



SOCIAL MEDIA

A Practical Guide for
Electoral Management Bodies





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SHANA KAISER

CASE STUDY AUTHORS:

ERIK ASPLUND

NEIL BURRON

ANDREW LIMO

S.Y. QURAISHI



Electoral Processes

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International IDEA
Strömsborg
SE-103 34 Stockholm
Sweden
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00, fax: +46 8 20 24 22
E-mail: info@idea.int, website: www.idea.int

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Preface

Over the past several years online social media have come to play an increasingly prominent role in the ways in which we communicate. With the emergence of new and engaging digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WordPress, the means by which information is created and consumed have changed radically. One-way output of information from ‘official sources’ has given way to communication that is individually or collectively generated and shared by online users who are now as much active producers of information as they are passive consumers.

In tandem with this, the public increasingly expects official bodies and institutions to have an active online presence, and expects that information is presented and distributed through those social media platforms where they themselves are present. Electoral management bodies (EMBs) are no exception here and they must respond to the changing demand from the public if they are to remain relevant and effective. Moreover, they have much to gain if they can learn to use social media tools successfully.

This guide is designed to inform EMBs about the ways in which social media can be used to increase the participation of the electorate, boost communication, engage all members of the community and improve transparency and trust throughout the entire electoral cycle. It also explains the factors that EMBs should consider during the initial phase of using social media platforms, and shows how social media can be effectively used throughout the electoral cycle. The guide is designed to be an introduction to the use of social media for EMBs who have just begun to use social media, or who are about to embark on its use. It provides material to enable EMBs to respond to new communication realities and to develop social media strategies, as well as outlining how social media needs to be embedded in an overall media strategy.

Social media plays an increasingly important role in the field of voter information. EMBs need to reach voters where they are and young voters are particularly active on social networks. Therefore social media is also an effective tool in voter education efforts designed to ensure voters are well informed and can effectively exercise their voting rights. In the digital age, social media has the potential to become a hugely valuable and effective voter education tool for EMBs.

International IDEA

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Acronyms and abbreviations

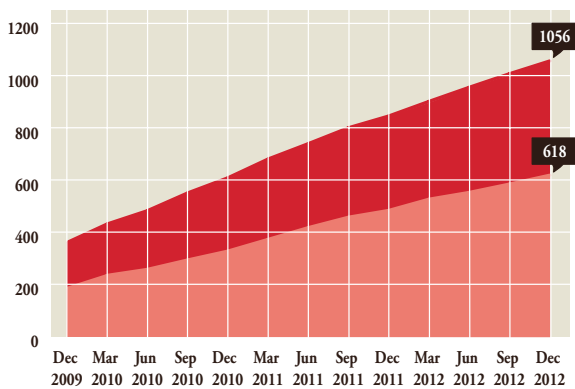
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
CNE	Consejo Nacional Electoral (Colombia)
EMB	electoral management body
EUR	Euro
GEO	Global Electoral Organizations
IEBC	The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya
International IDEA	The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
JNE	Jurado Nacional de Elecciones (Peru)
ONPE	Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales (Peru)
RNEC	Registraduria Nacional del Estado Civil (Colombia)
UGC	user-generated content
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

In August 2008, Facebook reported that the number of users on its popular social networking site had recently grown to over 100 million. By December 2012, just four years later, the number had reached 1.06 billion active users per month, with an average of 618 million active users per day (an active user being defined as a registered Facebook member who logs in and visits the site. See Graphs 1 to 5). The company also reported an average of 3.2 billion ‘likes’ and comments generated by Facebook users every day during the first quarter of 2012. In the same way, Twitter usership has grown with comparable impressive speed since the site’s launch in March 2006. Figures from 2013 show that each day Twitter users were posting approximately 500 million ‘tweets’ (USSEC Twitter).

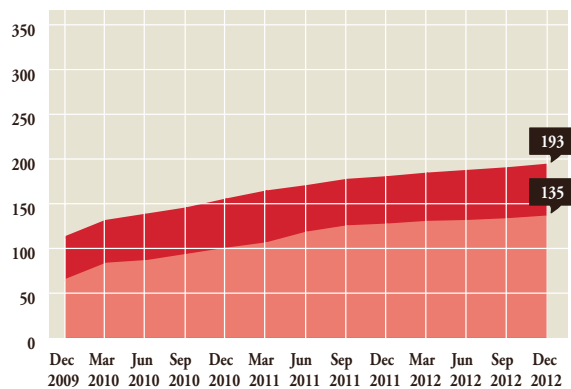
Graph 1. Active Facebook Users Worldwide (in millions)

● Monthly ● Daily (average over the month ended)

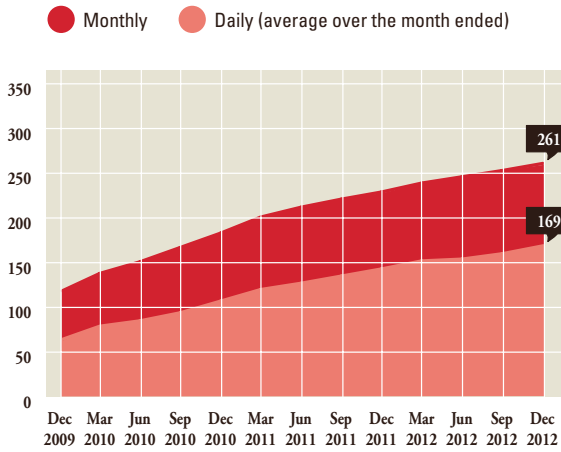


Graph 2. Active Facebook Users US and Canada (in millions)

● Monthly ● Daily (average over the month ended)

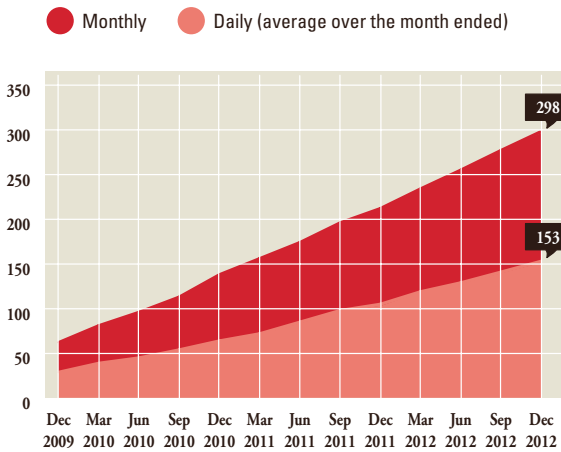


Graph 3. Active Facebook Users Europe* (in millions)



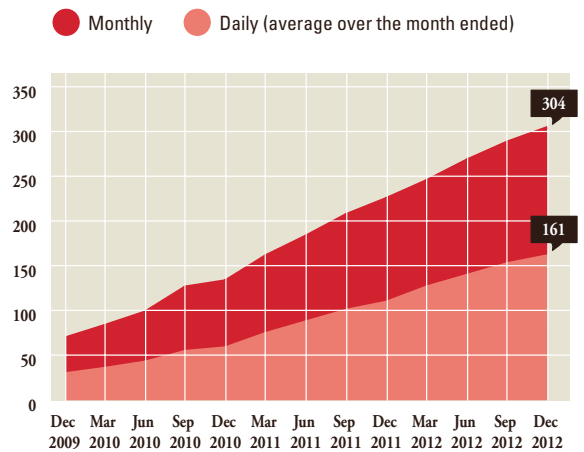
*Europe includes all users in Russia and Turkey

Graph 4. Active Facebook Users Asia* (in millions)



* Asia includes all users in Australia and New Zealand

Graph 5. Active Facebook Users Rest of the World* (in millions)



* Rest of the world includes Africa, Latin America and the Middle East

Source: United States Securities and Exchange Commission Form 10-k—Facebook, <<http://investor.fb.com/secfiling.cfm?filingID=1326801-13-3&CIK=1326801>>, accessed on 12 November 2013

Numbers such as these emphasize the increasing popularity and availability of online social networks, and show that the ways in which people communicate and share information have changed rapidly. Active social networks transcend national borders, span continents and allow users to access first-hand information from around the world. The impact that social media now have on the ways in which we receive, generate and process information is continually evolving, and institutions that make use of these new communication platforms may be more effective in meeting the demands and expectations of their audiences.

Citizens' understanding and perceptions of the electoral process and the activities and procedures taking place within it are crucial to an election's success—and, by extension, to the success of an EMB. One of the basic ways that an EMB can ensure an electorate has access to relevant information that will improve its understanding of the electoral process and bolster relations with the electorate and electoral shareholders is to 'maintain open, two-way communication' (International IDEA 2006a: 210). Arguably, such 'two-way communication' has never been easier than through the well-planned and strategic use of social media.

This guide introduces social media and some of the more popular social media platforms currently being used. It describes the benefits that EMBs from around the world have found in using social media to engage with their electorates. Elements and processes for designing a social media strategy are outlined, and these are followed by considerations that EMBs should bear in mind when first implementing a social media strategy. Lastly, the guide presents some ideas for the ways in which EMBs can engage with their target audience throughout the entire electoral cycle.

Figure 1. Overview of this guide

CHAPTER 1

- An introduction to social media
- Benefits of social media for EMBs

CHAPTER 2

- Elements of a social media strategy
- Steps towards developing a social media strategy

CHAPTER 3

- Considerations for getting started
- Using social media throughout the entire electoral process

CHAPTER 1.

An introduction to social media and its use by EMBs

Social media—what is it?

There are many definitions of social media but all social media are essentially understood to be web or mobile-based platforms that allow for two-way interactions through user-generated content (UGC) and communication. Social media are therefore not media that originate only from one source or are broadcast from a static website. Rather, they are media on specific platforms designed to allow users to create (‘generate’) content and to interact with the information and its source.

While social media rely on the internet as a medium, it is important to note that not all internet sites or platforms meet the definition of social media. Some websites make no provision for interactivity with the audience, while others allow users only to post comments as a reaction to particular published content as discussions posts (or ‘threads’) which are moderated and controlled. While discussion threads can offer a degree of interaction with the source, these are not considered to be social media platforms for the purposes of this guide.

Current popular platforms

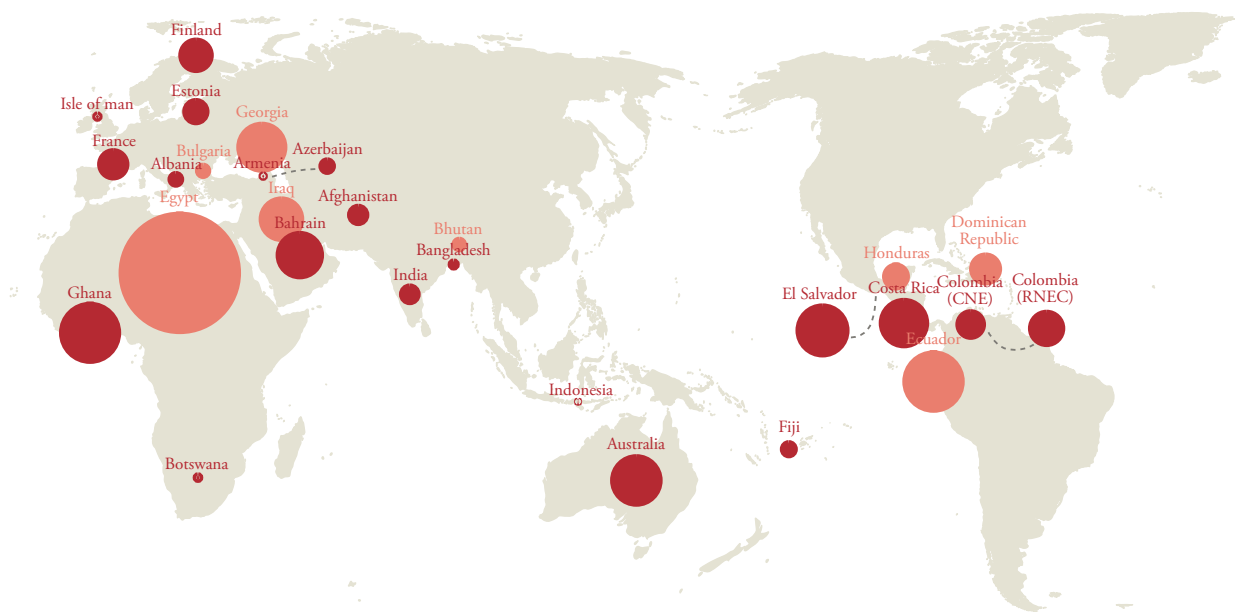
Current social media platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Bambuser, Vimeo, Blogs, Flickr, LinkedIn and Google+. Other platforms popular in select countries or regions include Cloob (Iran), Orkut (Brazil, India), Cyworld (South Korea), Friendster (South East Asia), Grono.net (Poland), hi5 (parts of Asia, Central Africa and Latin America), mixi (Japan), Spaces (Russia) and Sina Weibo (mainland China). In addition to these platforms, there are a variety of ‘dashboards’ designed to consolidate social media messages and postings over various platforms (for example, Threadsy, HootSuite and Buffer) and software programmes that assist in monitoring social media discussions (for example, Tweetdeck and Meltwater Buzz) in order to provide feedback to the user. (Short descriptions of some prevalent social media platforms can be found in Annex One.)

