



Ministry of Information  
and Broadcasting  
Government of India

# Information Technology

(**Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code**),

# Rules, 2021



Notified: 25th February, 2021



# **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code), Rules, 2021**

With the advancement of science, new technologies have provided an opportunity for exponential expansion of print media as well as digital media. The OTT platforms and digital news portals are now established and are working well. The problem was that for these new sectors there was no institutional mechanism. When the Press has the Press Council of India and TV has its own self regulation and films have Central Board of Film Certification, these new platforms had no such arrangement.

There was a demand for bringing such parity and mechanism by media experts, filmmakers and industry experts, trade organizations/bodies and the people at large. These apart, there have been serious grievance from parents and guardians over the adult, violent and such other content which is harmful to children. There is also a need to empower the citizens for their grievance redressal. Due to absence of an

institutional set up, citizens do not know where to send their grievances or file complaints or suggestions relating to content on OTT or on digital news. There was demand from all sectors that there must be some arrangement by which a level playing field can be provided to all the media categories.

The Digital Media Ethics Code, under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 establishes an institutional mechanism for digital news portals and OTT platforms.

## Main features of the Rules

The rules establish a soft touch progressive institutional mechanism with a level playing field featuring a Code of Ethics and a three-tier grievance redressal framework for news publishers and OTT platforms on the digital media. The OTT platforms would self-classify the content into five age based categories- U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A (Adult). Platforms would be required to implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content

classified as “A”. Publishers of news on digital media would be required to observe Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India and the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks Regulation) Act thereby providing a level playing field between the offline (Print, TV) and digital media.

## **Grievance Redressal Mechanism**

A three-level grievance redressal mechanism has been established under the rules with two levels of self-regulation- Level I being the publisher and Level II being the Self Regulatory Body, and the third level being the Oversight Mechanism under the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. The rules provide for an effective grievance redressal mechanism for receiving, processing, and time-bound disposal of public grievances related to the Code of Ethics. The self regulatory body would be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court, or by a person of eminence from the relevant field, and can issue advisories to the publisher.

The mechanism is based on the **principles of minimum Government intervention**; however platforms should develop a robust grievance redressal mechanism on their own.

## Benefits of the Rules

The institutional mechanism established by the Digital Media Ethics Code would provide a stable policy environment to encourage growth in the OTT industry, bring in investments and generate jobs thereby providing a boost to the Champion Audio-Visual Services Sector. Self certification of content by OTT platforms would ensure artistic freedom for content creators and prevent delays. The Code would also empower the citizens to make informed choices about content, get their grievances redressed in definite time frames, and protect children.

The Code of Ethics for news publishers would help to fight fake news on digital media through a mechanism of accountability of publishers while providing a level playing field between online and offline (Print and TV) news publishers. The rules also open up new avenues for further engagement and coordination with the digital

news publishers which would be recognized for the first time under law through the process of furnishing information.

At a time when the digital media governance is in a state of flux across the globe, the Digital Media Ethics Code is thus a transformative step which would raise India's stature at an international level and serve as a model for other nations to emulate.



## सूचना एवं प्रसारण मंत्री श्री प्रकाश जावडेकर का सम्बोधन (25.02.2021)

जैसे आपको पता है कि नई टेक्नोलॉजी का एक अच्छा फल है कि डिजिटल मीडिया न्यूज पोर्टल बन गए, वैसे ही ओटीटी प्लेटफॉर्म्स आ गये। लेकिन एक फर्क रहा कि जो आप लोग बैठे हैं, प्रेस से जो आते हैं उनको प्रेस काउंसिल का कोड फॉलो करना पड़ता है लेकिन ऐसा डिजिटल मीडिया पोर्टल को कोई बंधन नहीं है। यहां टी वी के लोग हैं, उनको केबल नेटवर्क एक्ट में जो प्रोग्राम कोड है वह उनको फॉलो करना पड़ता है लेकिन ओटीटी प्लेटफॉर्म्स को ऐसा कोई नियम नहीं है और इसलिए सरकार ने यह समझा कि एक लेवल प्लेइंग फील्ड होना चाहिए। और इसलिए डिजिटल हो या प्रिंट हो या टी वी हो या ओटीटी हो, कुछ नियमों का पालन करना पड़ेगा, कुछ प्रोसेस सेट करना पड़ेगा। और लोगों की मांग भी बहुत थी, रोज सैकड़ों पत्र मंत्रालय में आते थे। इस बार संसद के सत्र में ओटीटी प्लेटफॉर्म पर 50 पश्च पूछे गए, दोनों सदन में मिलकर। इस विषय में देशभर में कितनी चर्चा है उसका यह उदाहरण है।

