

## London School of Theology

# Social Media and Digital Communication Policy

## For Students

Process of ratification:	Executive Team
Executive Team Member Responsible:	Director of Finance and Operations
Individual Responsible:	Jonathan Mead
Date Last Approved:	March 2024
To be Reviewed:	Annually
Review consultation:	Marketing & Communication Manager & Team
Date of Next Review period:	March 2025

### Introduction

London School of Theology (hereafter LST/the School) recognizes the importance and significance of social media and other online communication in this digital age. Social media are forms of electronic communication that allow users to create online communities and share various types of content, for example: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp. In addition, many other websites allow digital communication between individuals and groups—for example, Reddit, Mumsnet, 4Chan, and many others.<sup>1</sup> Individuals may also have personal websites, blogging platforms, and/or podcasts.

As well as prioritising social media as part of the School’s formal communications and marketing activity, we encourage students to engage with social media platforms as a key means of: (i) promoting the School’s vision, mission, ethos and strategic goals; (ii) commending its programmes of study; (iii) foregrounding its educational philosophy and practice; (iv) showcasing its personnel and community life, and (v) highlighting its wider ministry and outreach.

We expect that students will use social media responsibly and respectfully in general, and especially in relation to the School and their involvement in the School. This policy sets out guidelines for the appropriate use of social media, and other types of digital communication, in order to maintain a positive and professional online presence, while upholding academic freedom and the values and principles that define us as an evangelical theological college. This policy should also be read with regard to our position as a validated

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<sup>1</sup> These others include, but are not limited to: LinkedIn, YouTube, Likee, iMessage, Flickr, Yammer, Yahoo/MSN Messenger, Facebook Messenger, Pinterest, Snapchat, Skype, Truth Social, Weibo, WeChat, VK, QQ/QZone.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) within the UK, whose programmes are also made available to students overseas.<sup>2</sup>

A distinct Social Media Policy is in place for LST employees, Visiting Lecturers (VLs) and Visiting Supervisors (VSs), although many elements of that policy overlap with this one.

## **1. Engagement with the School's own Social Media Platforms**

1.1. When formally representing the School on the School's own social media platforms, students should liaise on their contribution with the Marketing and Communication Manager,<sup>3</sup> except where simply liking or endorsing material generated by the School. In any case, they should ensure that their contributions to the School's own social media platforms are in keeping with the vision, mission and ethos of School, including with its Community Code. This means being mindful that online behaviour reflects on the School's reputation, and recognising that good judgement and propriety are expected when representing or commenting on the School's activities and profile online.

## **2. Free Speech, Respect and Tolerance**

2.1. In all social media communication, due tolerance and/or respect for diversity of opinion and belief within and beyond the School community is expected, in line with the School's own Free Speech and Academic Freedom Policy. Constructive engagement should characterise the content and tenor of students' social media discourse.

2.2 In all social media interactions, students should treat others with politeness and respect, even when discussions or debates involving significant disagreement are in process. Personal attacks, offensive language, discriminatory remarks and verbal abuse should be avoided. In some circumstances, comments made by students might be construed by others as falling into these categories but might not do so according to the School's own vision, mission and ethos. In other cases, where this Policy is deemed to have been breached, disciplinary action might be applied in accordance with the School's Student Disciplinary Procedure.

2.3 While it is recognised that the Christian vision, mission and ethos of the School might have political implications in a more general sense, and while students may affiliate with particular political parties in a personal or private capacity, they should not use social media to imply that the School itself supports or promotes a specific political party or parties – or any other campaigning or activist group with which the School has not formally affiliated.

## **3. Confidentiality and Privacy**

3.1. Confidential or sensitive information about the School, fellow students, faculty, staff,

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<sup>2</sup> For background, see the Student Social Media Guidelines issued by our validating University, Middlesex: <https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/student-life/important-documents/appropriate-use-of-social-media-guidelines>

<sup>3</sup> In this and other instances where the Marketing and Communication Manager is referenced here, the absence or unavailability of that Manager will mean that the matter should be referred directly to the Director of Finance and Operations instead.

VL/Vs, trustees or any other individuals associated with the School, should not be shared on social media.

3.2. Appropriate permissions should be sought and secured before sharing photos, videos or personal information of others. Respect should be shown at all times for others' image rights and rights to privacy.

#### **4. Intellectual Property and Copyright**

4.1. Copyright laws and intellectual property rights should also be complied with in social media interactions by students. No posting or sharing of copyrighted material should occur without proper authorization or attribution.

4.2. When sharing content from external sources, due credit should be given, with a link or links back to the original source whenever possible.

#### **5. Honesty, Integrity and Appropriate Interactions with Employees**

5.1. Honesty, transparency and integrity are essential in all social media interactions. Students should not misrepresent themselves or the School in such interactions.

5.2 The School's own social media platforms should not be used for personal gain, promotion or advertising of individual students' personal work, products or goods without prior approval from the Marketing and Communication Manager.

5.3 Students should avoid developing and/or maintaining private, non-School related contact with current employees of LST on social media, including direct messaging. Students should normally contact employees online through their LST email or the VLE. Where interaction with employees via social media is deemed necessary, it should be for educational or pastoral reasons related to students' programme, formation and formal membership of the School.

5.4 Where student-employee messaging via social media platforms/apps such as WhatsApp is deemed necessary, this should normally be via designated online *groups* rather than with individual employees (e.g., via group chat related to a Tutor Group). Where one-to-one social media communication between a student and an employee is believed to be helpful, e.g., for educational or pastoral support, for School-related social, community, sporting or musical events, or for other events and conferences—this should be limited, appropriate, and relevant to those purposes.

5.5 Where a student has a close family relationship with an employee (e.g., as a son, daughter, sibling etc.), or where a long-standing friendship has existed between a student and an employee prior to the student's enrolment, special exemptions to the above social

media protocols will be agreed with the Director of Finance and Administration, HR Manager and, if necessary, the Executive Team.

## **6. Cyberbullying and Harassment**

6.1 Cyberbullying, harassment, or any form of online intimidation is unacceptable, and will be addressed through the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

6.2 Students are expected to report any instances of cyberbullying, online harassment or intimidation perpetrated by a fellow students or employees of the School to the Director of Finance and Administration, who will initiate such disciplinary action as may be deemed necessary, in accordance with the School's Student or Employee Disciplinary Procedures.

## **7 Compliance with Laws and Policies**

7.1 Students should adhere to all other applicable laws, regulations, policies and protocols beyond this policy when using social media platforms. Pursuant to this, they should familiarize themselves with the terms of service and privacy settings of the social media platforms they use, ensuring that they understand how their information is being shared and protected.

## **8 Consequences of Policy Breaches and Violations**

8.1 Breaches and violations of this Policy may result in disciplinary action, in accordance with the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

8.2 It is the duty of each student to familiarize themselves with this Policy. In keeping with this, new students will be introduced to it as part of their induction.