How can social media be beneficial to EMBs?

EMBs are critical to ensuring that the electoral process is run effectively, legitimately and credibly. EMBs are also responsible for ensuring that the electorate is informed about the procedures and practices for which the EMB is accountable. Associated with these roles and responsibilities are certain principles that guide the management of the electoral process. These include the independence, impartiality and integrity of the EMB and its staff, as well as transparency, efficiency, professionalism and a service-minded ethos (International IDEA 2006a: 22). The new tools and platforms provided by emerging social media can play an important role in assisting EMBs to adhere to these principles, and, in combination with traditional forms of outreach, help an EMB educate the public about its role and the electoral process at large. The better stakeholders understand the role and function of an EMB the greater their perception of its integrity and effectiveness (International IDEA 2006a: 26).

At present, very few EMBs employ any form of social media. A mapping exercise and global survey of EMBs and their use of social media undertaken by International IDEA in October 2013 found that of 172 countries and territories only 55 EMBs (31.9 per cent) had Facebook pages, and of these 55 only 49 showed any sign of current Facebook activity. The corresponding number for Twitter was that 47 EMBs (27 per cent) had Twitter accounts. The number of Twitter ‘followers’ ranged from a high of 250,117 (with Latin American EMBs being most

Table 1. EMBs using Facebook and the numbers of ‘likes’ (October 2013)

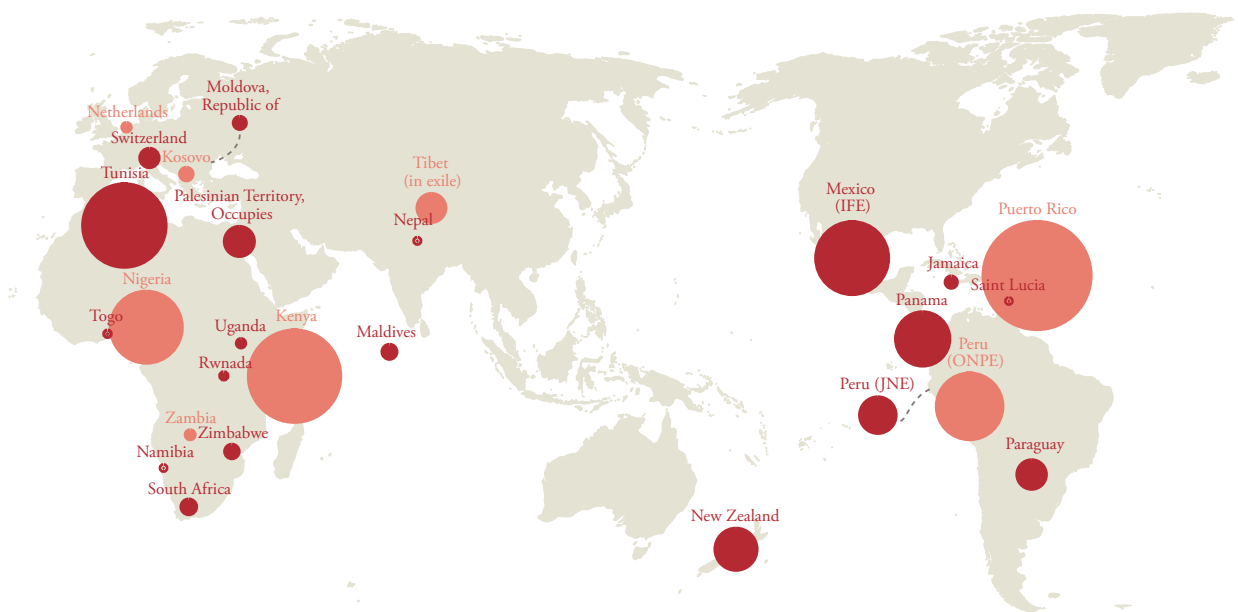


Number of ‘likes’ per country / territory	
Afghanistan	2,100
Albania	822
Armenia	37
Australia	19,083
Azerbaijan	978
Bahrain	15,766
Bangladesh	210
Bhutan	630
Botswana	98
Bulgaria	748
Colombia (CNE)	5,083
Colombia (RNEC)	8,402
Costa Rica	17,356
Dominican Republic	6,182

Number of ‘likes’ per country / territory	
Ecuador	28,322
Egypt	123,694
El Salvador	20,373
Estonia	3,708
Fiji	1,063
Finland	7,410
France	5,824
Georgia	17,901
Ghana	28,068
Honduras	3,950
India	1,931
Indonesia	15
Iraq	13,663
Isle of Man	83

active Twitter users) to a low of only two. These numbers reveal not only that the use of social media by EMBs varies widely; they also show that the level of engagement with social media platforms by EMBs and their online followers is not in general very high. In fact, where users are posting to EMB Facebook pages, the general trend indicates that user activity is higher than that of the EMB, further indicating that EMBs may not be using Facebook to engage effectively with their audiences.

Table 1. EMBs using Facebook and the numbers of 'likes' (October 2013) (cont)



Number of 'likes' per country / territory	
Jamaica	582
Kenya	72,336
Kosovo	777
Maldives	1056
Mexico (IFE)	43,916
Moldova, Republic of	707
Namibia	57
Nepal	68
Netherlands	241
New Zealand	13,307
Nigeria	42,757
Palestinian Territory, Occupied	6,177
Panama	23,306

Number of 'likes' per country / territory	
Paraguay	5,905
Peru (JNE)	9,689
Peru (ONPE)	36,186
Puerto Rico	100,425
Rwanda	141
Saint Lucia	48
South Africa	1,196
Switzerland	2,082
Tibet (In exile)	5,626
Togo	90
Tunisia	58,376
Uganda	234
Zambia	290
Zimbabwe	959

The mapping exercise was complemented by a written global survey of EMBs. In their responses to the survey, EMBs highlighted the potential benefits and possible challenges that social media bring to election management. The benefits they identified can be grouped into three broad categories: (1) easier communication with the electorate; (2) engagement with new audiences; and (3) increased accessibility and transparency. Challenges raised by the EMBs will be discussed later in the guide.

Easier communication with the electorate

Social media allows us 'to meet the public in a way that enables dialogue and communication, not mere information'. (Norway)

From the replies provided by survey respondents, it is evident that EMBs believe that an important benefit of social media is the ability to engage with the electorate through shared and open discussions. When there is a need to share information quickly, an EMB can directly access an existing audience of followers, who can then share the information within their own respective networks in an ongoing and ever-expanding process.

Social media 'eases ... fast dissemination of information [and] obtaining information on the part of voters and other stakeholders in the electoral process'. (Portugal)

Equally important is the real-time information that can be gathered from the electorate (see Box 1). For instance, when monitoring social media platforms, Elections Canada was able to identify issues such as the non-delivery of voter information cards in some areas, confirm the accuracy of reports, and request field staff to take appropriate action. In addition, the Canadian EMB reported that social media had given them an 'opportunity to get real-time information on stakeholders' views and areas of interest'. Listening to an audience and understanding their needs and opinions as posted on social media platforms is a key element of successful social media usage and should not be underestimated.

Social media provides EMBs with 'wide coverage for information dissemination [and] immediate feedback'. (Botswana)

Box 1. Reacting to real-time information through social media in India

A notable advantage of the social media is direct and instant communication with an audience without the mediation of any other media. As for their usefulness, social media have repeatedly proved to be a source of real-time information and instant feedback. One gets to know things as they happen. As the former Chief Election Commissioner of the Independent Election Commission of India, I would like to mention at least one instance when Twitter brought to my notice an ugly incident at a counting centre in Uttar Pradesh in March 2012. Late in the evening, when just a couple of assembly constituencies remained for the announcement of results, I left for home. Soon after, I saw a 'tweet' asking me, 'Dr Quraishi, what are you doing to rescue the journalists surrounded by a violent crowd outside the counting centre?' I had no clue about the incident as our field officials until then had reported nothing. We contacted the leader concerned, who then asked his followers to lift the blockade at once and threatened to expel them from the party. It had an instant impact and a serious situation was averted in time.

Dr S.Y. Quraishi, Former Chief Election Commissioner of the Independent Election Commission of India

Social media also provide a valuable means by which EMBs can supplement more traditional means of communication with the electorate. Direct channels of communication between an EMB and the electorate have long been recognized as essential to the work of an EMB, and may include telephone enquiry services, public enquiry desks and suggestions boxes at locations such as markets, shopping precincts or transport hubs, interactive radio and

television programming, and ‘town hall’ type meetings featuring EMB members (International IDEA 2006a: 207). While such tools are beneficial for traditional outreach campaigns, social media enable EMBs to advertise these events and services widely and to encourage greater public participation.

There are various ways in which social media can assist an EMB in sharing information and in gathering valuable insights into the issues and concerns being discussed by the electorate. These uses of social media can also assist an EMB in identifying and assessing what the electorate needs and expects from the institutions that manage electoral processes. Methods used on social media platforms that are helpful in this respect include:

- Online quizzes
- Online polls
- Keeping pages open to allow followers to post or ‘tweet’ questions and comments
- Allowing users to create and comment on blog posts or articles
- Posting questions that encourage online debates
- Hosting information sharing or question/answer sessions
- Allowing users to post videos
- Using analysis software to identify key words being used
- Monitoring social media platforms and developing immediate responses to issues of concern

Engaging new audiences

International IDEA’s global survey of EMBs reveals that interactive communication platforms help EMBs reach a wider audience and convey information to specific social groups which they may not have been able to access previously. Social media can play a vital role in communicating with a wide and diverse population and can assist an EMB to better understand the needs of various demographics within an electorate and the ways in which cross sections of society participate in elections and engage with politics in general.

Many EMBs have identified youth, minorities and women as members of the electorate who may be less engaged with electoral and political processes but who can be reached through effective use of social media platforms. The EMB of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, uses social media to engage such groups, along with first-time voters, refugees and displaced persons.

