIR CONTENT?**

**A:** Sharing content with the owner's permission is not a copyright infringement. In fact, this is the best practice for resharing or using content owned by someone else. It's normally best to have this permission in writing.

## **Q: I GOT REPORTED. NOW WHAT?**

**A:** Firstly, determine why you got reported. Social media platforms can take down content for a variety of reasons, and one of those reasons is copyright infringement. Please make sure the reason is actually that and not other violations of the Community Guidelines and Terms of Use, such as graphic content, hate speech, incitement of violence etc. If your content is being taken down because of a copyright issue, normally you will get an email notifying you of the cause of the taken down (in this case copyright infringement), and you will be told the name and email address of the person making the copyright claim. If you believe your content was removed wrongfully, then you can reach out to the copyright owner directly to resolve the issue.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL/COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT**

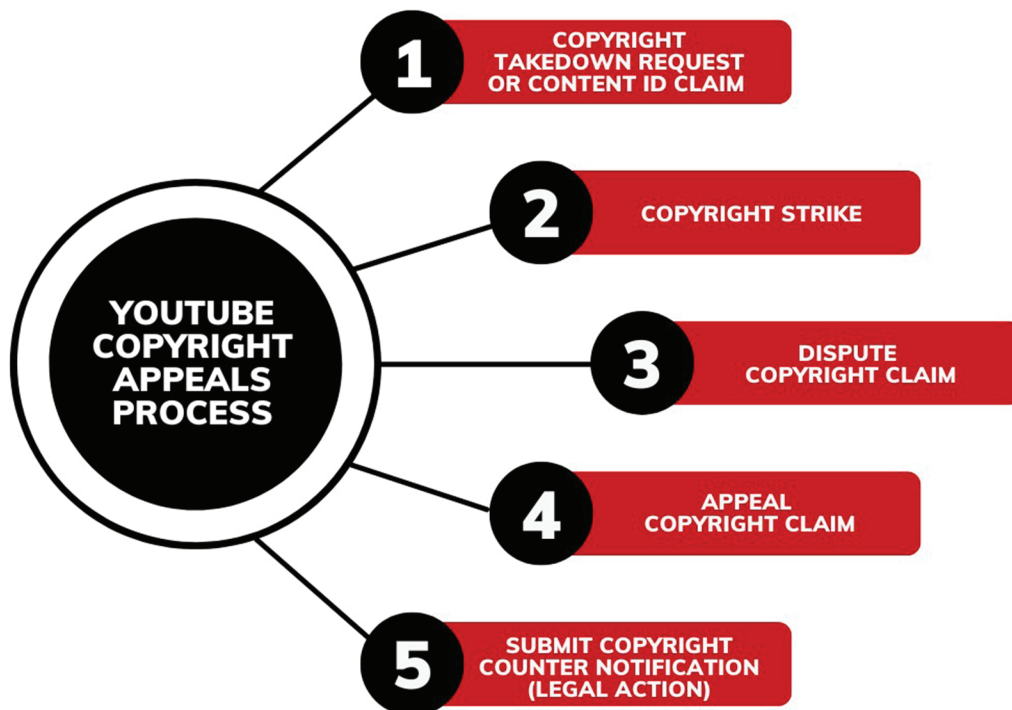
Various social media companies are legally required to take down copyright content, and some even have penalties against people who continuously violate their copyright policies that are often codified in the social media Terms of Use and Community Guidelines. Each platform may have slightly varying policies and take-down mechanisms and penalties depending on what kind of services they provide. You can find the specific copyright policies per each major social platform listed below:

- Twitter Copyright Policy (twitter's policy includes detailed instructions on how to file and dispute a copyright claim)
- Facebook Copyright Policy
- Instagram Copyright Policy
- How YouTube Prevents Content Piracy (For more information on how to file and dispute copyright claims see below)
- Intellectual Property Policy | TikTok

It is important to acquaint yourself with these policies especially given that the penalty for repeat offenses may be permanent removal from the platform, being permanently blacklisted or the permanent deletion of your account and all the data associated with it.

# HOW TO FILE/DISPUTE COPYRIGHT CLAIMS (YOUTUBE)

It is important to be aware of YouTube's copyright infringement policies as they can suspend your monetization feature and permanently delete your account after three copyright strikes. When a copyright claim is made on your content, it basically means that a "Content ID claim" has been made on your video, meaning that your video features work that does not belong to you. The consequences of this are that ad revenue from your content may be diverted to the claimant. You have the ability to dispute this Content ID claim, and if that is rejected, appeal the decision of the disputed Content ID claim. Copyright counter-notifications are basically legal challenges against the Content ID claim and should only be made with complete evidence and with the necessary legal assistance. Detailed information regarding the process can be found below.



