

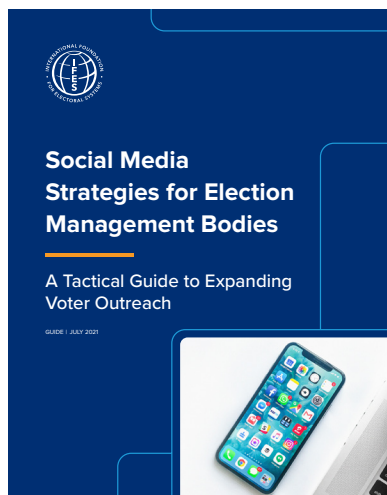


Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies

A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach

GUIDE | AUGUST 2021





Social Media Strategic for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach

This paper provides tactical guidance to election management bodies (EMBs) on leveraging social media to expand voter education and outreach. The primary audience for this guide consists of communications and public relations staff of EMBs with a baseline knowledge of social media who are looking to strengthen voters' confidence in the safety and integrity of voting processes. While this guide is directed toward election administrators, other audiences may also find the strategies relevant to their work.

This paper outlines specific tactics and strategies for reaching audiences on four leading social media platforms and communications services – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube¹ – as well as reflections on the use of messaging applications to enhance EMB communications and additional platform-agnostic guidance applicable in any social media environment. Despite the decision to limit coverage to these particular

services, the tactics described can easily be applied to other social media services that may be popular in certain regions or among specific demographic groups.

This guide includes individual tip sheets for each of the major platforms; guidance on tools and tactics that function in similar ways across multiple platforms; actionable guidance on the characteristics of engaging content that apply in any social media setting; recommendations for planning and carrying out live video events; strategies and guidelines for partnering with other social media accounts to amplify audience reach; and strategies for effective social media communication specific to elections held while COVID-19 remains a threat to public health.

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Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies

A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach

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International Foundation
for Electoral Systems



About IFES

IFES advances democracy for a better future. We collaborate with civil society, public institutions and the private sector to build resilient democracies that deliver for everyone. As a global leader in the promotion and protection of democracy, our technical assistance and applied research develops trusted electoral bodies capable of conducting credible elections; effective and accountable governing institutions; civic and political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate; and innovative ways in which technology and data can positively serve elections and democracy. Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries, from developing to mature democracies. IFES is a global, nonpartisan nonprofit organization based in Arlington, Virginia, and registered as a 501(c)(3).

IFES By The Numbers



Reached 205M+
people with civic and
voter education



Trained 759,326
election officials
in fiscal years
2015-19



Worked in 145+
countries

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1

Introduction

Overview

This paper provides tactical guidance to election management bodies (EMBs) on leveraging social media to expand voter education and outreach. The primary audience for this guide consists of communications and public relations staff of EMBs with a baseline knowledge of social media who are looking to strengthen voters' confidence in the safety and integrity of voting processes.

This paper outlines specific tactics and strategies for reaching audiences on four leading social media platforms and communications services – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube – as well as reflections on the use of messaging applications to enhance EMB communications and additional platform-agnostic guidance applicable in any social media environment. These platforms were chosen because of their global scale. Despite the decision to limit coverage to these particular services, the tactics described can easily be applied to other social media services that may be popular in certain regions or among specific demographic groups.

While the tactics proposed below are illustrated in some detail, the purpose of this specificity is to present ideas for consideration rather than to prescribe a rigid plan for implementation. We hope readers are stimulated by the discussion to develop ideas that best fit their local context and the audiences they intend to reach.

This guide includes:

- Individual tip sheets for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube¹ that review the features unique to each platform and offers tactics and content suggestions suitable for each environment. A tip sheet on innovative EMB uses of messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, is also included.
- Guidance on tools and tactics, such as paid ads and leveraging comment features, that function in similar ways across multiple platforms. It also provides actionable guidance on the characteristics of engaging content that apply in any social media setting.
- Recommendations for planning and carrying out live video events.
- Strategies and guidelines for partnering with other social media accounts to amplify audience reach.
- Strategies for effective social media communication specific to elections held while COVID-19 remains a threat to public health.