The ways in which different sections of a society access and relate to social media platforms are influenced by factors such as the ‘digital divide’ (the discrepancies that exist between social groups in terms of access to digital technology), education levels, class disparities and the existence of a diaspora community. Attention to demographic factors should therefore be included in EMB outreach strategies; and because the exact nature of audiences not yet engaged or active either within electoral processes or on social media platforms will vary across countries, conducting a thorough exploration of potential target groups to be engaged through social media—as well as the platforms on which they are currently active—is an important preliminary exercise (see ‘Targeting discussions to the audience’). It should not be assumed, for example, that new media are most actively used by youth. Surveys have shown that social media activity on the internet is spread across all age groups (Deloitte 2010: 5). This suggests that while social media platforms may be effectively designed to target younger populations, their use by older demographics will inevitably shift in the future. Such shifts should not be ignored by EMBs, who must ensure that engagement in the electoral process is as widespread as possible.

Social media platforms ‘give an opportunity to reach a special community that may not be reached by traditional/conventional media’. (Kenya)

Social media have ‘broadly opened participation for citizens of all kinds’. (Chile)

‘We intend to start using [social media] to engage more effectively with younger people, but also to try to engage with those who are currently disengaged from our electoral processes, for example those who are not currently registered to vote.’ (Australia)

A research study on *Participatory Politics—New Media and Youth Political Action* found that ‘new media has the potential to facilitate an equitable distribution of political participation among young people from different ... ethnic groups’ (Cohen and Kahne 2012: 20–30). Furthermore, according to a research study on *Technology Trends among People of Color* in the United States (Smith 2010):

‘Among internet users [in the United States], seven in ten blacks and English-speaking Latinos use social networking sites—significantly higher than the six in ten whites who do so.’ Within this, ‘minority respondents were significantly more likely than whites to say that this type of outreach “helps people be more informed about what government is doing” and “makes government more accessible”. They are also much more likely than whites to say it is “very important” for government agencies to post information and alerts on social networking sites.’

Whether by abstracting the information from such studies to conditions pertaining to their own local context, or by conducting research of a similar nature, EMBs can plan more effective social media strategies by paying careful attention to the exact nature and make-up of groups not yet participating fully in the electoral process.

A further social category whose relation to social media use must be carefully considered is that of gender. Globally, as a 2010 ComScore study on the ways in which women are using the internet and social networking sites reveals, women are slightly less connected to the internet than men, with 46 per cent of the global web population being female (Vollman, A., Abraham, L. and Mörn, M. P., 2010). However, the study points out that the global average is lowered by limited access to the internet in many parts of the Asia Pacific region and by restrictions on the use of social media in countries such as China (Vollman, A., Abraham, L. and Mörn, M. P., 2010: 10). Despite these figures, the study finds that ‘once online, women are more connected than men’ and on average women spend more time on social networking sites. Table 2 provides the regional average figures disaggregated by gender.

Table 2. Average hour per visitor on social networking by region

REGION	MALE	FEMALE
Asia Pacific	2.7	3.3
Europe	6.3	8.2
Latin America	6.9	8.2
North America	6.0	7.9
Worldwide	5.0	6.5

Source: ComScore ‘It’s a Social World: Top 10 Need-to-Knows About Social Networking and Where It’s Headed’ (December 2011).

The figures in Table 2 highlight the fact that in each of the four global regions females are using social media platforms more frequently than males. Female users of Facebook alone outnumber male users by 57 per cent to 43 per cent (Honigman 2012). This indicates that, where necessary, EMBs have the potential specifically to target this demographic in their messaging. Although females may not be using social media for predominantly political purposes, with the right strategy and approach social media may provide an opportune means to attract this audience into the political arena.

Finally, many countries are struggling with a decline in turnout among young voters. Strategies to increase voter turnout within this demographic, as discussed in forums such as the Fifth GEO (Global Electoral Organizations) Conference in 2011, include reaching out to young voters by using their language, in their own spaces of interaction (see International IDEA, 2011). As social media platforms grow, so too do the opportunities and variety of ways for EMBs to reach out to and engage with younger audiences through specially targeted discussions. The case study in Box 2 explains how Elections Canada used social media for their ‘Canada’s Democracy Week’ campaign. The case study provides insight into why such a campaign was undertaken; how Elections Canada’s social media platforms are managed, and the successes and challenges they have experienced to date.

**Box 2. Using social media to promote youth engagement:
Elections Canada and Canada’s Democracy Week**

Canada’s Democracy Week is an annual civic education initiative organized by Elections Canada to raise awareness of democracy and the importance of voter engagement among Canadian youth.

Social media are a key component of the programme and are used to interact with youth and key stakeholders, promote the National Youth Challenge and advertise events and activities that occur throughout the week. Although Canada’s Democracy Week was first launched in 2011, social media only figured prominently in the programme the following year when several platforms were established and regularly used to engage with young people and actively post content. The programme now includes Facebook and Twitter accounts in both of Canada’s official languages (English and French), as well as a YouTube Channel in each language. While Democracy Week occurs in September of each year, the social media accounts remain active all year long.

Canada’s Democracy Week social media represent Elections Canada’s first attempt to engage with the public through this important new form of communication and interaction. Since the agency has yet to establish a social media presence across its many areas of activity, the accounts are branded separately with the Canada’s Democracy Week theme.

In developing its approach to using social media for Canada’s Democracy Week, Elections Canada established a governance structure and terms of use. Among other things, the terms of use provide guidelines for user submissions, including a definition of unacceptable content. A relatively small team manages the social media accounts. A staff member drafts most of the content and monitors day-to-day activity. A program manager and senior advisor review and approve content and ensure that posts are consistent with the larger messaging of the agency. Two additional senior directors provide oversight and content approval.

The use of social media in Canada’s Democracy Week has been highly successful, but not without its challenges. Becoming adept at using the technology takes time, as does learning how to respond quickly and in an engaging manner. Additionally, as a non-partisan agency, Elections Canada monitors the accounts for postings that could compromise the agency’s real or perceived impartiality. Most users respect the guidelines established in the terms of use and only on a few occasions have partisan postings appeared (in each case, they were removed). Ultimately, the use of social media for Canada’s Democracy Week has provided Elections Canada with additional ways to reach youth, reinforce important partnerships with key stakeholders, and establish sound practices that can be used by the agency as it considers broadening its use social media in the future.

Neil Burrton, Elections Canada

Social media offers 'the chance to have a conversation with people and gather data/information to make our work with the people more effective, contemporary and relevant'. (Australia)

Social media gives an 'opportunity to be in constant contact with the voters of all categories, as well as in contact with all political parties that participate in the election process'. (Spain)

People are more informed about a very complex election process, and the turnout in the last years increased, as well as number of registered voters (refugees and displaced persons). (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Social media are effective tools to 'meet the public in a way that enables dialogue and communication, not mere information [provision]'. (Norway)

A survey by the Pew Research Centre's Internet and American Life Project on Civic Engagement has shown that younger people in the US are more likely to use social media tools for civic activities and details the politically related activities for which social media tools are most commonly used. For instance, these populations are found to use Facebook to 'like' or promote political materials, encourage others to vote, post thoughts on issues, repost political content and follow officials and/or candidates on social media. To exemplify further, 44 per cent of users between the age of 18–29 use social media to like or promote political material, only 34 per cent of users between the age 50–64 use social media for these purposes. It is significant to note that almost as many young people in the 18–29 age bracket post their individual thoughts on civic issues as those who simply 'like', share or promote material posted by others. The smallest percent of the population studied actually 'follow' civic officials or political candidates. (Rainie, L., Smith, A., Schlozman, K.L., et.al.)

Increased transparency and accessibility

Transparency and integrity are especially important for the accountability of an EMB (International IDEA 2006a: 223). Social media can help EMBs increase the electorate's perception of transparency and accessibility by enhancing an EMB's ability to disseminate impartial, accurate and timely information and respond promptly to queries and requests through both formal and more informal platforms. In addition, exchanges held on an EMB's social media platforms—either between the EMB and its followers or between the followers themselves—are visible to a wide audience. This in turn allows for increased accessibility to information and transparency around issues of concern.

While this is true for all EMBs, it is especially relevant for EMBs during transitional periods when building confidence and trust between voters and political actors is crucial. To do this, consideration should be 'given to confidence-building activities such as ... avenues of dialogue and consultation with political actors', again an area where social media can play an important role (International IDEA, 2012: 4).

The use of social media by EMBs for open communication and interaction with the electorate, coupled with an EMB's ability to react to information provided, can eventually build trust between the electorate and the EMB and engender greater confidence in the electoral process at large. This is exemplified in Nigeria's 2011 electoral process, where social media tracking centres concluded that, through the effective use of social media, trust in the EMB amongst the electorate rose markedly (see Box 3).

Box 3. Building trust in Nigeria's electoral process through social media

The 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria took place with great anticipation after the largely discredited elections of 2003 and 2007. The 2011 election was the first in which social media were employed throughout Nigeria's electoral process by a wide range of stakeholders that included civil society organizations, political parties and candidates, the police, citizens, traditional media outlets and Nigeria's EMB, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In the lead-up to election day, the Social Media Tracking Centre was established in order to 'explore how social media platforms were working during the election period; what trends might be developing; possible course corrections and whether groups could learn from one another's experience'. Information from SMS, Facebook, Twitter and photographs posted online were collated and analyzed. The report concluded that trust in the INEC and electoral process grew throughout the electoral process due to the EMB's use of social media. The 'presence of social media', it wrote, 'and the willingness of the INEC to receive and act on information gave Nigerian citizens the feeling that, perhaps for the first time, their voices would be heard. They made an effort to register and vote, and also to protect their votes. Even non-activists followed poll results and continued checking in order to ensure that what was happening on ground was what was being reported.' The full report can be found at:

<http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/918145253/860730352/Tracking_Social_Media-COMplete-final.pdf>



CHAPTER 2.

Seven steps towards a strategic approach to social media

'The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya (IEBC) did not have a social media strategy but there was a general acceptance of its use. Everyone spoke of the need to use social media but did not know how to and to what extent. A strategy would certainly have been helpful. We did not know exactly who would be responsible for posting information, how were we going to have various departments interacting with social media and so on.'

IEBC representative

Developing a social media strategy

While a number of EMBs successfully began their use of social media without a clear strategy, there is now experience and lessons learned which suggest that the development of a realistically achievable and easily operationalized social media strategy can help an EMB avoid pitfalls and challenges and assist it in targeting its outreach more effectively.

Social media strategies determine goals and set a framework for achieving them. Strategies allow an organization to be forward thinking and proactive. With a clear strategy, an EMB can set the stage for discussion, engagement and knowledge sharing, rather than simply reacting to discussions already taking place. In contexts where EMBs face challenges such as lack of trust or political pressure, and in fragile or emerging democracies, a clear social media strategy and guidelines for how and when social media are to be used is of particular importance.

Social media are changing rapidly, with new innovations on existing platforms coming into effect alongside the emergence of completely new social media services. Thus EMBs that are new to social media will be embarking on an inevitable period of trial and error. A strategy may therefore be designed for six months, a year, or more; however, regardless of the timeframe, periodic revision, re-planning and revising are essential in order to remain relevant and up-to-date. Strategies should also be flexible enough to adapt to rapid technological change.

The seven steps listed below will help an EMB construct an effective social media strategy:

1. Ask key questions that will guide the use of social media by the organization
2. Identify resources needed to implement the strategy
3. Develop guidelines for implementing the strategy
4. Identify links with other institutional strategies and policies
5. Identify other actors using social media
6. Consider possible risks and scenarios and ways of addressing them
7. Review the strategy

These steps will be discussed throughout the chapter, not in order to provide a rigid and inflexible template, but rather to highlight considerations that will enable EMBs to find their own ways forward within their respective contexts.

