

## Background

Digital media has transformed journalism in many ways, it has expanded the potential audience for stories, developed new platforms through which stories are told and increased the speed with which stories reach the public. Media outlets need to be aware of the impact and sensitivities of reporting across different mediums.

## ➔ Best practice for reporting on suicide using digital media

### Story origins and sources

- Stories spread online virally and through social networks before they have been authenticated so take extra care to check the source before reporting something as fact.  
The pressure to publish quickly may lead to the rapid spread of inaccurate information about a suicide or attempted suicide.
- Even sources regarded as reliable occasionally generate or repeat inaccurate information.
- If a suicide has been officially confirmed by the relevant authorities there may still be a great deal of speculation surrounding the circumstances. For example, a celebrity's death may attract instant, global attention and give rise to multiple theories about why and how the person died. Avoid such speculation.
- A misreported suicide can cause a great deal of distress to friends and family.

### Content

- Digital media allows for a variety of coverage ranging from short video to tweets to lengthy written pieces. It also means that contributions from 'citizen journalists' and feedback from audiences – including trolls – are commonplace.
- A prominently or sensationally reported suicide or attempted suicide, or reports that go into detail about a suicide method, may influence the behaviour of vulnerable people.

- People who post on comment threads may not be aware of journalistic codes of conduct or media guidelines on reporting suicide. This may increase the possibility of inappropriate, offensive and sensationalist content appearing on a site. Proactive moderating of comment threads can help. All forms of user generated content relating to suicide should be carefully scrutinised prior to publication online to guard against inaccurate or potentially harmful information reaching vulnerable groups.
- Eulogising and memorialising people who have died by suicide is common online particularly within social networks. Referencing such content, especially where it concerns young people, can potentially glamorise a death.
- Repeated use of photography, and in particular online photo ‘galleries’ of people who have died by suicide can be very distressing for bereaved people. Avoid using images of young people who have taken their own lives and, where photographs of individuals are used, steer away from placing them too prominently.
- Video and audio content posted online might not comply with journalistic codes of ethics or general reporting guidelines on suicide. Check before you link to or use such material, that it does not glamorise a suicide or go into detail about methods.
- It is advisable to apply the same caution, when promoting a story using social media, as would be the case in mainstream media. For example, making sure that appropriate, non-sensationalist language is used.
- Reproducing or linking to content from chat rooms, pro-suicide websites and other online forums could be damaging to vulnerable people and distressing for bereaved families.

## Impact

- Because of the potential to reach large numbers of people quickly, suicide stories published online can have significant impact, particularly on vulnerable groups, such as people experiencing suicidal thoughts, people bereaved by suicide and younger people.
- Incorporate links to Samaritans and other sources for support, to encourage help-seeking behaviour, and do so as prominently as possible.
- Contact Samaritans’ media team for further information and advice on reporting suicide.

**For general tips on best practice consult *Samaritans’ Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide* at: [www.samaritans.org/mediaguidelines](http://www.samaritans.org/mediaguidelines)**



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