एक इंस्टीट्यूशनल मकेनिज्म सभी मीडिया के लिए होना चाहिए। क्योंकि मीडिया की आजादी लोकतंत्र की आत्मा है।



**Address of Hon'ble Minister  
for Electronics & Information Technology  
Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad (25.02.2021)**

Social Media is welcome to do business in India. They have done exceedingly well, they have got good business, good number of users and they have also empowered ordinary Indians.

The Government welcomes criticism and the right to dissent and social media has been used to ask questions too, but it is very important that the users of social media must be given the forum to raise their grievance for resolution against the abuse and misuse of social media . It is very important, with the social media users running into crores, they should be given a proper forum for resolution of their grievances in a time-bound manner against the abuse and misuse of social media. We are empowering the ordinary users of social media.

The basic essence of this step is a soft-touch oversight mechanism.

# OVERVIEW

## Digital Media Ethics Code UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES



- Create institutional mechanism to preserve Free Speech and Expression and provide level playing field
- Progressive and balanced Approach : Balancing with concerns of users
- Based on Existing Statute
- Utilising Experience of Existing Practices : Domestic and International

# Digital Media Ethics Code MAIN FEATURES



- Due diligence by intermediaries
- Three-Tier Grievance redressal mechanism
- Code of Ethics for Publishers
- Self-regulation architecture
- Disclosure of Information

## Digital Media Ethics Code FURNISHING AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION



- Publisher to furnish basic information to the Ministry
- Disclosure of information in public domain regarding grievance redressal by publisher and self-regulating body

# CODE OF ETHICS

## Digital Media Ethics Code Digital News Publishers

Norms of Journalistic  
Conduct under Press  
Council Act, 1995

Programme Code  
under Cable  
Television Networks  
(Regulation) Rules,  
1994

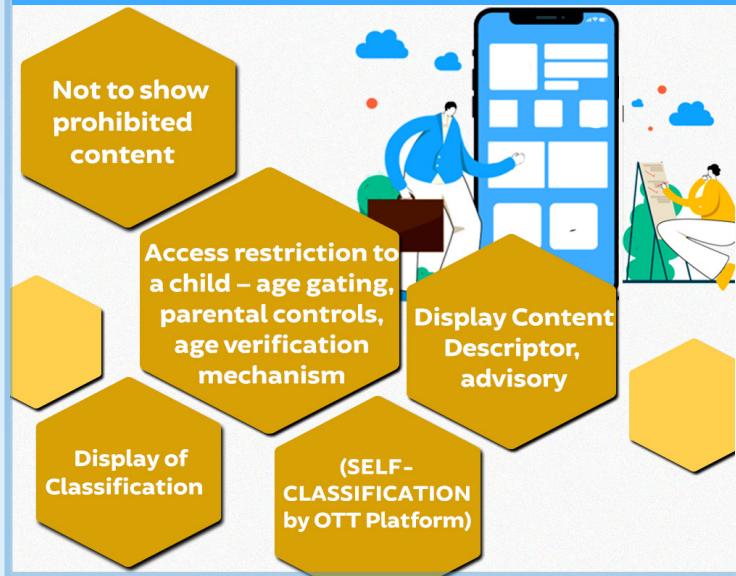
Prohibited Content  
not to be transmitted