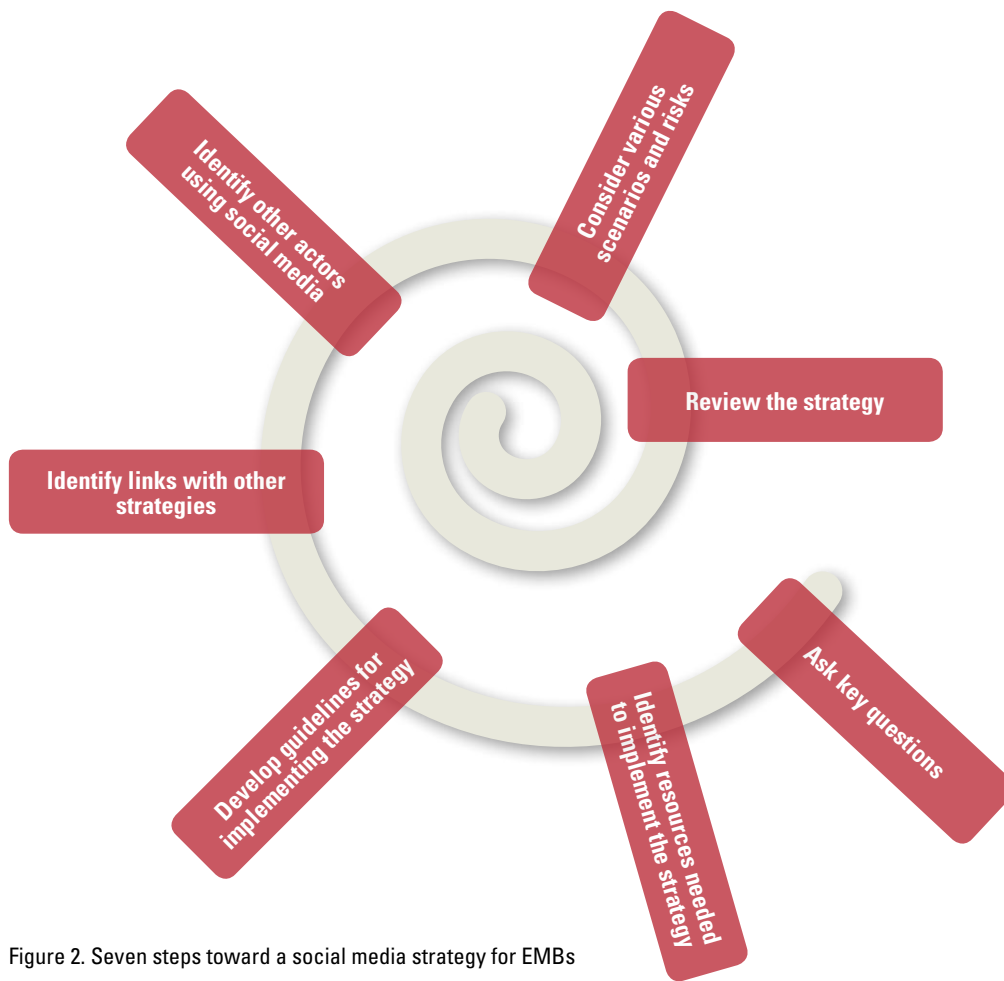


Figure 2. Seven steps toward a social media strategy for EMBs

1. Key questions to help guide an EMB in its use of social media

Questions that will help guide an EMB in determining how social media can be most relevant and have the most impact for the organization should focus on purpose, audience, methods and risks, and could include the following:

1. Why do we want to engage through social media? What are our purposes and goals?
2. What do we believe can be improved or addressed by social media? What added value do we seek from such engagement?
3. What do our organizational resources look like? What assets can we work with?
4. What kinds of conversations are we interested in stimulating/participating in? Why are we interested in these and how do they relate to our goals?
5. Which different target groups do we want to engage with? What platforms are they using?
6. Why would our target audience engage on our platform(s)? What do we have to offer?
7. Who else is trying to engage with our target groups? How can we be aware of their discourse? Can we partner with any of these actors to increase our outreach?
8. How do we recruit followers to our social media platforms and how do we maintain their interest?
9. What type of content should we share and how do we produce it?
10. Are there any specific events or dates that we would like to develop a special campaign around?
11. What potential scenarios do we need to prepare for? What are the potential risks?

Although answers to these questions may not appear directly in an EMB's social media strategy, outlining answers to them can assist in clarifying (a) the purpose of using social media, (b) the audience that will be engaged, (c) the ways of engaging them, and (d) strategies for reducing risks. Answering these questions may also help to outline clear, measurable goals with relevant indicators (for instance, a quantifiable increase in followers or an increase in visits to or downloaded information from the EMB's website). Moreover, clearly measurable goals and indicators will be essential when conducting an evaluation of the strategy's success.

2. Identifying resources

While social media tools may be available free of charge, ensuring that they are used in ways that maximize their benefit will involve a great deal of human and other resources. It is therefore necessary to clearly determine the resources needed to operationalize a social media strategy.

The inclusion of social media into staff responsibilities will ultimately have budgetary implications. Thus a social media strategy should carefully consider the goals and benefits of using social media and weigh these against impending costs.

Some resource considerations include:

Employing a dedicated staff member or team of staff members to manage the social media platforms	✓	
24/7 availability on social media and 'real-time' responses	✓	
Scope of the strategy (number of platforms to be used etc.)	✓	
Building capacity of staff and possible partnerships or outsourcing	✓	
Language	✓	
The use of social media management software	✓	

While social media activities may increase during an electoral period, the pre- and post-electoral periods are also times when important information about the electoral process can be gathered and disseminated. In this regard, an EMB might consider having a staff member or team of staff members attending to their social media platform(s) throughout the entire electoral process.

Furthermore, the ability to respond in near real time implies that resources are needed consistently. However, this is not without challenges. When surveyed, Norway's EMB noted that 'resources to follow-up and update on a regular base are scarce. This means that it is a challenge to meet the demands for continuous updates.'

Particularly when platforms are newly launched, it may be advisable for EMBs to have staff members or others attending to the platforms on a regular basis, including at night and over weekends, in order to ensure that followers are promptly and consistently engaged. Again, this implies that human resources will be needed beyond traditional working hours.

'A relatively low-cost way in which an EMB can foster its stakeholders' awareness of its activities and build their loyalty is through a sustained effort of promoting open communication and dialogue.' Electoral Management Design: The International IDEA Handbook (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2006)

While a small group of staff members may hold ultimate responsibility for content on the EMB's social media platforms, this need not preclude other staff members from sending information to this core team, who can then translate the material into 'social media friendly' posts. Some social media management systems encourage input from staff from outside the social media team, while maintaining central control by allowing these staff 'draft-only' capability. Draft posts and responses are then queued for approval by the core social media management team before being posted publically. In the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), for instance, officers directly involved in managing the AEC's social media seek clearance for any proposed content that might be particularly contentious or break new ground. Officers meet regularly to share ideas and information, and attend seminars and other specific training where possible. This is done to ensure that everyone is aware of the activities being undertaken and to tailor potential posts for each platform.

In all cases, having staff take part in the creation of posts will allow them to feel that they are a part of the social media strategy and will lead to more innovative, creative and informative posts from a wider cross-section of the organization. This may also be a way to reduce the burden on the time and resources of a smaller social media team.

Resources should also be linked to the overall scope of the strategy, and as the availability of resources grows, so too can the strategy's scope. While two-way interaction is the ultimate goal of successful social media platforms, beginning with announcements or links to the institution's website might be a first step in establishing a social media presence. Stating your scope publically, as done by the United States Department of Justice, can also help mitigate or reduce expectations for interaction.

Figure 3.



Once an institution has the resources for increased online engagement, it can post a wider variety of information: for instance, debate pieces, questions to followers or the staging of real-time events such as question-and-answer sessions.

Building staff capacity

While some staff members might have experience with and a talent for posting and mediating social media platforms, changes to these platforms occur quickly. Should resources permit, training staff on the features of various platforms, on how best to engage and respond on social media, and how to respond in a crisis will allow staff to keep up to date and to maximize the use of the respective platform. Building staff capacity in these ways will give an organization increased confidence in its use of social media and in the way its strategies are being executed.

Creating partnerships and outsourcing

Another means of maximizing resources, engaging the widest audience possible and ensuring that information is spread effectively is to form partnerships. Partnerships can be formed between the EMB and government agencies, civil society and not-for-profit organizations, prominent personalities and others. There are many good examples of the ways in which these bodies have used social media for civic engagement, and EMBs should not be afraid to explore such options with politically neutral bodies that work towards similar goals. Sharing experiences with other EMBs, government or non-governmental organizations through online discussion or face-to-face forums can also lead to informal partnerships and develop more creative ways of engaging an audience.

Another option, as used successfully by the AEC, is to partner with an outside agency during the start-up phase of a social media engagement strategy. In Australia, an advertising agency was 'given guidelines based on the telephone call centre response manual so they could quickly respond to questions on the online platforms' (Macnamara J., Sakinofsky, P. and Beattie, J., 2012: 33). This partnership allowed AEC staff to learn from the agency while remaining confident that should something go wrong there were professionals on hand to help mitigate the situation. This in turn led to higher levels of comfort for AEC staff during the first stages of unrolling their social media platforms (see Box 4).

Box 4. Embarking on the use of social media: the Australian experience

Before the AEC began with its use of social media in 2012, the agency commissioned a substantial review of social media engagement by other Australian government agencies and electoral authorities. This report effectively lent further support to an AEC decision to adopt social media as part of its strategies and is available at: <http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/research/social-media.htm>

FACEBOOK—The AEC's Facebook page was launched on 28 May 2012 and was designed by its advertising agency BMF. BMF managed the site for a short period until the AEC's Education and Communications Branch brought it in-house. The immediate rationale for launching the page was to have a presence on a social media platform that millions of Australians visit every week, many several times a day, and for the AEC to experiment in that space. Having the potential to connect with a large number of young Australians and spread the enrolment message during the Count Me In campaign was attractive. It is fair to say, however, that the popularity of the site and 'click throughs' to the AEC website (where the capacity to check status and undertake enrolment is available) was less than hoped initially, and well-targeted AEC digital promotion and advertising of the Facebook presence proved a difficult task for the AEC's media placement agency. Some lessons were learned, including that the site requires time to grow and expectations of immediate success should be tempered. Nevertheless, pleasing steady growth is occurring, and at last count the AEC Facebook site had grown to over 19,000 'likes', many of which were garnered in the lead up to the 2013 election.

In addition to its use as part of message campaigns, the site receives a range of public enquiries. Indeed, the volume of public enquiries grew markedly closer to the 2013 election, and increased considerably during the election period itself. To prepare for this, the AEC organized standard responses to electoral questions tailored for Facebook, similar to the need to prepare and manage the hundreds of thousands of telephone calls and emails to its National Call Centre.

TWITTER—The AEC’s Twitter account was created at the same time as the Facebook page. However, in contrast the AEC’s media and public relations team managed this process internally from the outset. This approach was chosen because Twitter is a simpler platform to administer than Facebook and requires comparatively little familiarization or training. While initially used for the Count Me In campaign, it quickly became evident that the AEC Twitter feed is a very useful additional tool for managing media issues, and it has tended to be subscribed to by a range of media journalists and stakeholders, along with general members of the community.

Continued updating and monitoring of a wide variety of platforms, coupled with the initial establishment of an online presence may be beyond the abilities of an EMB, or an EMB may deem it to be overly time-consuming or costly. In this regard, some EMBs choose to outsource social media content to other agencies (such as civil society organizations or private consultants). However, issues to consider when outsourcing social media content include perceptions of neutrality, the ownership of and responsibility for content, familiarity with the electoral process and the communication strategy and policies, rules, regulations and mandate of the EMB. In order best to represent the EMB, outsourced agencies should be well educated about these matters, as well as about the role and legal limitations of the EMB, the electoral process and the stakeholders involved.