- What is a copyright claim? - YouTube Help
- Learn about Content ID claims - YouTube Help
- Copyright strike basics - YouTube Help
- Dispute a Content ID claim - YouTube Help
- Appeal a Content ID claim - YouTube Help
- Monetization during Content ID disputes - YouTube Help
- Submit a copyright counter notification - YouTube Help
- Respond to a counter notification - YouTube Help
- Requirements for copyright counter notifications - YouTube Help
- What is a manual claim? - YouTube Help

## THINGS TO BE MINDFUL OF: COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT CHECKLIST <sup>39</sup>

### IT'S POSSIBLE TO INFRINGE SOMEONE ELSE'S COPYRIGHT WHEN YOU POST THEIR CONTENT EVEN IF YOU:

- Bought or downloaded the content (e.g. a song from iTunes)
- Recorded the content onto your own recording device (e.g. a song playing in the background during a party, concert, sporting event, wedding etc.)
- Gave credit to the copyright owner
- Included a disclaimer that you didn't intend to infringe copyright
- Didn't intend to profit from it
- Modified the work or added your own original material to it
- Found the content available on the Internet
- Saw that others posted the same content as well
- Think the use is a fair use

### BEFORE YOU POST CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA, YOU MAY WANT TO ASK:

- Have I created all of the content myself?
- Do I have permission to use all the content in my post?
- Does my use of the content fall within an exception to copyright infringement?
- Is the content protected by copyright (e.g. is it a short phrase, idea or public domain work?)

It's generally a good idea to get written permission from the author of the work before posting content on social media. You might be able to use someone else's content if you've received permission from them, for example, by obtaining a license. You may also be able to use someone else's content if it's in the public domain, is covered by fair use, or there is another exception to copyright.

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<sup>39</sup> From Meta's Copyright Guidelines

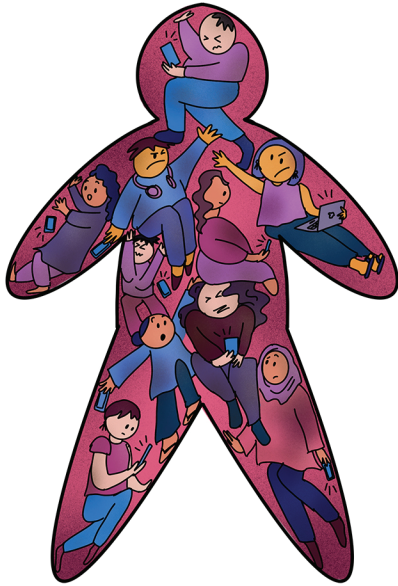
## **HOW TO PREVENT OTHERS FROM STEALING YOUR CONTENT:**

- Use watermarks
- Add a copyright notice (especially if your content is written)
- Report any unauthorized duplications and reproductions of your work
- Keep evidence (with time stamps) of your original content

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE IS STEALING YOUR CONTENT**

REPORT. REPORT. REPORT

# COMMUNITY AND DIGITAL WELLBEING



## MENTAL HEALTH AND THE INTERNET

**MENTAL HEALTH IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT COMPONENT – IF NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT – IN THE DISCUSSION AROUND NAVIGATING THE ONLINE SPACE.**

Given the prevalence of social media as an unavoidable part of life, there has been a lot of research linking social media usage to various mental health issues and disorders. Part of being a responsible consumer of the internet is being mindful of the negative mental health impacts that social media can induce while meaningfully engaging with these spaces to enhance your life and career.

*There are studies suggesting that social media addiction is a real problem affecting roughly 5% of youth on the internet. Social media addiction is thought to be “potentially more addictive than alcohol and cigarettes”.<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> Anxiety, Loneliness and Fear of Missing Out: The impact of social media on young people’s mental health

## SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

Positive engagement on social media, in the form of likes and shares can contribute to a feeling of addiction because it creates dopamine in the brain (i.e. a chemical in our brain that is triggered by reward and pleasure). The negative effects of this are that when there is a lack of positive engagement, one begins to experience self-doubt and negative self-esteem. Experiencing negative feelings or intrusive thoughts like “no one has liked my picture, I feel ugly.” or “I didn’t get a lot of views or likes on this video so I must not be funny” can be an indication of this. These feelings stem from the lack of gratification from social media and can result in more obsessive behaviors such as refreshing feed for likes and shares or suffering from mood swings when these expectations are not met.