Each social media platform considered here offers a variety of methods for posting, reposting, borrowing, referencing, pinning and promoting content. It is beyond the scope of this paper to specify the “hands-on-keyboard” navigation pathways for carrying out specific tasks. For readers who want coverage of basic features and functions, links to the relevant help sections on the websites of the respective services are provided throughout the text.²

¹ This paper is not intended as an advertisement or promotion for any of the platforms covered and IFES does not financially benefit from any decisions, strategies or purchases that might be made based on advice contained in this guide. Although reference is made to various resources, IFES does not endorse any third-party apps, training or other features, whether free or paid. Additionally, readers should be aware that technology and the terms and conditions that govern its usage are subject to frequent change. EMBs should conduct further research before implementing any particular strategy or course of action.

² Links are current as of publication but are subject to change.

2

Platform-Specific Tactical Tip Sheets

In this section, we cover four major social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube – as well as reflections on the use of messaging applications, such as WhatsApp. Rather than exhaustively cataloguing the features available on each platform, many of which might already be familiar to EMBs, this paper focuses more on platform-specific suggestions for effectively engaging with audiences for voter outreach at scale.

These strategies and tactics have been organized into brief platform-specific pull outs so that you can focus on the information that is most relevant to you and the platforms used by your organization.



Facebook

A good post is about more than informative content. Take full advantage of the options available to make your posts go further on Facebook.

Facebook

With over 2.5 billion active users worldwide, Facebook enjoys broad reach in most countries. While this massive user base represents an attractive opportunity for any organization looking to engage the public, the sheer volume of daily content makes it difficult to break through and secure placement in users' Facebook feeds. As most social media managers know, Facebook shows users a limited subset of the posts published by their friends and the Pages³ they follow.

Across Facebook, *organic reach* – which refers to the number of people who see a Page's content without support from paid advertising – is roughly 5 percent of a Page's total followers. Put another way, when a Page with 10,000 followers publishes a new post on Facebook, the post will generally only appear in the feeds of 500 of those followers. Unfortunately for EMBs, when deciding which posts to display to users, Facebook [prioritizes content from friends and family over organizations](#).

Despite these limitations, Pages can still increase their organic reach by publishing quality content and then judiciously working to cultivate engagement – in the form of likes, comments, shares, video views and click-throughs on embedded links – with their posts.

Facebook wants to expose its users to interesting content when they visit. If a Page's posts are not generating engagement, Facebook regards that as a signal of poor quality (or more precisely, that the content is of low interest to Facebook users). This in turn will lower the organic reach of future posts published by the Page. Put simply, a Page owner that wants to increase its organic reach should focus on producing interesting content that elicits reactions and engagement.

Frequently, Facebook Page owners focus on increasing their follower counts. However, if Facebook rarely exposes followers to the Page's posts, the follower gain is a somewhat hollow achievement.

Recommendations

Below we provide guidance for increasing engagement and organic reach on Facebook and highlight some features that EMBs can leverage to make better use of the platform. Several recommendations remain relevant across social media platforms, but all are especially pertinent within the competitive landscape for placement and users' attention within the Facebook feed.

#1. Do not resort to engagement bait.

Relevant and popular content can be used to inspire your own posts, or to identify posts or accounts with which you might choose to engage. The "Engagement" field (see Figure 1) allows for filtering by different criteria. According to Facebook, engagement bait consists of:

"Spammy posts that goad users into interacting with likes, shares, comments, and other actions. For example, 'LIKE this if you're an Aries!' This tactic, known as 'engagement bait,' seeks to take advantage of our News Feed algorithm by boosting engagement in order to get greater reach."⁴

Facebook downgrades the organic reach of Pages that use engagement bait. Page owners who want to generate engagement should produce compelling stories that spur reactions. (See Section 3, "Power of Storytelling.") Of note: While the guidelines for downgrading are not exactly clear – intentionally so, as Facebook does not want to facilitate attempts to

³ Pages are accounts belonging to organizations, companies and public figures, as opposed to personal accounts belonging to individuals.

³ [Fighting Engagement Bait on Facebook](#), December 18, 2017

game the system – including an occasional question in a post as a gentle prompt to encourage thoughtful conversation should not be detrimental, especially if no direction to reply in the comments is given.