Language

In countries with two or more official languages, maintaining a fully bilingual or multilingual social media platform may pose added challenges and require additional resources. This is particularly true if all discussions being held on the social media platform are expected to take place in all official languages.

3. Develop guidelines for implementing the strategy

In order to ensure that EMB staff work in line with the strategy, guidelines or codes of conduct can be developed to assist those administering the EMB’s social media platforms. Guidelines should include issues such as:

- The kind of content that can be posted
- The platforms the organization uses
- The tone of language that should be used to reflect the organization
- The frequency of new posts
- The institution’s position on sharing or re-tweeting (passing on) messages and on which of those might be seen as an endorsement of the views of other (potentially less neutral) organizations

While each EMB will develop its own guidelines for the use of social media, centred on its own particular context and purposes, important elements to be considered include the following:

- Purpose—Why have these guidelines been developed? How do they link to the strategy?
- Audience, scope and applicability—To whom do the guidelines apply? When do they undergo a revision? Do they apply only to the EMB’s social media platforms or also to the private use of social media?
- Background—Why social media is chosen. Where the organization is in its current use of social media. Where it aims to go. How it aims to get there.
- Social media platforms accepted for use—Which platforms have the organization deemed to be the most appropriate for the context?
- Target audiences
- Related documents—What other policies are related to or mentioned in this one?
- Roles and responsibilities—For maintaining the social media platform(s) chosen by the EMB; monitoring compliance; managing, implementing and revising the strategy.
- Waivers (if applicable)
- Protocols for crisis situations

Further helpful examples of social media guidelines and policies as developed by government agencies, not-for-profit organizations and others can be found at <http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php?f=5>.

Codes of conduct

Codes of conduct can be helpful in ensuring that guidelines are adhered to. In general, codes of conduct are sets of rules, responsibilities or expected behaviours that apply to individuals within an institution or organization. With regard to social media, codes of conduct can differ for those administering EMB platforms, electoral stakeholders using social media, and for the use of social media generally within the workplace. Codes of conduct developed with the use of social media in mind should also be linked to other institutional strategies, as discussed above.

For those administering EMB platforms

It is the responsibility of the party who is ultimately responsible for an EMB’s social media platform(s) to ensure that they are speaking on behalf of the institution and not expressing their personal opinions. This should also be reflected in the code of conduct for those administering the EMB’s social media platforms.

As noted, it is also in the interest of the responsible party to have a thorough understanding of the mandates, procedures, rules and regulations of the EMB, and to engage in discussions, updates or responses that adhere to these. It is therefore advisable that staff members responsible for the social media platform know where to seek responses that reflect the position of the EMB should difficult questions or questions regarding the values or opinions of the EMB arise. Actions such as these should be included in the code of conduct.

Additionally, as group or organizational Facebook pages must be run from individual accounts, it is important to state the organization’s stance on whether the page can be accessed through a staff member’s personal account or if an institutional account is to be created.

For electoral stakeholders

Codes of conduct designed for and used by media, polling station staff, political parties, EMB staff and other electoral stakeholders might include mention of the agreed upon ways in which social media may be employed throughout the electoral process and possible limitations on its use (such as during campaign blackout periods).

For the private use of social media

In addition, some organizations include rules or codes of conduct concerning the ways in which social media may be used privately and/or during working hours. While using social media privately to spread information on the work of the EMB can be of great value, there is also the risk that information posted on private social media accounts may reflect poorly on the organization. Such considerations might ultimately affect the kinds of private messages or discussions employees can post or initiate regarding the workplace. In addition, an organization may wish to suggest guidelines around ways in which staff should behave with regard to scenarios such as accepting 'friend' requests from public political figures like candidates and party officials.

4. Links with other institutional strategies and policies

The ways in which a social media strategy links to and is embedded in wider communication or outreach strategies is an important consideration for EMBs, as having contradictory or incongruent strategies will lead to confusion.

A social media strategy should therefore highlight the ways in which social media will enhance and complement areas such as civic education campaigns and outreach mechanisms like public meetings, websites, articles, news pieces and publications.

An example of how social media can be used to highlight more traditional outreach campaigns is that of the EMB of the Canadian province of Manitoba (Elections Manitoba), which used Facebook to spread a civic education campaign bringing the commission to classrooms throughout the province:

Figure 4.



Social media strategies and platforms can be designed for the national EMB or local and regional EMBs, or developed around a particular issue of interest (for instance, voter registration). Although it will depend on the setup of the EMB(s), where possible it is desirable to ensure consistency and coherence in the strategies employed for these various platforms, as the actions of one may inadvertently reflect on the other. This will be particularly true if electors are unfamiliar with the structure of electoral management bodies in different contexts: some voters, for example, may not be aware that a central EMB and regional/state/provincial EMBs are in fact separate entities.

5. Identifying and engaging with other actors using social media

Although there may only be one EMB using social media in any given country, there may be civil society organizations, international organizations, interested citizens, observation groups (international and domestic), political parties and others involved in the electoral process and also engaging the electorate through social media.

Other actors using social media may include:

Local level EMBs	✓	
Civil society organizations	✓	
International organizations	✓	
Interested citizens	✓	
Observation groups	✓	
Political parties	✓	
The media	✓	
Security sector agencies	✓	

Following the platforms of other users with a similar target audience can be of great value. Not only can an EMB engage with these actors through social media to enrich discussions, but following other organizations or individuals can be valuable in assisting an EMB to stop the spread of misinformation about the electoral process (see the section on challenges and risks below), or to respond to criticisms that arise. Furthermore, regardless of whether an EMB is using social media or not, its actions and performance will inevitably be a part of discussions taking place online. Being aware of these discussions and engaging with them proactively, rather than simply reacting, will help an EMB to direct the discussion and better engage with its target audience.

The use of social media and online platforms by citizen reporters and domestic observation groups is also increasing rapidly (see Box 5). Understanding these platforms and the material gathered and posted by citizen reporters and observer groups can be a valuable source of information for EMBs. In addition, EMBs can use social media and online platforms to educate domestic observers about their roles and the legal framework within which they will act.

Box 5. The use of Ushahidi in electoral observation

Created in response to the violence that broke out after the 2007 elections in Kenya, Ushahidi ('testimony' in Swahili) is crowdsourcing software that allows for public input through mobile telephone SMS/text messages, e-mail, Twitter and the Internet. Designed to enable interested parties to collect, map and distribute information, the tool allows for highly customizable use and is available to download free of charge. According to Ushahidi, 'The core engine is built on the premise that gathering [...] information from the general public provides new insights into events happening in near-real time'. While the platform was originally intended to map sites of violence throughout Kenya, it has since grown to such an extent as to make possible citizen reporting on specifics of the electoral process. The *Uchaguzi* platform developed by Ushahidi, and used in Kenya for the 2013 elections, enabled citizens to report on electoral related issues such as hate speech, vote counting and results, polling station logistics, materials, equipment and ballot issues.

<http://www.ushahidi.com/> / <http://www.uchaguzi.co.ke>

Political parties are increasingly using social media as a method of campaigning, advertising and fundraising. EMBs can monitor these platforms to ensure that the legal framework is not being breached. It is advisable for the EMB to refrain from showing any allegiance to one party over another on social media channels (or others). Should there be a need to mention political parties on a social media platform, all parties should be given equal mention. In order to help educate the electorate about the campaign, EMBs can make links to websites or NGOs that are collecting non-partisan information on political party platforms or others.

A further group of actors with whom an EMB can engage through social media is the traditional media, which is increasingly attuned to the conversations occurring on social media platforms and whose role in consequence is also changing. One commentator has described this change as a move from 'gatekeepers' to 'gatewatchers' (Bradshaw 2011: 6). Traditional media are now involved in monitoring stories being spread on social media platforms and in providing context, verification, comment and interpretation of these stories for their readers and viewers. EMBs can affect traditional media and their reporting during the electoral process by leading and facilitating stories and conversations through online posts and subsequent comments. An EMB with an active online presence 'can use the media to inform and educate the electorate about elections, and undertake its own publicity programmes—such as print and audio-visual information products and a regularly updated website—to keep voters in touch with its activities' (International IDEA 2006a: 207).

In Tunisia in 2011, a local radio station partnered with the United Nations Development Programme in order to conduct a civic education campaign being run on their popular website and through Facebook (see Box 6). In such instances, EMBs can work with the media to provide valuable information and guidance while bolstering their image and outreach.

Box 6. DemocraTweet—engaging Tunisian youth

During the run-up to the 2011 national constituent assembly election, suspicion and fear still prevailed among the people of Tunisia. To help engage young people in the electoral process, Radio Mosaïque FM, one of Tunisia's foremost radio stations with a large following on its website and Facebook page, worked together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to launch a voters' educational game, designed to promote participation among youth.

The game, called 'DemocraTweet', was launched a few weeks ahead of election day and engaged users on a variety of topics including the basic principles of democracy, the transition towards democracy, the electoral process and election day procedures. Users were asked a series of questions and were able to progress through the game by answering correctly. Two winners were selected and each won a trip to the United Nations to carry a message from the youth of Tunisia to the United Nations in New York.

Extensive advertising about the campaign was conducted through the media, social media, billboards and flyers. The game attracted 2,600 players in French and Arabic and succeeded in reaching its target audience of 18 to 35 year olds.

For more information see: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/successstories/supporting-democratic-elections-tunisia.html>

Erik Asplund, International IDEA

Thus the relationship between social and traditional media is becoming increasingly symbiotic. While social media platforms are used to spread stories generated from traditional media outlets, so too media outlets are becoming increasingly dependent on information gathered from social media. Understanding the mutuality of this relationship is beneficial for EMBs, so that the content they generate through social media platforms can be disseminated as widely as possible.

In addition, because access to the internet varies across the world and within countries, maintaining traditional civic education campaigns and links with traditional media outlets such as television, radio and print media is important for an EMB. Particularly where internet connectivity and social media usage is limited, it is key to use the newer communication methods as a supplement to, rather than a replacement of, more traditional means.

6. Potential risks and ways of addressing them

There are many benefits to using social media, but the use of new media tools brings challenges as well. When developing a social media strategy, an EMB should consider carefully the risks and challenges social media can present, as well as exploring ways of addressing them. As each strategy for addressing risks will largely depend on the context within which the EMB is working, some potential risk scenarios are presented here for consideration, while ways of addressing each of them will be left to the discretion of EMBs themselves.

The range of possible challenges is broad but several of the most important challenges for EMBs to consider include the following:

- The legal framework and internal procedures
- Negative posts
- The spread of misinformation
- Using social media in conflict and post-conflict contexts
- Unauthorized or fake sites
- Active social media platforms

The legal framework and internal procedures

An EMB should have a good understanding of the ways in which social media can be used within, and ultimately effect, the overarching legal framework of an electoral process, as well as the internal procedures that guide the running of the institution. It should also understand and abide by the legal requirements specified by the chosen platform.

As an EMB may not have the resources needed to conduct such a comprehensive study, some experts suggest that managers should ‘consult the legal resources available to them—including legal staff within agencies, but also guides from independent organizations [...] and incorporate those recommendations as part of a long-term public engagement plan that will guide both recurring activities and short-term initiatives’ (Leighninger, 2011: 6). Because social media are still a relatively new phenomenon, EMBs should not be afraid to look outside their doors for assistance in conducting a comprehensive legal review.

Some EMBs have noted that the widespread use of social media has brought new challenges to interpreting the law and to regulating and sanctioning breaches of the laws governing the electoral process. Experiences from Canada and France show that with the rise of new media aspects of electoral law are becoming outdated. For instance, while it was once widespread for there to be restrictions on the reporting of results before polls have closed, the use of social media by the electorate on election day has made this legal stipulation particularly difficult to enforce (see Boxes 7 and 8). EMBs also report that monitoring campaign blackout periods and campaign financing in an age of social media has brought new challenges.