Level playing field between Online & Offline Media



## Digital Media Ethics Code

### OTT Platforms



## Digital Media Ethics Code

### Content Classification



S.No	NATURE OF CONTENT (SUITABLE FOR)	Classification
1.	unrestricted access, regardless of age, and is family friendly	U
2.	for persons aged 7 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 7 years with parental guidance	U/A7+
3.	for persons aged 13 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 13 years with parental guidance	U/A13+
4.	for persons aged 16 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 16 years with parental guidance	U/A16+
5.	which is restricted to adults	A

Content Classification based on international practices

# GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM



## Digital Media Ethics Code

# Grievance Redressal Mechanism



### Level I: Publisher

- Establish an adequate grievance redressal mechanism
- Appoint a Grievance Officer
- Time bound acknowledgement and disposal of grievance
- Provide facility for grievance tracking
- Provide users with reasons for any action taken/not taken
- Display all details related to its grievance redressal mechanism

## Digital Media Ethics Code

# Grievance Redressal Mechanism



### Level II: Self-Regulating Body

#### STRUCTURE

- Independent body/bodies constituted by publishers
- Headed by retired judge of Supreme Court/High Court, or a person of eminence from the relevant field;
- Members - experts from various fields
- Publisher to be a member of a self-regulating body
- Ministry of I&B to register self-regulating bodies

## Digital Media Ethics Code

# Grievance Redressal Mechanism



### Level II: Self-Regulating Body

#### *FUNCTIONS*

- Oversee adherence to Code of Ethics by publisher
- Address grievances unresolved at Level I
- Issue guidance/advisories to a publisher, ensuring compliance
- Inform Ministry of I&B regarding disposal of grievances.

## Digital Media Ethics Code

# Grievance Redressal Mechanism



### Level III: Oversight Mechanism

#### *FUNCTIONS OF MINISTRY OF I&B*

- Constitute an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC)
- Lay down responsibilities and obligations of publishers
- Develop an online grievance redressal system
- Issue appropriate orders for adherence to Code of Ethics
- Take action for non-compliance of its directions

# BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

## Digital Media Ethics Code Benefits and Outcomes

For Citizens and Society



Quality Content  
Better Journalistic and Entertainment Content

Citizen Empowerment  
Informed Choice, Effective Grievance Redressal

Protecting Children  
Access Control and Age Verification

Curbing Misinformation  
Accountability of Digital News Publishers

Social Benefits

# Digital Media Ethics Code

## Benefits and Outcomes

For Media & Entertainment Sector



### Sustainable Growth

Promote Champion  
Audio-Visual Services  
Sector

### Artistic Freedom

No pre-censorship

### Avoid Litigation

Informed Decisions  
by Content Creators

### Self-Classification

No delays

OTT  
Players

# Digital Media Ethics Code

## Benefits and Outcomes

Digital News Publishers



### Sustainable Growth

Quality journalism  
through transparency

### Level Playing Field

Similar principles for  
online and offline news

### Freedom of Press

Arm's length from  
Government

### Curbing Misinformation

Reducing fake news on  
digital media

Digital  
News  
Publishers

## Social Media Rules Include Text Traceability, Grievance Redressal

Describing the rules as a "soft touch mechanism", RS Prasad said they will be implemented in three months' time.

THE QUINT  
Updated: 25 Feb 2021, 5:16 PM IST



## Ekta Kapoor, Prasoon Joshi and Nila Madhab Panda welcome OTT guidelines

By Movie Desk | Fri, 26 Feb 2021 12:18 IST



## New Rules for Digital, OTT Platforms Revolutionary: Tandav Director Ali Abbas Zafar



## एकता कपूर, प्रसून जोशी ने ओटीटी दिशा-निर्देशों का किया स्वागत

एकता कपूर, प्रसून जोशी | Published by: Jeev Kumar

Updated Fri, 26 Feb 2021 02:51 AM IST



## We are trusting self-regulation on OTT content: Government on censorship rules

"The laws made for significant social media will be implemented within 3 months so that they can improve their mechanism. The rest will come into effect from the day the rules are notified," Ravi Shankar Prasad said. The government also announced new guidelines to curb the misuse of social media platforms.