It is important to remember that these feelings should not be stigmatized, they are natural and a result of the fact that social media platforms manipulate these aspects of human nature. However, one should still strive to identify these feelings when they occur and take appropriate action to ensure they do not regress into becoming an addiction.

## BLUE LIGHT ISSUES

All technological devices we use on a daily basis, including laptops, computers, tablets and smartphones emit a light known as “blue light”, and prolonged exposure to blue light may have certain health implications. For example, have you been having trouble sleeping? Are you experiencing dry eyes, eye strain or more frequent headaches? There is a possibility that this is a result of too much screen time on your devices.<sup>41</sup>

## BODY-IMAGE ISSUES

*A study on body image, confidence and the media surveyed 1000 men, and found that 87% of women and 65% of men compare their bodies to images they consume on social and traditional media. Among those figures, 50% of women and 37% of men compare their bodies unfavorably.<sup>42</sup>*

Studies have shown that time spent on social media can correlate with both negative and positive body image issues. Exposure to appearance-based social media, such as fitness influencers, models and beauty bloggers, may exacerbate negative body image issues or perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards.<sup>43</sup> These negative issues may result in a negative self-image that can turn into disordered eating.

*It is very important to remember that social media does not reflect reality.*

Photo editing and photo-altering software such as photoshop, facetune and in-app beautifying filters are extremely prevalent on social media. This is particularly relevant for Pakistan, where Western standards of beauty, colourism and a preference for lighter skin can find a new outlet

<sup>41</sup> How blue light affects your eyes, sleep, and health .

<sup>42</sup> Link Between Social Media & Body Image | King University Online

<sup>43</sup> Social media effects on body image and eating disorders - News - Illinois State

through lightening tools on these apps. Additionally, social media has also contributed to more and more people turning to plastic surgery.<sup>44</sup>

*Remember: WHAT YOU SEE ONLINE ISN'T ALWAYS THE REALITY. You don't know how much effort from a PR team, professional stylists and beauticians, photoshop or plastic surgery has gone into a person's appearance.*

## CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIVE AND PROBLEMATIC BODY IMAGE<sup>45</sup>

	Positive body image	Problematic body image
Thoughts and feelings towards the body	Positive, accepting, compassionate	Negative, evaluative
Focus of body-related evaluations	All body domains e.g. appearance, functionality, etc.	Appearance
Body perspectives	Internal and embodied	External and objectifying
Body-related behaviours	Focused on self-care and embracing appetites	Rigid and impairing, aiming to control and/or modify physical appearance
Centrality of body image	Neutral to identity and self-worth	Central to identity and self-worth
Conceptualisations of physical beauty	Broad and diverse. All bodies can be beautiful, but beauty is not a main pursuit	Narrow and unattainable, defined by unrealistic social expectations
Body-image related distress	Overall low, flexible and tolerant of fluctuations that are transitory	High and unyielding
Regulation of distress	Fluctuations are experienced without avoidance and with no behavioural reactivity	Focused on changing the body

(Source: Media and Body Image in Children and Adolescents)

<sup>44</sup> Influence of Social Media on Cosmetic Procedure Interest - PMC

<sup>45</sup> Media and body image in children and adolescents | Education in the Digital Age : Healthy and Happy Children | OECD iLibrary, Table 7.1

# COMMON MENTAL HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

**CHRONIC SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND ADDICTION ARE ROUTINELY LINKED WITH THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:**

- Low Self-Esteem
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Insomnia/Sleep-disorders
- Body dysmorphia/Eating-disorders
- Burn-out



## ARE YOU EXPERIENCING THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS? ANSWER YES OR NO IN THE SPACES PROVIDED.