Box 7. Updating Canada’s legal framework in response to social media

The 1938 Canada Elections Act, under Section 329 ‘Premature Transmission’, states:

No person shall transmit the result or purported result of the vote in an electoral district to the public in another electoral district before the close of all of the polling stations in that other electoral district.

During the 2011 Canadian federal election, Twitter was widely used as a platform to ‘tweet’ the results from polling stations on the Atlantic Coast, where the polls close four and a half hours ahead of those on the Pacific Coast. ‘Tweeters’ thereby broke the law regarding premature transmission. As Elections Canada deemed that the law was unenforceable in the face of current technology, on 13 January 2012 it was decided to repeal the law ahead of the 2015 elections.

Box 8. #Radio London: Flanby and Camembert as tweeted in the French presidential elections

French law forbids predicted election results based on exit polls being published while polling stations are still open. Despite the EMB having warned that a team of staff members would be monitoring media for leaks and that fines of up to EUR 75,000 would be imposed for violations, Twitter users circumvented the law by creating widely used nicknames for the candidates and thereby publishing predictions through these aliases. At the time of publication, no amendments to the law had been suggested or approved.

As seen in the Canadian experience, while an EMB itself may be unable to implement legal reforms, advice surrounding electoral laws and codes can be provided by an EMB whose mandate and ability to oversee and enforce legal provisions is adversely affected by outdated legislation.

Negative posts

Many comments posted on an institution's social media platform will be positive, but there will inevitably be some followers who post negative comments. Many experts recommend that addressing negative comments directly, rather than deleting or hiding them, is the best way for an EMB to remain transparent. Discontented followers who post negative comments are likely to continue posting comments unless they feel their criticisms have received a direct answer. Clearly, if certain posts are obscene or insulting, or pose a threat to public order, they should be removed as quickly as possible. So too should posts that compromise the neutrality of the EMB (which may be done by users who impersonate the EMB or election officials), or which encourage illegal behaviour, promote commercial interests or violate the privacy of others. Many organizations have created disclaimers governing what posts may be removed and outlining the conduct that is expected by participants on their platforms (see Box 9).

Box 9. Disclaimers on Facebook: UN Women

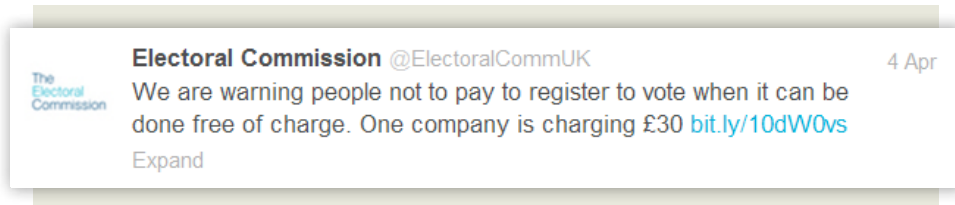
The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) does not guarantee the truthfulness, accuracy, or validity of any comments posted to its social media outlets (blogs, social networks, message boards/forums, etc.). Users must not post any content that is obscene, defamatory, profane, libellous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to any person or entity. UN Women reserves the right to delete or edit any comments that it considers inappropriate or unacceptable.

Source: <http://www.facebook.com/unwomen?sk=app_4949752878> accessed on 31 July 2012

In addition, an EMB may need to gently steer or direct conversations taking place on its platforms, particularly if a conversation is moving off topic and no longer relates to the electoral process or the EMB, or if tensions arise between followers with conflicting opinions.

The spread of misinformation

Figure 5.



Although useful and factually correct information can spread quickly over social media, so too can information that is negative or misleading. Standards typically associated with journalists and journalism do not bind ‘citizen journalists’ and there is an increasing ‘concern about a lack of accountability on the part of individuals who use the speed and anonymity of social media to spread misinformation and propaganda’ (Bradshaw, 2011: 13). For this reason, EMBs should be aware of what others are posting about the EMB and the electoral process, and should be able to react quickly and respond to misinformation. It is therefore important to monitor social media platforms that are being used by other electoral stakeholders such as the media, political parties, sister institutions and prominent bloggers, not only so as to share relevant information from these sites (where appropriate), but also to catch and correct misinformation as soon as possible. Monitoring can be facilitated by the use of specific software and search platforms (see Annex One).

For instance, during the 2013 elections in Kenya, rumours on social media spread quickly claiming that the Chief Electoral Officer had been kidnapped during the counting process. In order to dispel these rumours, the Independent Election and Boundary Commission used traditional media to calm the situation and set the record straight (see Box 10).

Box 10. Dispelling rumours during the vote count: Kenya 2013

On 8 March 2013, four days after the general election voting day and at the height of counting and tallying of results, a rumour spread through social media claiming that the CEO of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) of Kenya, Mr James Oswago had been kidnapped. This was in spite of the CEO and Commissioners appearing at regular media briefings throughout the count and electoral process as a whole. The blog 'Kenyan Daily Express' posted the alarming headline: 'IEBC CEO, James Oswago has been LOCKED somewhere by UHURU'S men in order to RIG elections—CORD PROPAGANDISTS Assert'. It went on to allege that the CEO was held at the Kenya's Department of Defence (DOD) for two days to allowing rigging at the National Tallying Centre, Bomas.

The social media were abuzz with the kidnap story, and many 'tweets' appeared demanding Oswago's release.

To counter this alarming rumour, the IEBC decided to use mainstream media, particularly television, as it was necessary to have the CEO appear on TV, as he would not be physically visible in social media. The strategy was effective, and there was a noted change in the content and tone of social media messages. For instance, messages were now along the lines of 'CEO James Oswago says he is well and alive but just fatigued by work contrary to reports that he was kidnapped' and '#IEBC CEO #Oswago finally appears in public, "I am not in prison but I am very tired." #2013Polls'.

The IEBC learned a valuable lesson during this period: namely that the best medium to counter rumours or misinformation may not always be the medium that carried the rumour in the first place.

Andrew Limo, Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, Kenya

Lastly, information provided by the EMB may also be misread or misinterpreted. There is need, therefore, for clear and concise posts, and for conversations to be closely monitored in order to take corrective action when needed.

Using social media in conflict and post-conflict contexts

A strategy for defining how social media is used, the tone of its messages and the frequency of posts is of particular consideration in conflict or post-conflict situations. The possibility for rumours or hate speech to spread may be acute in fragile environments, and an EMB may need to be overtly proactive in sending timely messages and responding to rumours and the deliberate spreading of misinformation. Finding a balance between freedom of expression and the outright inciting of violence will be particularly important. Discussions on social media should also be analyzed in order to measure the level of trust in the EMB and the electoral process, and aggregated to assist EMBs in finding effective conflict prevention and mitigation strategies. Equally, social media may be used to call for peace during an electoral process, and links may be made to other individuals or organizations seeking peaceful resolutions to violence through the use of social media (see Mancini, 2013).

Figure 6.



Unauthorized or fake sites

In general there are legal provisions to which users must agree when they create a profile on social media sites that sometimes forbid the giving of false information or creation of a site for someone without that person's permission. Nevertheless, unauthorized and fake sites are common. Facebook reported that of the 106 billion accounts operating in 2012, 76 million (7.2 per cent) were classified as 'duplicate, misclassified or undesirable'. Facebook defines undesirable accounts as 'user profiles that we determine are intended to be used for purposes that violate our terms of service, such as spamming' accounted for 9.5 million accounts (USSEC Facebook). Unauthorized accounts may be created by individuals or by 'robots' that create and populate false profiles with the aim, for example, of attracting users to their pages to spread malware, attract 'likes' for revenue or discredit other sites.

Many platforms have taken steps to prevent the creation of unauthorized sites, but the identification and reporting of the infringement often occurs too late. Taking the time to occasionally search for your organization on various platforms may be a way to intercept a fake site promptly. Stating publically (on the social media platform and elsewhere) that a fake site has been published in the name of the EMB should also be done so as to inform the public that unauthorized sites are operating. Reporting the imposter's account to the host platform should also be done immediately. Facebook, for instance, has a five-step system that allows users to report fraudulent accounts (see <http://www.facebook.com/help/174210519303259/>). However, the timeframes for having an account disabled may vary from platform to platform.

Active social media platforms

Of course, not all scenarios are negative. EMB social media platforms may be exceeding their anticipated reach and number of active followers and may be engaging the target audience beyond expectation. This, however, also deserves scenario planning which includes constant monitoring, nurturing and responding while keeping conversations on track.

7. Reviewing the strategy in light of lessons learned

As with all strategies and processes, it is important to take time to reflect on their value, guiding features and usefulness. This is no different for communication or social media strategies, and reflections on lessons learned and subsequent revisions and updates to the ways in which social media are being used by an EMB are essential. In light of quickly changing platforms and features, a review of the social media strategy may be needed even more frequently than for more static strategies, policies or guidelines.

Reviews should be undertaken to ensure that EMBs are meeting their set objectives, using the most relevant social media platforms, deploying resources with maximum efficiency, and improving the quality of service provided. Constant monitoring and evaluation of the ways in which an EMB's social media platforms are engaging the target audience (through statistical monitoring software for instance—see Annex One) can be a helpful tool in addressing these questions and in identifying new ways forward.

CHAPTER 3.

Going live! From strategy to getting started

Once a social media strategy has been formulated, several elements can help an EMB in best operationalizing its strategy and achieving maximum public engagement on its social media platforms. There are three particularly important areas of consideration:

Two-way interactions	✓
Targeting discussions to the audience	✓
Security	✓

Two-way interactions

Social media are intended first and foremost to be social, and the ability to foster two-way interactions is the essential feature that separates user-generated media from traditional media sources such as television, radio and print. Moreover, social media have also changed the way in which discussions or messages can be framed to increase their attractiveness. Table 3 gives a brief overview of the ways in which communication through social media platforms differs in style from more traditional modes of sharing information.

Table 3. Traditional versus social media—adapting the style to the medium

TRADITIONAL STYLE		SOCIAL MEDIA STYLE
Analysis	↔	Engaging
Long	↔	Short
Published	↔	Unpublished
Static report	↔	Immediate; allows feedback
More formal style	↔	Informal conversational style

It is always important that an EMB ‘responds quickly and accurately to all questions and comments received from the public. A delayed response, or no response, gives the EMB a public image of an inefficient organization that is not interested in service to the electorate’ (International IDEA 2006a: 207). In addition, failure to respond to comments or queries may jeopardize the work done by the EMB to gain and retain followers. The use of social media not only requires that two-way interaction between an EMB and its audience takes place; it also requires that it takes place quickly and regularly.

Targeting discussions to the audience

In order to be effective, the EMB should have a good understanding of its target audience and the best ways of engaging it. Understanding the audience will help EMBs define and target their messages and discussions in ways that will best address the needs and expectations of their social media followers. Whether, for example, the audience is looking for entertainment, information or thought-provoking discussion will greatly change not only the content of the platform but also the ways in which discussions are hosted and the platforms used. In this regard, it is also important to understand the culture of a particular platform: the degree of formality or informality in the language of the platform should determine the tone that an EMB uses in its messages. Monitoring social media platforms for some time prior to posting on them can help an EMB better understand the tone of discussions and to identify successful ways of engaging with participants and followers.

If an EMB proposes to use a variety of social media platforms, it will be important to maintain similar topics for discussion while ensuring that the tone of the discussion is appropriate for each platform. For this reason, until an EMB or partner agency understands the target audience and the tone and content of discussions on various social media platforms, it is advisable to begin with one or two platforms widely used within the particular country.

One method of targeting a specific audience is to identify prominent online personalities or groups who are easily identified by the target demographic, and engaging these personalities to advertise—that is, to ‘like’, link to, re-tweet—the institution’s social media discussions. Additionally, traditional media should also be made aware of social media platforms that the EMB is now using and encouraged to participate in gathering and disseminating information about the electoral process as widely as possible.