## 'Code of ethics' to be applicable for news publishers, OTT platforms, digital media: Centre

PTI Updated: Feb 25, 2021, 15:55 IST



## The Digital Media Code balances many priorities, interests of several stakeholders



तीन स्तरीय जांच से गुजरेगी ओटीटी पर रिलीज होने वाली फिल्में और वेब सीरीज, सरकार ने तैयार किया खाका

एकता कपूर, अरविंद कुमार | Published by: अरुण यादव

Updated Thu, 25 Feb 2021 02:42 PM IST

We are not bringing censorship for films on OTT: Prakash Javadekar

एकता कपूर, अरविंद कुमार | Published by: अरुण यादव

Crossed: Feb 25, 2021, 05:48 IST



The Telegraph *online*

Friday, 26 February 2021 • E-paper

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## Centre unveils ethics code for digital media

OIT platforms would be required to implement parental locks and reliable age verification mechanisms



**India imposes new rules on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube**

By Rishi Verma, CNN Business  
Updated 2201 GMT (0601 HKT) February 25, 2021

**新华社 Asia&Pacific**  
India announces new rules to regulate social media platforms

Source: Xinhua | 2021-02-25 19:14:23 | Editor: India  
[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Sina Weibo](#)

**AP**  
India introduces new rules to regulate online content

By SHERIN SAUDI yesterday

**dt NEWS**  
TECH NEWS  
POLITICS PLAN YOUR VACCINE COVID-19 U.S. NEWS OPINION BUSINESS WORLD TECH

**India introduces new rules to regulate online content**

The Information Technology Ministry said the new regulations would require social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to swiftly erase content authorities deem unlawful

**yahoo/news**  
Parental lock, self classification of content among new rules for OTT platforms

This 25 February, 2021, 10:39 pm

Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar during a press briefing on February 25 informed that the government has decided to have a 3-star mechanism for OTT platforms. "OTT and digital news media will have to disclose their details. We are not mandating registration, we are seeking information," he added. He further informed that OTT platforms should have a self-classification of content in 13+, 16+ and A categories and there has to be a mechanism of parental lock and ensuring compliance that children don't see that.

**SPUTNIK**  
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**Guidelines on Social Media, OTT Regulations Announced in India - Here's What They Say**

INDIA 12:09 GMT 25.02.2021 [Get short URL](#)  
by Rachita Purashar

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There are over 600 million internet users in India – the majority of whom are heavy consumers of social networking platforms and content streaming sites. In recent months, graphic content and misinformation has made the government enforce laws to keep the internet in check.

Indian Cabinet Ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad and Prakash Javadekar on Thursday announced the country's first guidelines to regulate India's digital space.

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12:11 GMT FBI Offering \$250,000 Reward for Information About Russia's Killmikov Over



Prasoon Joshi ✅  
@prasoonjoshi\_

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Measures taken for a level playing field and empowering consumers would provide clarity for content creators of emerging platforms. Responsible and accountable mechanisms will only bring in more quality and maturity in a commercial creative industry.

@PrakashJavdekar @rsprasad



Siddharth Shirole ✅  
@SidShirole

With great power comes great responsibility. A welcome step by GOI to make Indian Internet safer, more responsible and unbiased. Code of Ethics, self regulation and grievance redressal will go a long way to make platforms more accountable.

#ResponsibleFreedom  
#OTTGuidelines

3:21 PM - Feb 25, 2021 · Twitter Web Ap



rahul shrivastava ✅  
@Rahulshrivstv

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Welcome 2 do business. But follow India's constitution & rules. We don't want to interfere but #OTT & digital platforms can't hv double standards. Says @Gol\_Meity @rsprasad Action in attack on #USCONGRESS & inaction on #redfortattack is not acceptable

@PrakashJavdekar @IndiaToday



rahul rawail  
@RahulRawail

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Much Needed! A great mature handling of the Social Media and OTT platforms. The ball is in their court now. Kudo's to the vision of The Honourable PM, Shri Narendra Mody, @PMOIndia and to @rsprasad and @PrakashJavdekar for translating the vision to reality.

“With this move, India continues to deepen its position as a leader in digital policy and technological innovation”

**T.V. Mohandas Pai**





Ministry of Information and Broadcasting  
Government of India