#2. Reply to those who comment on your content.

Treat your commenters like VIP followers. Their commenting activity enhances your News Feed algorithm score. Responding to their comments will encourage them to comment on future posts. Furthermore, when other Facebook users see a

Page owner responding to comments, they may be encouraged to add comments of their own, thereby further increasing Facebook’s ranking of the quality of the post.

#3. Be aware that Facebook penalizes the organic reach of pages that link to external websites too often.

Instead, post content that is native to Facebook. A Facebook feed should not function as a repository of links.

#4. Use videos and images, as they tend to receive higher engagement than text-only photos.

Brevity is key. Shorter videos outperform longer videos just as shorter text posts outperform longer text posts.

#5. Use the [Facebook Insights tool](#) to audit your own performance.

With Insights, Page owners can view their organic reach scores and ascertain which types of content (e.g., photos, videos, text-only, external links) have performed best with their audience.

#6. Review Facebook Pages of other institutions to ascertain which types of content have high rates of engagement.

Analyze not only cause-related groups, government bodies and civil society organizations, but also popular brands, media companies and influencers in the private sector to better appreciate the types of content that receive the most engagement and to generate inspiration for new content. Consider the context: If an account with over a million followers typically receives 250 comments and 5,000 likes per post, a particular post that receives 100 comments and 2,000 likes may not be worth emulating.

#7. [Create a custom tab on a Facebook Page](#) to highlight certain content.

For example, a “How to Vote” tab would be appropriate to organize and present an EMB’s catalog of instructional material.⁵ (Separately, an EMB can and should [remove unused and irrelevant tabs](#) – e.g., Jobs, Offers, Reviews – which will facilitate navigation and foster a cleaner Page presentation.)

#8. Use Facebook Groups as an alternate channel for engaging users.

Through its Page, an EMB [can join Facebook Groups managed by other users](#) and post inside those groups. Searching within the [Groups section](#) for news topics, causes or city/state/province names can yield groups receptive to electoral content. In instances where it would be inappropriate or impractical for an EMB to play this role, partnerships with civil society can enable other stakeholders to join Groups and to disseminate official electoral content via their own Pages.

#9. Emphasize field work, engagement with voters and voters’ voices.

While it is OK to post about the activities of your own team, try to avoid overrepresenting bureaucrats

⁵ Note that the custom tab feature is only available to Pages with at least 2,000 likes. Custom tabs are only visible to Facebook users in a desktop environment.

behind microphones. Find ways to include everyday voters or staff active in the field. Some examples are shown in the subsection on Instagram below. The goal should always be to create a welcoming environment for user reactions, questions and comments. As a content genre, “Bureaucrats and Microphones” creates a nonconversational ambience reminiscent of one-way broadcast news.



Instagram

Are you using Instagram to its full potential? A few changes to your approach can make your account shine and provide a window into the election process that promotes voter trust.

Instagram

Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, is distinguished from other platforms by its focus on image-based content, intensive use of hashtags, young user base (over 70 percent of Instagram users worldwide are under the age of 35) and the popularity of its Story format.

Instagram Stories are a versatile format that can be used to both ask and solicit questions. Stories also allow content creators to stitch together content from other accounts with their own to build a larger narrative. As such, the format is well suited for collaboration.

We offer a few specific tactical recommendations for Instagram below. For these recommendations and in general, it is important to bear in mind that Instagram is a visual medium. Images that are beautiful, artistic or unique tend to receive the most engagement. The grind of the electoral process may not provide many opportunities for photographic brilliance. However, when the right moments present themselves, to generate new followers, it might be worthwhile to post some photos primarily for their artistic merit and visual appeal, rather than the substance of the photo.

Recommendations

#1. Keep an organizational transparency diary.

