

## HELPING YOU READ BETWEEN THE LINES: social media etiquette

Need-to-know information about social media, brought to you courtesy of legal experts Thompsons Solicitors – the NUJ’s dedicated legal partner. Essential reading for any members interested in making sure Tweet nothings don’t lead to being (Face)booked, here we explore some of the key legal issues associated with using social media.



### What’s at stake?

The threshold for intervention by police is high – but you absolutely can be prosecuted for things you say or do on social media. As professional content creators and curators, NUJ members have a responsibility to uphold certain principles – accuracy, honesty and integrity – both on and offline, professionally and personally. Fear of criminal charges isn’t the only reason you should pause before you post! Even if posts don’t technically fall foul of the law, if your employer thinks you have damaged their reputation by proxy because of your behaviour on social media, you could face disciplinary sanctions or even dismissal.



### The laws at play

Multiple laws can apply to tackle inappropriate behaviour on social media – some are specific, others also apply in day to day life. These include:

- Defamation Act 2013
- Communications Act 2003
- Malicious Communications Act 1998
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988



**Think** before you tweet; **pause** before you post; **source** before you share and remember the NUJ Legal Service’s advice to **stay safe** on social.

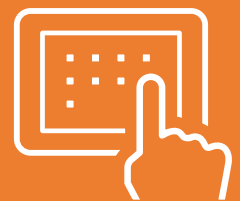
For more detailed guidance, download the NUJ Code of Conduct:

[www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code](http://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code)



### Don’t get caught in the rumour mill:

In your professional life, you’d always fact check your sources before publishing a story or running a piece. The same rules of best practice apply before posting online too, even in a personal capacity. Posting or sharing other people’s posts, about rumours or unsubstantiated claims that could harm someone’s reputation, can leave you in legal hot water.



### A fair share

As professionals involved in creating all forms of content, NUJ members will have a deep appreciation for matters of copyright. It can seem like social media content – including gifs and memes – are a complete ‘free for all’, but that’s not the case. When using someone else’s images or videos, take steps to check whether the right licences are in place.

# HELPING YOU READ BETWEEN THE LINES: social media etiquette



## Tackling trolls

The CPS has issued guidance on how, and when, the law will intervene in matters of trolling – including a number of categories.

Be warned, it's not just threats of physical harm that will cause them to step in: that heated debate you're getting into? It's worth toeing the line. Any form of sustained offensive, false, intimidating or threatening contact – targeted at an individual or small group – can meet the 'high threshold'. Threats have to be credible, but if they're deemed to be, the police will get involved.

## No safety in numbers

Just because hundreds (or even thousands) of others are sharing, commenting or posting about a particular topic or point of view, doesn't mean your contribution will go unnoticed. Like not using your real name, joining a barrage of other users won't offset bad online behaviour.



## MORE OBVIOUS

**TROLLING**

**Category 1** – threats of violence to a person, or damage to property.

**Category 2** – targeting an individual(s) constituting harassment, stalking, controlling or coercive behaviour or blackmail.

**Category 3** – anything which might breach a court order or a statutory prohibition.

**Category 4** – grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false communications.

## MORE SUBJECTIVE

SOURCE: CPS

## No such thing as an anonymous source

Unlike the media, social media platforms are under no obligation to protect your identity if there's a concern you're involved in a criminal matter.

A pithy username or Twitter handle, will not act as a shield if you step over the line.



## Gone but not forgotten:

Deleting content won't make the problem go away. We all have limited control over how our content is shared once it appears online – something which might have seemed an innocuous bit of fun, can cause serious ripples both on, and offline, and reach audiences far greater than originally planned.



## When bad news hits, the NUJ Legal Service is here for you.



Download more information about your rights – including employment rights – from:

[www.thompsonstradeunion.law/nuj-resources](http://www.thompsonstradeunion.law/nuj-resources)



Injured or involved in an accident? 100% free and 100% compensation guaranteed.

Start a claim, call **0800 587 7528**.



Arrested while working or require other forms of emergency criminal law advice?

Call the emergency helpline, on **0800 587 7530** – 24 hours.