Figure 7.



Achieving an appropriate balance in the frequency of posts—posting neither too few nor too many—is something that can be monitored and adjusted over time. Many experts emphasize that the quality of discussion is more important than the quantity. Discussions that are informative, engaging and which reflect a personal approach will in the long run encourage greater loyalty among followers. But should an EMB consider it important to provide frequent updates and face staff and resourcing challenges in doing so, automated RSS feeds may be a useful tool. Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that the ‘inhuman’ character of automated feeds and an absence of genuine interactivity will in time lose the interest of followers. Postings require a quality of human voice and personality to retain followers’ attention and interest.

The content of posts and discussions instigated by the EMB will also vary depending on the target audience. If the primary target audience is the general electorate, discussions need not go into great detail regarding, say, electoral law. Practical information about how to register, vote and lodge a complaint will obviously be far more relevant and useful. However, if the target audience is political parties or candidates, discussions and posts regarding electoral laws and regulations affecting candidate registration and political finance, or laws concerning behaviour on or before polling day, will be appropriate. Of course, broad discussions of legal provisions will be useful to the general electorate, in order that voters better understand what to expect of political parties, independent candidates and even the EMB itself.

Figure 8.

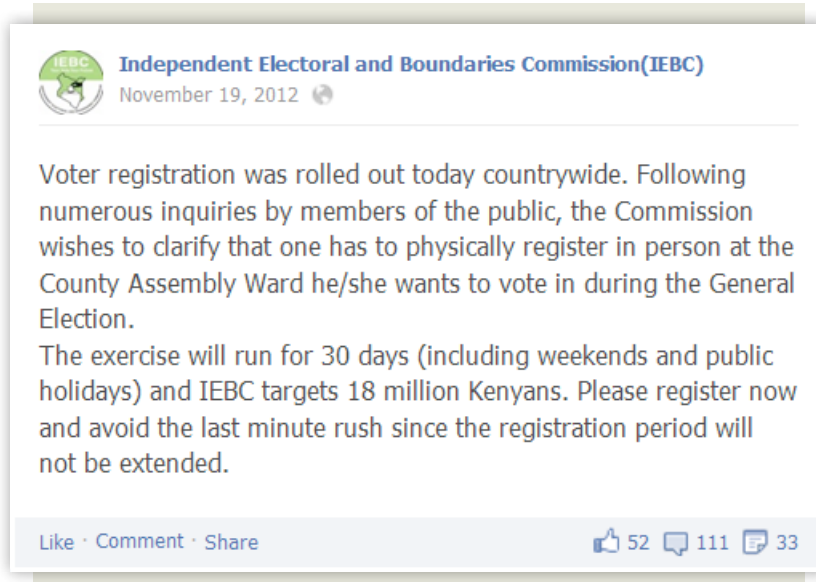


Figure 9.



Figure 10.



If an EMB is targeting youth—either new voters or young people not yet old enough to vote—discussions should be light in tone and engaging, but still relevant and informative. Relevant discussions might cover topics such as the ways in which young people who cannot yet vote can become politically engaged (for example, by creating or participating in youth councils); the registration age and the reasons for it; voter registration ‘marathons’; links with organizations or traditional media running civic education campaigns; ways of engaging young people in political processes, such as ‘get out and vote’ campaigns; or the asking of youth to give examples of the ways in which they have been politically engaged and the strategies they use to engage their friends and peers. (For more ideas on engaging with youth see International IDEA, 2006b.)

Security considerations

Security of information is always a consideration when using online platforms. While common sense should be applied in regards to all online platforms, some simple steps can also be taken to enhance the security of information provided online. Profiles should have passwords and a limited number of administrators with access. Administrators should understand the intricacies of each platform as well as the features that are automatically enabled and those that can be disabled. For instance, new features in Facebook are most often automatically enabled, so the administrator should be aware when new features (on all platforms) are launched and how they might affect the security of the profile.

When logged on to institutional social media platforms, be aware that malware and phishing programmes can be posted onto profiles and that opening links should be done with caution and only when accessed from a viable source. This applies to links posted onto an EMB’s profile (for example, Facebook) by a follower or accessed from an EMB’s account when browsing the pages or posts of other organizations or individuals.

Some social media platforms have made great strides in addressing security issues. Facebook, for instance, has announced partnerships with several antivirus companies, and the company regularly posts updates on security issues and solutions on its security page. EMBs should not only be aware of the possible new threats to their systems but also should stay up-to-date with ways of avoiding hacking, phishing and spam attacks.

Where possible, download the institution's profile once a month in order to properly archive discussions and retrieve or re-create posts and conversations that may be lost due to damaged or hacked accounts.

Overall, it is important to be aware that everything posted to a social media platform becomes immediately public, with little or no chance of deleting or retracting the post permanently.

The use of social media throughout the entire electoral cycle

While many followers of an EMB's social media platform(s) may primarily be engaged closest to an election day, there are many opportunities to reach out to the electorate throughout the entire electoral process. Not only will the active use of social media platforms throughout the electoral cycle keep an EMB's followers actively following; it will also allow followers to learn more about the entire electoral process and to see the important work that EMBs do beyond Election Day.

It is important to remember that social media platforms are above all designed to be social and to allow for two-way communication to take place. Ways of engaging an audience on social media platforms can take many forms, including:

- EMBs posing questions which can be answered directly on or through the platform
- Posting information in a way that encourages followers to give their points of view on an issue
- Responding to questions or concerns as an avenue of customer service
- Hosting debates with chat functions to allow audience participation
- Live question and answer sessions
- Cooperating with other organizations through linking to their work and having them link to yours
- Creating polls or surveys
- Posting quizzes
- Posting pictures for comment
- Photo journals of election day or other events
- Creating partnerships with other organizations in order to cross-post information for wider access
- Infographics (visual representations of information, such as graphs, map and timelines)
- Creating short films

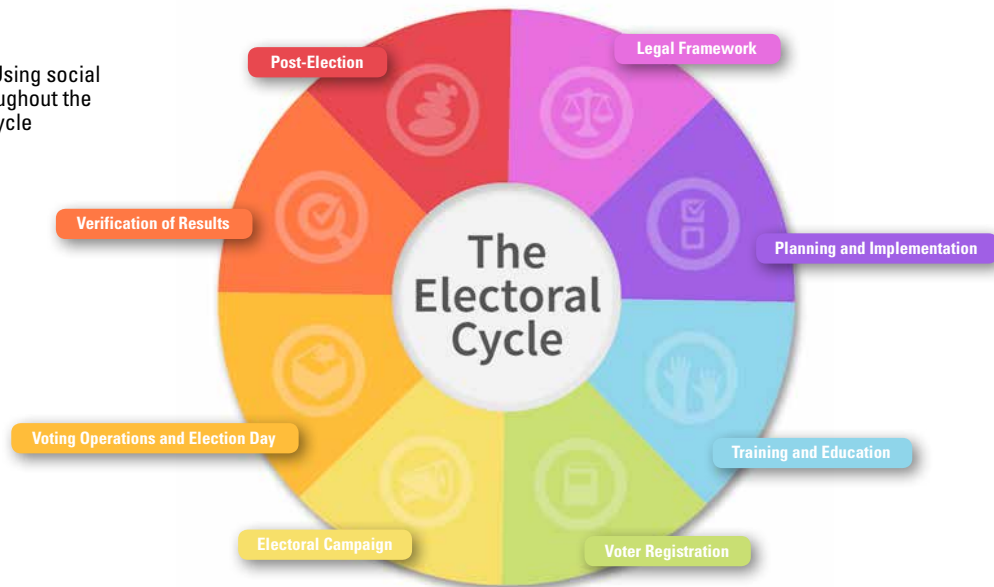
Other ways of engaging social media users throughout the electoral process include developing applications ('apps'), such as those for voter registration (see Box 11); online simulation tools that can stimulate discussion and learning on topics such as electoral systems or boundary delimitation; and online training programmes and e-seminars for EMB and polling station staff on topics such as party finance regulations and filing mechanisms.

Box 11. Facebook application for voter registration: Washington State

Ahead of the 2012 presidential elections in the United States of America, the EMB of Washington State and Facebook jointly developed an application called 'My Vote'. The application allows non-registered voters to register online and for registered voters to check and update their personal information through the State Elections Office's website or directly through their Facebook user profile. The application guides voters through the registration process, which can be done online, by mail or in person. In order to increase confidence in the system, the user's name and age, information provided to Facebook through the application, is not stored by the platform.

Some suggestions for discussion topics that EMBs could initiate throughout the entire electoral process (where relevant and legally applicable) are offered in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Using social media throughout the electoral cycle



Legal Framework

- Constitution**
- Proceedings of constituent assemblies or other constitutional reform mechanisms
 - Changes to constitution and implementation timeframes
 - Referendums on constitutional amendments

- Legislation**
- Revisions or updates to legislation surrounding electoral processes
 - Referendums on legal reform

- (Revision of) Electoral System**
- Rationale behind revision of electoral system
 - Consequences of change or revision
 - Pros and cons of various systems
 - Simulation tools for public use

- (Revision of) Electoral Boundaries**
- Reasons for and consequences of boundary delimitation
 - Practicalities, outcomes and effects of revision
 - Change in representatives

- Electoral Bodies**
- Mandate and primary functions of the EMB

- Codes of Conduct**
- Codes of conduct of various stakeholders—political parties, media, election management bodies
 - Codes of conduct for the use of social media throughout an election (for EMB staff, political parties and candidates, other stakeholders, etc.)

Planning and Implementation

- Budgeting, Funding and Financing**
- Financial reports and analysis of previous electoral processes

- Election Calendar**
- Key dates and deliverables across the electoral process

- Recruitment and Procurement**
- Notices of vacancies for recruitment and volunteer positions
 - Procurement procedures, tender applicants and tender winners; training videos for polling station staff and existing election workers (on for example procedures, new technologies, legal framework etc.)

- Logistics and Security**
- Accessibility of the electoral process
 - The use of mobile polling stations
 - Security procedures and steps taken
 - Relevant legal provisions

Training and Education

- Civic Education and Voter Information**
- Shared links to all political party platforms
 - Details around when/where/how to vote

- Announcement of election date
- EMB press releases
- Position statements for direct democracy elections
- Out of country voters and processes
- Mobile polling stations and eligibility for their use
- Upcoming candidate debates
- Quotas
- Procedures for voters with disabilities
- E-voting procedures

- Voter Registration**
- Registration process and time frames
 - How to register and what is needed to do so
 - Restrictions on registering to vote
 - Special registration for advanced or out of country voting
 - Online registration and verification options through social media

- Observer Accreditation**
- Available online channels for observers to file for accreditation
 - Accredited international and national observers
 - Role and mandate of observers
 - Who may be found in a polling station at the time of voting

- Parties and Candidates**
- Requirements for registration
 - Registration process for parties/candidates (including independent candidates)
 - List of candidates

- Media Access**
- Conduct of media and legislation governing their conduct
 - Access of media to entire electoral process
 - Access of all actors to media

- Electoral Campaign**
- Campaign Coordination**
- Campaign period
 - Blackout period
 - Get-out-the-vote efforts or campaigns by the EMB

- Party Financing**
- How and when to file campaign expenses and financing
 - Relevant laws and campaign limits
 - Where documentation on party finances and spending can be accessed
 - Information on campaign donors

Voting Operations and Election Day

- Voting**
- Polling station times and irregularities
 - Access

- Discourage/correct rumours or misinformation
- Polling station procedures
- Voter turnout

- Special and external voting**
- Advance polling (dates, locations and procedures)
 - Where/why/how advanced polling is done
 - Restrictions on advanced or external polling
 - Out of country voting procedures and requirements

- Vote Counting**
- Vote count, consolidation and tabulation procedures
 - Processes open to the public
 - Guidelines and ground rules EMB will use to report and update on tabulation (timeframes etc.)
 - Timeframes

- Tabulation of Results**
- Parallel vote tabulation
 - Legal timeframe for tabulating and announcing results
 - Reasons for delayed results
 - Unofficial results

- Verification of Results**
- Official Results**
- Official results
 - Public accessibility of relevant counting documents other than the ballots—such as election protocols, tabulation and tally sheets, and decisions regarding the election results
 - Legal provisions providing exemptions to posting results
 - Detailed tabulations

- Complaints and appeals**
- Who may file a complaint
 - Kinds of complaints that may be filed
 - Process of filing a complaint (including first instance body, filing fees etc.) and the adjudication process and timelines
 - Appeals process and timelines
 - Decisions of verdicts and processes
 - Where recounts are to take place and reasoning for the recount

- Audits and Evaluations**
- Results of evaluations and audits

- Post-Election**
- Voter List Updates**
- Updates to voter lists and processes involved

- Legal reform**
- Revision of legal frameworks

- Archiving and research**
- Solicit feedback on the electoral process and the role the EMB played

*Discussions to be instigated within the legal framework and operational mandate of the EMB.