Just as people use Instagram to document their food adventures and pet interactions, EMBs can use their accounts to share the quotidian acts of managing the electoral process and to highlight transparency. Posts like this should include staff in the field engaging with people, not seated behind microphones at conferences. [In this example](#) from the Instagram account of the General Elections Commission of Indonesia, staff is shown actively engaged in authenticating voter rolls at a grassroots

level. [And in this thread of photos](#) from the National Office of Electoral Processes of Peru (ONPE), we see staff in Lima processing ballots cast by Peruvians living abroad. Misinformation and conspiracies spread more easily when processes are presented as bureaucratic phenomena engineered from hotel conference rooms. A unifying hashtag related to transparency can be implemented to tie together related posts. EMB staff throughout the country – as well as any partners working on the election – posting scenes from their work life on their personal accounts can also be encouraged to use the same hashtag.

This general tactic of sharing everyday insights into the operations of the EMB can also be employed on other platforms. On Twitter, the Commission on Elections in the Philippines has posted photos showing its staff [distributing voter information materials in public locations](#) and [conducting a bike caravan to promote voter registration](#).

Of course, on plenty of occasions, important messages worthy of distribution *are* communicated in official settings. EMBs should consider which platforms are best suited for these types of communications. ONPE, for example, tends to publish press conference information on Twitter while focusing its more creative content on Instagram. Even on Twitter, it is instructive to see how ONPE packages material from press conferences. Short, direct quotes are extracted and used to highlight the important points made at the event. [In this tweet](#), the head of ONPE Piero Corvetto is quoted as saying: “There are no restrictions on voting in the second round Presidential Election.” This approach is preferred to generalized statements that function more as an account of a bureaucrat’s schedule. For example, a less engaging way to convey this information would be a tweet that read: “Mr. Corvetto met with reporters yesterday to discuss issues regarding the second round of voting.”

#2. Reach out other organizations to establish informal partnerships.

Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram limits the ability of users to repost images from another user's account. However, reposting is possible within these restrictions. A user can share a post from a public account as part of their Instagram Story by selecting the paper airplane icon below the image and selecting "Add post to your story". Reposting from one Instagram Story to another is possible if the account being reposted is public, has story sharing enabled and the account reposting the content has been tagged through the use of the @ symbol in the original post. Accounts that are tagged receive a notification in their direct message inbox. Reposting an entire story, rather than an individual clip, is a slightly more complicated affair. Users can only repost an entire story if the story creator has mentioned their account with use of the @ symbol on each individual clip in the relevant story. Third

party applications can be used to further enhance the ability of an account to repost content they are not tagged in, but these applications must be independently downloaded and account owners should ensure that these applications do not present data privacy or digital security vulnerabilities.

An EMB that wants other accounts to reshare a post from the EMB in their Instagram Stories can tag the accounts they hope will follow through directly in the post or in a comment on their own post. For example, a post highlighting health protocols at polling stations could use the @ function to tag accounts of public health authorities, political parties or media organizations. Including a comment or a short bit of overlaid text explaining why the accounts were chosen, the desired outcome (a story repost) and a brief appeal to the civic-mindedness of the account holders might be helpful. All in all, this represents a sort of no-fuss, on-the-fly partnership model.

#3. Create how-to-vote guides and answers to FAQs.

Instagram can be used to communicate step-by-step instructions related to registration and voting. Short

videos, as well as stories and photo posts, can readily be divided into individual, easy-to-digest steps. For example, a post devoted to Election Day procedures could thread together images for each step in the process: 1) bring pen, mask and hand sanitizer to the polls; 2) verify your identity; 3) receive your ballot; 4) choose candidates; 5) cast ballot; 6) wait for ballot processing; and 7) carry out exit procedures. [This short video](#) from the National Electoral Institute of Mexico (INE) details sanitation protocols voters can expect to encounter on Election Day.

In addition to instructional guides, Instagram can also be used to present the answers to frequently asked questions on a topic. [In this short video](#), INE answers three questions regarding eligibility for service as an election observer. [In this photo thread](#), ONPE answers questions regarding a runoff presidential election.

By default, Instagram Stories expire 24 hours after posting. To avoid summary deletion and to continue promoting important information throughout an election cycle, a story can be pinned to the top of an EMB's profile as a Story Highlight.

#4. Put together a text-based Q&A.

Through the use of the [Question sticker](#) within Instagram Stories, EMBs can hold asynchronous Q&A events that do not require the use of video. Instagram users submit questions through the sticker and an EMB can select a subset to answer publicly. The selected questions and accompanying answers then get posted to a new story.