- ☐ 1. Do you get tired easily? Feel fatigued rather than energetic most of the time?
- ☐ 2. Do you feel dread (sadness or anxiety or fear) every time you look at your social media?
- ☐ 3. Are you increasingly cynical, disenchanted, and disappointed with the circumstances around you?
- ☐ 4. Are you often invaded by sadness and anxiety that you can't explain?
- ☐ 5. Are you forgetting things (appointments, deadlines, personal possessions)?
- ☐ 6. Are you increasingly irritable? More short-tempered than usual? More prone to mood swings?
- ☐ 7. Are you seeing close friends and family members less frequently?
- ☐ 8. Have your eating habits changed for the worse? (Eating too little or eating too much)
- ☐ 9. Are you frequently suffering from physical complaints? (e.g. aches, pains, head headaches, a lingering cold)
- ☐ 10. Are you having trouble sleeping at night or sleeping in general?
- ☐ 11. Are you having difficulty enjoying activities and hobbies you previously enjoyed?
- ☐ 12. Are you unable to laugh at a joke about yourself?
- ☐ 13. Does social interaction seem like more trouble than it's worth?
- ☐ 14. Do you feel constantly concerned about your appearance?
- ☐ **TOTAL**

**If you answered "YES" to 5 or more of these questions, that may be a sign that you need to take a break from social media.**

# SOME TIPS TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

## TAKE A BREAK

If you are feeling overwhelmed with social media, the first step is to limit screen time and reduce the time spent on your device. A good practice is to turn off notifications so that you're not constantly bombarded with reminders to check your social media and respond. For some people, deleting the social media app on their phone works more effectively. **Be careful about deleting your apps, though, because once you delete an app all your saved drafts are deleted with the app.**

## GET THE HELP YOU NEED

IF YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION, PANIC ATTACKS, EXTREME ANXIETY, BODY DYSMORPHIA, SUICIDAL IDEATION, OR PHYSIOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS PLEASE CONTACT A QUALIFIED MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL AND SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.

If you are feeling anxious or depressed, it may be helpful to speak to a professional. In Pakistani society, visiting a therapist or psychologist is stigmatized. However, people go to therapists for a variety of reasons. Mental health care is just like any other kind of medical care. If you hurt your arm, would you not go to the doctor for the risk of stigmatization? Similarly, one should always turn towards a licensed therapist or mental health professional when one is experiencing feelings of distress, needing help to develop healthy coping mechanisms or wanting to gain a deeper insight into their thoughts, actions and motivations.

*It is also important to note: not all therapists are the same. Please make sure to check the license and qualification of your mental health practitioner. Always do a background check and crowd-source information before going to any therapist. A bad therapist can do more harm than good.*

## SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Social interaction has tremendous mental health and well-being benefits.

## STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT PEOPLE WITHOUT STRONG QUALITY SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE AT A MUCH HIGHER RISK FOR:<sup>46</sup>

- Depression and anxiety
- Elevated levels of stress and inflammation, which can adversely affect coronary arteries, gut function, insulin regulation, and the immune system
- A wide range of diseases, including cardiovascular disease and cancer[3]
- Cognitive and functional decline, including dementia
- Decreased resistance to infection
- Delayed recovery from injury, surgery, illness, etc.
- Premature death (50% increased risk)

*A strong family and friend circle can be an immense form of emotional and sometimes material support. Don't be afraid to voice your needs and ask for help when you need it. This is what friends and family are for!*

See also:

Cultivating Mental Health: The Importance of Social Relationships

### BE SAFE ONLINE

Having safe online practices (i.e. having a secure password with two factor-authentication activated, being discerning about what one makes public on social media, keeping a separate work phone, having a backup of your work etc.) makes it easier not to get involved in a stressful situation online relating to breach of privacy or loss of data. Be mindful of the security precautions you take online to avoid complications later on.

For more ways to increase your digital security see:  
Covid-19 Digital Security Toolkit (Digital Rights Foundation)

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<sup>46</sup> Cultivating Mental Health: The Importance of Social Relationships

## **TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Lack of sleep, a poor diet or bad eating habits and lack of exercise are all known to negatively impact mental health. Spending too much time on your device can involve sitting down for long periods of time and straining muscles which results in back or wrist issues among others. If you are struggling, try to:

- get more sleep or sleep whenever you get the chance
- reduce sugar and caffeine intake and have a more balanced diet for more consistent boosts of energy throughout the day
- incorporate at least some kind of physical activity, whether it's taking a walk, playing some kind of sport, going to the gym, dancing etc.

For more information on the relationship between physical and mental health see:

- [Cultivating Mental Health: The Importance of Sleep to Your Mental Health](#)
- [Cultivating Mental Health: The Benefits of Exercise to Your Mental Health](#)
- [Cultivating Mental Health: How to Improve Your Mental Health Through Nutrition](#)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- [Doing What Matters in Times of Stress](#)
- [Doing What Matters in Times of Stress \(URDU\)](#)
- [Protecting your mental wellness on social media](#)  
[Cultivating Mental Health: Protecting Your Mental Health on Social Media](#)

