

#austand digital

Eleven Commandments

PREFACE

The internet makes communication faster, easier, freer, and airier. It breaks down barriers and hierarchies, opening-up free access to worldwide knowledge. It entices people to play, to search and find. It is a place of recommendations. It increases the chances of participation. Everyone can become an author here, express an opinion and find an audience. Yet the advantages of the net are at the same time its dangers. Its speed is a problem, as every comment is written down immediately, every opinion is shared thousands of times. The internet has hardly any filters. It lacks buffers. It tends to escalate, polarize opinions, and pile up waves of agitation.

Therefore, caution and restraint are required, as well as efforts to maintain poise and decency. Moving around

in the digital world calls for a specific attitude. Such an attitude needs practice. It brings together distance, deceleration, and a rhythm of its own. To find one's own attitude, time and calm are necessary. I must have the opportunity to reflect on myself and my communicative experiences, to examine them retrospectively, and to draw conclusions from them. Decency can be found only through distance.

Decency here does not mean moral heroism, but an attitude practiced in everyday life. It combines decisiveness with restraint. A decent person is skeptical towards oneself, gets by with few but clear words, and does not always smell indecency in others, but resists it rather whenever the need arises.

Cooperation partner:



KATHOLISCHE AKADEMIE
IN BERLIN e.V.



Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien

ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS

1 DISTINGUISH TYPES OF OUTRAGE

Democracy is not possible without outrage. It is the driving force when cases of injustice need to be confronted and remedied. Without indignation, democracy loses its strength and passion. Nevertheless, there is a great danger outrage. The internet promotes a questionable culture of agitation, in which outraged judgements about others build up and intensify at breakneck speed. Resentment, anger, and hatred travel like waves through the net, damaging the democratic culture of discussion and debate, fostering atmospheres of mutual suspicion and conspiracy theories. The issues that people wanted to discuss are drowned out.

3 TAKE YOUR TIME

Democracy lives on good decisions, not on quick ones. To find these, it has imposed many delays, filters and formal requirements in institutions and procedures. Many see this as a weakness, but it is also a strength. This is true on the internet. Taking one's time with statements on the net means always reconsidering them, overthinking them, basically taking speed out of them. For those who allow themselves to be rushed into something by the fast internet have already lost, and the path from being rushed by others to rushing oneself is short.

2 DO NOT JUDGE

Democratic action is not possible without a well-developed faculty of judgement. Democratic processes need clear distinctions and decisions. Premature moral judgements about others damage this effort. For judgement is formed in conversation. The internet promotes the tendency to make quick, often final judgements about others. In scathing comments or in the moral disparagement of fellow human beings. It is always important to remember that one's own judgements can be a mistake, and that we ourselves need to be gentle and lenient. And above all: No one is entitled to make final judgements about other human beings.

4 BECOME OBJECTIVE

Democratic culture thrives on passionate, yet also objective debate. On the internet, however, such arguing is carried out without distance and without filters. It is easy for emotions to get the better of us. The opportunities to share knowledge on the internet are squandered. Emotions rule. More than in the analogue world, a cool mindset and passion for objectivity are needed here, as well as an attitude of not always resenting the other person's impulse and emotion.

5 KEEP YOUR DISTANCE AND DON'T BE MEAN

Democratic societies need the right amount of closeness and distance. The internet shortens distances while at the same time not allowing for physical and bodily closeness. This digital closeness is an opportunity, but at the same time a danger, against which discretion, attention and empathy for others must be practiced. This also includes restraint in sharing and spreading questionable content on the internet too quickly and without double-checking. Rumors, gossip, or missionary distribution of „fake news“ all too easily are transformed into rabble-rousing tumults and conspiracy communities on the net.

7 SHOW YOUR FACE

As always in public, you should carefully consider what you reveal about yourself and what you keep to yourself on the net. Anonymity can be a legitimate protection of the weak in repressive circumstances. But it can also be cowardly, mendacious, and destructive. This risk should be countered by setting a good example. This includes allowing oneself to be called on what one says and writes. Showing face means, for example, taking a clear stance that others may follow or contradict with reasons.

6 RESPECT YOUR COUNTERPART ON THE NET

Respect for the other is one of the basic tenets of democracy. The other person is like me: finite and fallible, free, and vulnerable, trying to form his or her opinion, and subject to the alternation of misunderstandings and true insights. In dealing with each other, courage is needed to clearly represent one's own position, but also to put it up for discussion. What is also needed is fair confrontation with the opponent and, time and again, the will to accurately interpret the common situation.

8 VALUE CONTRADICTION ABOVE ALL

Democracy requires opposition. Without opposition to the government, democracy loses its heart. The internet and its tendency to declare or recommend this and that to be good can lead to an atmosphere of sentimental positivity and non-contradiction. Contradictoriness is a democratic attitude. But it should not degenerate into permanent indignation or childish defiance. But those who only react irritably or over-sensitively to contradiction deprive themselves of the chance to gain better insights.

9 REMAIN TOUCHABLE AND GET OUT OF YOUR RAGE

Not: “Time for outrage!” Nor: “Down with outrage!” (#JoachimBittner). But why not: Get out of your rage! Put down your weapons of narrow-mindedness and your shields of knowledge. Trust the sense of the word: Disarmament of the out-rageous offence is not possible without out-raging, i.e., disarming oneself. Those who are truly outraged make themselves defenseless. False outrage would then go down! False outrage is often only the flip side of cold indifference that has given up interest in the other and the common good.

11 DISTINGUISH DECENCY AND LAW

It is the task of the law to legislate for the legal handling of personal rights, for appropriate data protection, for adequate transparency of algorithms, and to regulate the power of the large platforms. As a matter of principle, the rules of decency do not have the force of law, they are merely subjective recommendations and gain their power by being implemented as widely as possible. Deficits in legislation or its enforcement cannot be replaced or compensated for by calls for more decency. Decency and law must therefore always be distinguished from each other.

10 BE ABLE TO FEEL ASHAMED, AND AVOID EMBARRASSMENT

Without the ability to be ashamed, it is difficult to imagine living together. Only then can one see oneself through the eyes of others. The ability to be ashamed also regulates the difficult transition from intimacy to the public sphere. However, shaming another person in public is a questionable intervention that should only be used in exceptional situations. Rather, it is important to spare the other person shame and to respect feelings of shame in others. It takes discretion and reverence to know one's own shame threshold or that of the other person, and not to violate it. Without awareness of the value of boundaries, good life is not possible even in the borderless realms of the internet.