Twitter

How can you stay current amidst Twitter's up-to-the-minute pace? Save energy by focusing on the content and interactions that best suit the platform.

Twitter

Twitter is distinguished from other platforms through its tight connection to current events. Twitter content is akin to a daily newspaper, where the material declines in appeal the older it is. Two-day old Twitter content, like a newspaper edition of the same vintage, might retain 25 percent of its original interest to readers. Whereas people might occasionally scroll through their Facebook feeds from years past, such nostalgia trips are less common on Twitter. As such, Twitter is well suited to content tied to the news cycle and current events. It is not as hospitable to evergreen content as other platforms.

Recommendations

#1. Package tweets as news or newsworthy items. Use current events as a frame for the messages you want to broadcast.

#2. Take advantage of the advanced search function to find relevant and popular content.

Relevant and popular content can be used to inspire your own posts, or to identify posts or accounts with which you might choose to engage. The “Engagement” field (see Figure 1) allows for filtering by different criteria.

Figure 1: Engagement Field in Advanced Twitter Search

The screenshot shows the 'Advanced search' interface. At the top, there is a search bar with a blue 'Search' button. Below the search bar, the 'Engagement' section is highlighted. It contains three input fields, each with a label and an example text below it:

- Minimum replies**: Example: 280 · Tweets with at least 280 replies
- Minimum Likes**: Example: 280 · Tweets with at least 280 Likes
- Minimum Retweets**: Example: 280 · Tweets with at least 280 Retweets

Some of this functionality is also available in the regular Twitter search bar. By way of example, to find popular tweets from The Economist on the topic of disinformation that received a minimum of 50 likes, use the following search string:

from:theeconomist “disinformation” min_faves:50

#3. Use stylized formatting to make your tweets stand out and easy to read. When reviewing other accounts for inspiration, pay attention to style and wording.

Use bullet points instead of sentences, when appropriate. In the two examples that follow, the Electoral Commission of the UK breaks information into separate lines so it is easier to understand. [This tweet provides information on the start of vote counting in different areas.](#) And [this tweet explains why counting will take more time](#), compared to prior elections. Also, note the visual effect rendered by nonstandard bullet points.

When Peru’s ONPE links to outside content, it includes icons for [audio](#), [video](#), [photos](#) and [text](#) to reinforce the media type the reader can expect.

#4. Invite your followers to engage with your posts.

Ask people to comment with their opinions or to respond to a question you pose. Unlike Facebook, Twitter does not consider such invitations as “engagement bait” that will be penalized. Rather, [Twitter’s own guidelines](#) explicitly encourage these practices.

#5. Retweet past content that is evergreen or that has gained renewed relevancy due to current events.

However, when doing so, do not simply retweet the old post. Rather, reply to the original tweet with a follow-up question or additional tweet. Twitter will include the original tweet along with the two most recent replies.

#6. Take advantage of free advanced tools for tweet analytics and video management.

These tools require you to have a Twitter ads account. However, no ad purchases are necessary to access the tools. Signing up for a free account at ads.twitter.com is sufficient.

After signing up, look under the Analytics tab to access information such as your top-performing posts and as the top posts made by others that mention your account name. Under the Creatives tab, look for the Media section, which provides a streamlined library of all the images and videos you have included in past tweets and plan to include in future tweets. The Media section also has tools for uploading captions to your videos and for adding tags, a description and a call-to-action hyperlink (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Media Section in the Analytics Tab

The screenshot shows the 'Media Section in the Analytics Tab' for a video file named 'video.mp4'. At the top, there are buttons for 'Change thumbnail' and 'Tweet'. Below this, the file name and upload date ('Today') are displayed. There are three tabs: 'Settings' (selected), 'Subtitles', and 'Sharing'. A note states: 'Title, description, and call to action will be displayed alongside video after it is published'. The form includes:

- Title:** A text input field with a character count of 70.
- Description:** A text input field with a character count of 200 and a placeholder 'Type a brief description here'.
- How would you describe your video?:** A dropdown menu with the instruction 'Select the category that best describes your video.'
- Call to action:** A text input field with a placeholder 'Call to Action Link'.

