

## **DRAFT**

### **Code of Ethics & Standards for Social Data**

#### **PREAMBLE**

Social media offers an unprecedented set of opportunities and responsibilities for individuals and organizations. For individuals, social media offers new routes to self-expression mixed with shifting, sometimes unfamiliar expectations regarding ownership and privacy of that data. For organizations, social data offers new ways to glean insight into customer and consumer attitudes, emotions and behaviors down to the individual level, and therefore also raises ethical dilemmas with regard to direct use.

High ethical standards are critical to maintaining the public's trust in the social data industry and in the professions associated with it. Since the Big Boulder Initiative was created in 2011, the non-profit organization has been working towards establishing the foundations for long-term success of the social data industry, inclusive of Ethics and Standards. In this forum, competitors, suppliers and brands work to help define the industry way forward.

The following Code of Ethics & Standards is an effort to define a set of ethical values for the treatment of social data. It represents a commitment of the Big Boulder Initiative to provide data stewardship across the social data ecosystem and an expectation from its members and supporters to display integrity aligned with the Code and Standards.

The Code of Ethics & Standards for Social Data therefore becomes the ethical benchmark for companies and individuals associated with the social data industry around the world.

#### **THE CODE OF ETHICS**

This document represents a starting point for articulating and honoring the most ethical business practices surrounding social data and its use for organizations. Our aim is to help set a standard for the industry that supports innovation, yet promotes best practice for usage, ownership, privacy and behavior at the same time.

Members of The Big Boulder Initiative (including Board members, supporters and sponsors) are expected to promote the 5 key ethics & standards:

- Accountability
- Privacy
- Transparency
- Education
- Accessibility

## **1. Accountability**

There are currently no standards across the social data eco-system, making it hard for industry to collaborate, compare quality and to innovate together.

We strive to hold ourselves accountable for ethical day-to-day deployment of social data and to take prompt action in case something goes wrong. Academic, corporate or industry usage can give rise to a host of unintended consequences and sometimes public backlash. We are committed to defining a framework for accountability and ethics in support of operational usage as well as for outages, data corruption, and potential privacy breaches.

BBI will lead from the front to help create, promote and celebrate the power of social data with the accountability we each need to take. Firstly solving for industry, secondly for the companies we serve.

## **2. Privacy**

With so many different social media platforms, privacy settings and contexts for social data, the notion ‘privacy and ownership’ is more complex than a simple “on or off” setting. Many forms of social posts are by default public, and broadcasting a specific tweet on television, with attribution, may represent more public scrutiny than an individual intends. There is an immediate need for industry stewardship to help provide more security and visibility into where personal data goes, combined with an ability to correct our own personal data where needed – ultimately acknowledging it is personal.

Members of BBI believe that, in addition to honoring explicit privacy settings, organizations should honor implicit privacy preferences where possible. This may mean broadcasting a post without attribution, or with a blurring of the name. Specifically, the best practice is to preserve content within its original context so as not to surprise the user, and first and foremost respecting the end user's voice.

BBI will strive to support more anonymous data batching where it is appropriate and will pursue a respect for the end user and their privacy above all. The non-profit organization will also develop proposed privacy standard forms for use across the eco-system to help platforms enforce their policies more uniformly.

## **3. Transparency**

Social data can increasingly be used to make business or personal decisions, but can be misleading without context. The social data industry should strive to reach the highest possible state of eco-system transparency.

A best practice is to include methodology notes, including method of collection, data context, and trace rate for data sources. Where possible, publishers, tool-builders, and analysts should enable readers to draw their own conclusions about the reliability of a particular data set and any associated

recommendations. In addition, some users want to have control over the content they create – but in practice it's very hard to control what's happened to that content, and impossible to verify that it's been deleted everywhere.

BBI will create and encourage the adoption of a standard scheme for metadata for social data with a standard for annotation on data and an industry benchmark on data quality.

BBI will also advocate that management of deleted content is the collective responsibility of the eco-system. BBI will take the leadership to develop wider policies and technical standards to make the management of deleted content easier and more effective.

#### **4. Education**

Education is about lifelong learning and when it comes to social data – people and organizations are in a potentially vulnerable position as they lack education and awareness of the space. There is an opportunity to educate users on how their data is used – to help encourage best practice and ultimately promote a better process for better judgment.

Ethical social data practices will emerge out of a better understanding of early failures and controversies. The lessons learned should be as relevant for higher education and professionals as they are for the middle school children creating the social data of the future.

The Big Boulder Initiative supports education efforts at all levels towards increasing the social data literacy through illustrative case studies. BBI strives to provide equitable access for the classroom – helping to onboard future generations into social and facilitate the conversation around social.

BBI will help facilitate social education for its members in support of technology, policies and future innovation.

#### **5. Accessibility**

The potential availability of data, far exceeds the actual practical availability of data. Usability with ease and access to global data sources remains an opportunity across industry, as does the creation of clear data standards, better geo coverage, better aggregation, and reliability in global data provision – both real-time and historically.

We strive to make social data tools and sources accessible across all user groups, at the scale and cost required for their work. We also strive to help set data standards, recommend user focused API's and promote reliability across the eco-system.

BBI will lead from the front to help create, promote and celebrate the power of social data and help close the gap between potentially and actually

available data. BBI offers a resourcing library across the website in support of these individuals and companies. Firstly advocating for industry, secondly for the companies we serve.

### *Pledge*

By agreeing to the five sections outlined in this Social Data Code of Ethics & Standards, I pledge to uphold these standards across the Social Web.

I will support the efforts of the Big Boulder Initiative to safeguard consumer data and privacy by providing feedback and advocating for adherence to these ideals. If I observe a violation of these standards, I will make a reasonable effort to notify the site owner and provide feedback directly and privately, referencing this Code of Ethics & Standards as warranted.

*[Note: the following will have live links when we finalize the COE:]*

I agree to the above Social Data Code of Ethics & Standards and am ready to pledge.

We hope this document spurs a wider discussion about social data collection, processing, and utilization practices. We must address many complex issues, including, but not limited to, custodianship, business value, accessibility, individual protections, and privacy.