Conclusion

The rapid rise in the use of social media over the last few years has irreversibly changed the ways in which we communicate, as well as the character and format of the communications we share. These changes present both opportunities and challenges for EMBs.

As we have seen, EMBs can use social media platforms with relative ease and speed in order to improve communication, transparency and accessibility; to collect and respond to information; to reach out to particular target audiences; and to build a greater sense of engagement and participation among the electorate throughout the entire electoral process. But there are important considerations in the use of social media that should not be overlooked, and EMBs must remain aware of the implications for resource management and staff capacity building; of the need to incorporate social media use with existing strategies and policies; of the importance of links with traditional media; of the need carefully to identify the particular demands and interests of a target audience; of the need to address and respond to an audience with an appropriate tone; and to be alert to possible risks and dangers such as negative posts and unauthorized sites, and the implications for internet security.

Challenges such as these argue strongly for the creation of a carefully formulated social media strategy that will help guide an EMB in identifying and implementing the most effective ways of using social media to engage with the electorate. Ascertaining in advance basic elements such as the kinds of platforms to be used, as well as the target audience to be addressed, will help determine the resources required as well as the most important topics to be discussed. And, as noted, a vital element of effective social media use is a thorough understanding of the existing social media landscape.

For EMBs that choose not to employ social media directly themselves, it is still important that they be aware of the ways in which social media influence the electoral process. The ability for news to spread quickly with little consideration for editorial or journalistic standards can profoundly affect public perceptions of the electoral process, its stakeholders and its administration. Closely following relevant discussions on social media platforms can help an EMB remain informed about public opinion regarding the electoral process and enable it to act, and react, more effectively.

Finally, while internet access varies from country to country, and by demography, EMBs should also strive to ensure that traditional outreach and civic education methods are not neglected, but rather that social media platforms are used in such a way as to complement them.

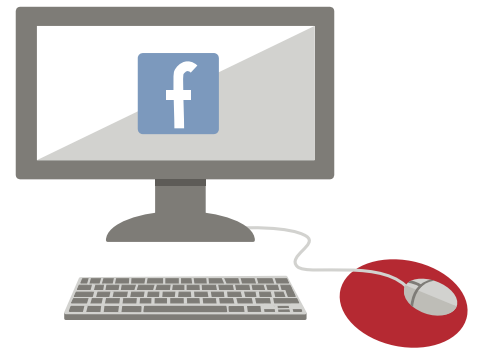
With attention to these considerations and with an adventurous spirit, EMBs can easily use social media not only to inform the electorate regarding key processes but also about the important work that EMBs do beyond election day.

ANNEX ONE:

An overview of selected social media platforms

Facebook

Launched in 2004, Facebook has become the world's leading social media networking site with over 1 billion users to date. Individuals or organizations can create a Facebook profile open to all users, or limit access to their page to selected 'friends' only or chosen members of a 'closed group'. Facebook requires that actual identities be used, though there are many examples of pages created under pseudonyms. The platform hosts 'chat' functions where friends can chat privately (via typed real-time messages) online. Users can download hard copies of their data or profile in the form of a full transcript of their activity on the platform.



In addition, smart phone platforms have been created to allow Facebook applications or 'apps' to access a user's profile, making Facebook easily accessible through any smart phone. Users also have the ability to create Facebook-specific apps with basic tutorials in how to do so offered by Facebook.

Facebook is known for being simple to use, for its high number of current users, and for the ability to send information through networks quickly. Should a follower 'like' you on Facebook, all source updates will automatically be posted onto the follower's news feed, where information is collected and posted. Followers may share posts within their network, comment directly on a post, or engage in discussions with the source or other followers.

Twitter

Created in 2006, Twitter is a micro-blogging platform where people can post messages, or 'tweets' up to 140 characters long. Twitter reports having 200 million monthly active users in 2013 with 500 million tweets being generated daily (USSEC Twitter). While unregistered users can follow tweets, only registered users (who may remain anonymous) can generate tweets. Messages may be shared with followers and 're-tweeted' (re-posted from others' accounts). If a topic is popular and shared frequently, it is considered to be 'trending'. Hashtags (#) are used to follow a conversation.

Twitter allows for short messages to be disseminated to a large audience in a short period of time. But Twitter does not offer a service for downloading or backing-up accounts, so the use of a third party platform is required to back-up or archive.

YouTube and Vimeo

Created in February 2005, YouTube is a video hosting site where users can upload, view and share videos. In order to upload a video a user must register; however, non-registered users can view all videos posted. Links to YouTube can be made from other social media platforms such

as Facebook and Twitter. YouTube is accessed through special apps on some smart phones and shows trending videos on its homepage. It is difficult to estimate the number of users on YouTube as users are not required to register, but it is widely known as the most popular video-sharing platform currently available.

YouTube hosts an 'insight' tool which allows registered clients to access aggregated information such as the number of views a video has had, the video's popularity, how people are linking to or finding the video, general demographics of age range, gender and location of viewers, and 'hot spots' within the video that attract or repel viewers. YouTube enjoys the largest viewership of all online video-hosting platforms.

Like YouTube, Vimeo is a video-hosting site tailored towards short films and broadcasts in high definition. Unlike YouTube, videos posted on Vimeo are available for download.

Blogs (over all platforms including WordPress)

Blogs are virtual spaces where individuals or a group of users present opinion pieces or send out information on a regular basis. Terms such as 'blogger' (the author of the blog), 'blogging' (the action of writing and sending out a blog) and 'blogosphere' (the world of weblogs) are common in this form of social media. Blogs can be made interactive by allowing for readers to post questions or comments to the blogger or other readers, thereby generating a conversation or debate around the topic at hand. Blog sites can be linked to other social media platforms and are generally hosted on specified sites, which can be individually designed.

Maintaining a blog can consume both time and resources, but benefits include the ability to educate and stir debate and discussion around a particular topic. Blogs are often used to present and discuss opinions, and are not always considered to be a source of news or facts, depending on the blogger.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social networking platform for professionals with approximately 120 million users. There are a variety of user packages ranging from a free personal profile to an executive profile that is available for a monthly fee.

Also available as a smart phone application, LinkedIn allows for the re-sharing of information. LinkedIn allows users to join groups based on interest or expertise through invitation or introduction, and allows users to post links to their networks regarding upcoming events and news. In addition, company profiles allow registered LinkedIn users to review products and services and follow a company or organization in order to receive updates.

Google+

Google+ is an online social networking project that was launched for users over 13 years of age in January 2012. Google+ allows users to cluster their relationships in order to tailor information to specific groups (friends, work associates, family etc.). Google+ hosts a chat function and video calls, both of which can be used between two people or in groups. It also

allows users to search for areas of interest ('sparks'), with updates for selected groups being sent regularly. Photo and video sharing is also possible, and organizations or companies are able to set up profiles and share posts.

As of October 2013, Google+ had 540 million active users and has applications that can be run on most smart phones. Google+ requires individuals to use their true identity to open an account and a user may download copies of their account (including all posts and interactions) via Google Takeout.

Mobile messaging

Sending information via SMS or text message is becoming increasingly popular in areas where internet connectivity is low. While SMS does not allow for the same level of interaction as other social media platforms, it can be a useful way to spread important information in areas of low internet connectivity.

Mobile phone numbers can be collected in person at events (through registration or by voluntary sign-up sheets), via a website or from participants who text their number to a local server within an organization. Once SMSs are sent out, it is important to respond to the sender within a reasonable timeframe. Should a user want to opt out of receiving mobile messages from an organization, easy opt-out options should be provided online or through and SMS/text message. Opt-out choices should always be respected.

SMS desktop systems or clients are software packages that allow users to send SMS messages from a desktop via a built-in modem or connected phone. Some features of this software include allowing users to collect and store mobile phone numbers, to send messages in multiple languages and to keep track of all messages that are sent through the platform. Desktop platforms can often be downloaded free of charge. Available platforms vary in terms of their ability to receive SMS replies, the length of SMSs that can be sent, and in the number of SMSs that can be sent at one time.

Sending SMS messages can be costly depending on the provider and subscription. Some operators may give discounted rates for bulk purchases and collection or sending systems. SMS costs may be equally high for recipients, so it may at times be advisable to limit the amount of responses needed, depending on the audience. In addition, delivery time for SMS messages may vary depending on the network over which they are sent and received, and may at times be lost or delayed in transmission, affecting the timeliness of the message.

Social media monitoring software

A variety of software programmes (Tweetdeck, Meltwater buzz, Sprout, HootSuite) have been developed in order to help individuals and organizations manage posts, track users and monitor discussions taking place on social media platforms and more widely. Basic features of these programmes include the ability to (a) send and receive information to a centralized inbox which manages all platforms, (b) publish information to all platforms via a centralized tool, (c) create lists of targeted audiences, (d) analyze statistics across users' platforms, (e) monitor discussions through the use of key words, and (f) provide reports on the use of social media.

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About International IDEA

What is International IDEA?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

The objectives of the Institute are to support stronger democratic institutions and processes, and more sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy.

What does International IDEA do?

The Institute's work is organized at global, regional and country level, focusing on the citizen as the driver of change.

International IDEA produces comparative knowledge in its key areas of expertise: electoral processes, constitution building, political participation and representation, and democracy and development, as well as on democracy as it relates to gender, diversity, and conflict and security.

IDEA brings this knowledge to national and local actors who are working for democratic reform, and facilitates dialogue in support of democratic change.

In its work, IDEA aims for:

- Increased capacity, legitimacy and credibility of democracy
- More inclusive participation and accountable representation
- More effective and legitimate democracy cooperation

Where does International IDEA work?

International IDEA works worldwide. Based in Stockholm, Sweden, the Institute has offices in the Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West Asia and North Africa regions.

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This guide is intended to inform electoral management bodies (EMBs) how social media can be used to increase participation of the electorate, boost communication, engage all members of the community and improve transparency and trust throughout the entire electoral cycle.

It is designed to be an introduction to the use of social media and to provide EMBs who have just begun to use these channels, or who are preparing to begin to use them, with topics to reflect upon when responding to new communication realities and developing social media strategies.

INTERNATIONAL IDEA

Strömsborg

SE-103 34 Stockholm

Sweden

Phone + 46 8 698 37 00

Fax + 46 8 20 24 22

E-mail: info@idea.int

Website: <http://www.idea.int>

[Facebook.com/InternationalIDEA](https://www.facebook.com/InternationalIDEA)

[twitter@Int_IDEA](https://twitter.com/Int_IDEA)