A separate program called Twitter Media Studio, which requires special approval for access, provides advanced features for accounts that hold frequent live video events on Twitter. According to Twitter: “Producer in Media Studio allows live video content creators to easily create high-quality broadcasts from external sources including streaming software, hardware encoders, and other professional studio applications.”⁶

Audio and Text Events on Twitter

Twitter enables hosts to hold live events using video, audio or text. Section 5 covers video events in a general, platform-agnostic way since the features are similar across the different services. This subsection will focus on audio and text events since these formats are more specific to Twitter.

For events on Twitter, hosts can choose to invite questions from the audience beforehand, in addition to fielding questions during the event itself. Hosts can ask participants to pose questions in advance by either 1) commenting beneath the announcement

⁶ <https://media.twitter.com/en/articles/products/2018/media-studio/producer.html>

post or 2) making a separate post of their own and inserting a designated hashtag that the host can search and use to locate the question. The two options are not mutually exclusive, and both could be used for a single event. An important benefit of both methods, though especially the latter, is that every question counts as a unique piece of content that can publicize the event to a wider audience of Twitter users.

Q&A Events Using Standard Tweets

Q&A events using standard tweets involve answering questions inside the confines of a standard tweet or set of tweets. Although hosts can answer questions using any media format allowed inside a tweet – text, images, audio snippets and video clips – in practice, most hosts tend to answer exclusively in text.

For hosts who respond through text, simplicity is the great draw compared to live video. No audiovisual setup (camera and microphone testing; room and lighting preparation) is required. Posts should be kept concise whenever possible. When an answer requires lengthy treatment, a host can either respond over multiple tweets or summarize key points and link to outside content that provides more information.

Hosts should also familiarize themselves with the methods [outlined by Twitter](#) for connecting question tweets from the audience with answers from the host.

EMBs should attempt to gain access to [Twitter VIT](#) (Very Important Twitterer), an app that provides its users with ways to more easily promote and carry out Q&A sessions. Although access is by invitation only, EMBs might be able to secure entry by contacting Twitter with their request for access. If permission is not granted, the Twitter platform itself still provides sufficient functionality for carrying out successful live events.

Twitter Spaces

Twitter Spaces, launched globally in April 2021, is a product for live audio conversations. It functions

somewhat like a live radio call-in show or a live podcast that enables listeners selected by the host to participate in the conversation. Analogous products include Clubhouse, a mobile app that pioneered the live audio conversation format. It is anticipated that other social media services will introduce their own audio conversation tools by the end of 2021.

[This Twitter blog post provides a good overview of Spaces](#). Unfortunately, as an emergent medium, it is difficult to point to an established body of best practices. It is also unclear whether the audio conversation format will gain widespread acceptance and meaningfully endure past the pandemic era when it originated and became a useful substitute for in-person events.

Twitter Moments

With [Twitter Moments](#), content creators can stitch together multiple tweets from different accounts, including their own, and varying content types (text, image, audio, video) together inside one creative unit. Because Twitter Moments enable an EMB and partners to blend each other's tweets into a single story, the format is well suited for collaboration. A Moment can also be shared privately before publishing publicly so there is an opportunity to get feedback from outside collaborators. As recommended for all content on Twitter, Moments should focus on “news-y” stories. (Note that Moments are distinct from threads on Twitter, which link tweets from a single account.)



YouTube

YouTube is more than a library where videos live. Deploy tactics that help your videos reach new audiences and appear in more search results.

YouTube

YouTube's distinguishing characteristic is its overwhelming focus on just two content formats (video, and to a far lesser degree, audio), unlike Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, which feature a greater heterogeneity of media, including text, images, GIFs, quizzes, location check-ins and status updates.

YouTube also has a relatively limited scope for horizontal social activity between "friends." The average viewer does not bring their real-world connections to YouTube and may spend thousands of hours viewing YouTube content without developing relationships with other viewers. The platform is instead typified by vertical connections between subscribers and channels.

Social functions are mostly limited to liking and commenting on videos. The comment sections of YouTube videos can generate a lot of discussion. However, in this regard, YouTube mirrors a newspaper website more than a social network, where article comments, outside certain niche communities, rarely lead to further interaction. For noncreators, the messaging inboxes on YouTube are usually quite barren. Most noncreators are probably unaware they even have a public-facing profile page.

YouTube compensates for its dearth of onsite social features with its ease of sharing to outside services (See Figure 2 below). Its embedding options are recognized by a wide variety of sites and content management systems. Compared to other services, content that goes viral on YouTube is frequently instigated by off-platform actions and events, such as a video that gets posted to a newspaper website, Reddit group or other external site. Because of the near-universal presence of the YouTube app on smartphones and its name recognition across age demographics, YouTube also represents a popular

sharing option in off-platform email and messaging apps.

The vertical nature of the relationship networks on YouTube reinforces the distributional power of the platform. Precisely because YouTube videos are more typically published by creators seeking a public audience rather than friends sharing content in restricted groups with other friends means that users trust that YouTube content will be viewable by most anybody with an Internet connection. A YouTube account is almost never needed to watch YouTube videos. To be sure, content on any platform can be made public, open to both nonfriends and nonregistered users. There is simply greater confidence in the accessibility of YouTube.

Another advantage of YouTube is its visibility to search engines. In addition to the fact that YouTube itself is the second-largest search engine in the world, YouTube videos tend to rank higher in regular web searches (e.g., Google, Bing) than content posted to other social media services. Remember that search engine performance is largely tied to quality, determined by audience engagement metrics such as "dwell time" (the amount of time people spend watching a video) and the number of links and embeds a video obtains on other sites.

To take advantage of the distribution capabilities of YouTube, EMBs should:

Recommendations

#1. Use YouTube to host video intended for distribution to external publishers, including newspapers, civil society organizations and bloggers.

#2. Enhance the ranking of content in ranking of content in search engine results search engine results by adding descriptive metadata (titles, tags and description)

#3. Consider what types of elections-related searches voters are likely to conduct and create videos that reflect those search terms.

If people are likely to search “check voter registration” in Google, EMBs should create short videos with titles like “How to Check Your Voter Registration, [Country Name], 2021 Elections”.

#4. Be concise.

YouTube has a generous ceiling on video length. Verified accounts can post clips as long as 12 hours.⁷ However, this sizable limit can be more curse than blessing for entities with libraries of lengthy raw footage. Short videos perform best as people tend to be averse to viewing and sharing excessively long videos. Edit and shorten when possible. If a video is longer than seven minutes, consider including timestamps within the text description to mark when different topics are discussed.

#5. Include captions.

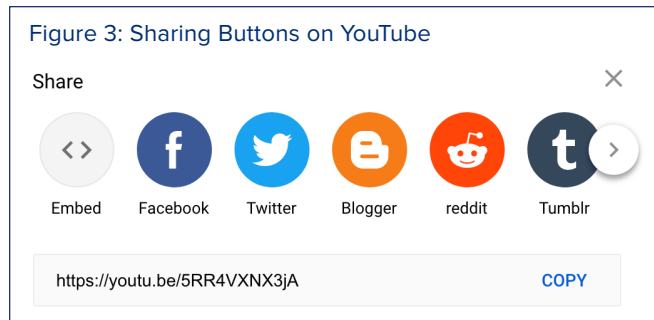
Doing so is helpful not only for users who are deaf or hard-of-hearing but also the substantial number of people who view mobile content with their phone volume muted. Verify any autogenerated captions for accuracy before posting.

#6. Consider supplementing distribution on YouTube with other platforms, such as IGTV and TikTok.

YouTube is the preeminent medium for video distribution and the second-most visited website in

the world. At the same time, certain demographic groups may be better represented elsewhere. No detriment is incurred by experimenting and posting the same video to multiple platforms, or by creating content specifically for alternate channels with the attributes of their unique audiences in mind. As shown in Figure 3, videos can be directly shared from YouTube to other platforms.

Figure 3: Sharing Buttons on YouTube



YouTube Community Tab

Unlike the other platforms considered here, which accept a range of media types, YouTube is mostly restricted to video. However, one lesser-known part of YouTube upends this assertion. Through the Community Tab, channels with over 1,000 subscribers can publish in a variety of formats.

Within the Community Tab, channel owners can disseminate text and image updates and conduct polls. Some channel owners use the venue to carry out text-based Q&As with their users. Also, while it is not possible to repost or share videos uploaded by other users on a regular YouTube account, channel owners with a Community Tab can share videos from other channels with their audience.

The Community Tab, however, comes with a major limitation. YouTube users who are not subscribed to a channel rarely see content posted within its Community Tab. The environment is relatively hermetic; content posted there has limited potential to go “viral.” Therefore, unless the YouTube subscriber base of an EMB or its co-marketing partner is truly massive, EMBs are advised to prioritize other platforms for nonvideo content.

⁷ By way of comparison, the maximum lengths for other services are as follows: Instagram: 60 seconds; Twitter: two minutes, 20 seconds; IGTV: 60 minutes; Facebook: two hours.



Messaging Apps

Have you considered the full potential of what you could be doing with WhatsApp? Ensure you are making the most of messaging applications.

Messaging Apps

The core function of messaging apps is instant messaging. Some messaging apps offer extended features such as payments, games, status updates and the ability to create groups. Popular messaging apps include Facebook Messenger, Line, Signal, Telegram, Viber, WeChat and WhatsApp. In this section we examine two possible uses for messaging apps as part of an EMB's larger communications strategy. The first relates to internal communications with poll workers and the second pertains to public external communications.

Distributing Internal Election Management Body Communications to Poll Workers

In many countries, messaging apps are the primary medium for business and personal communication. Accordingly, local heads of EMBs often use messaging apps to communicate with poll workers through the use of chat groups in which they maintain admin privileges. The central body of an EMB can supplement these local-level groups with separate groups for disseminating information of national concern, including updates throughout an election cycle and urgent notices related to handling unforeseen circumstances on Election Day.

The admins of a chat group can decide whether to allow group members beside themselves to post messages. If they choose to restrict messaging privileges to themselves as the group admins, the group becomes a one-to-many broadcast medium suited to top-down communication of key directives.

Structuring the groups and the type of communications that take place depends on the messaging platform chosen, as there is some

variance in conditions and features. One key factor is the limit the messaging app places on the number of group members. WhatsApp limits groups to 256 members. It is therefore incompatible with the needs of the head office of an EMB looking for a way to quickly disseminate information to tens of thousands of poll workers. Meanwhile, the upper bound of [groups on Telegram](#) is 200,000 and [Telegram Channels](#), a feature specifically designed for one-to-many broadcasts, has no limit on the number of subscribers who can join. WhatsApp has a similar feature called [Broadcast Lists](#). However, the maximum size of a Broadcast List is 256, the same as for WhatsApp groups.

If an EMB decides to use a messaging app with a relatively low group size limit, perhaps due to the app's existing popularity, but also wants to secure a channel for communicating from the national level to the local, it can create a group or broadcast list consisting of regional EMB heads who in turn create groups for their immediate subordinates. The branching would hopefully continue down to the base level of individual poll workers. Messages initiated from the center could then be shared throughout the network down to the local level.

Regardless of the messaging app and the network structure, content should be tailored to the chat environment: It should be concise, heavy on bullet points and use clear enumeration for any lists. EMBs should also be aware that even if a group or broadcast list is private in terms of membership, it is easy for any member to screenshot or share messages posted to the group/list. These channels should therefore not be used for confidential communications.

WhatsApp Business Application Programming Interface for Responding to Public Queries

[The WhatsApp Business application programming interface](#) (API) allows organizations to respond to queries from their customers or the general public at scale. It is essentially a text-based support line. It is not a broadcast platform or a push channel for promotional messages. To protect users from spam, WhatsApp does not allow organizations to initiate conversations. Instead, the platform combines a chatbot-style automated response system with a pathway to connect to a human for real-time or follow-up responses.

Since the feature's launch in 2018, a number of public interest institutions have introduced communications services based on the WhatsApp Business API.

Public health authorities and global health organizations, including the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), have launched chatbots to provide people with information about COVID-19. The WHO's service can be accessed by sending any WhatsApp message ("Hi" would suffice) to +41 798 931 892. The [International Fact-Checking Network](#) has also used the WhatsApp API to enable the general public to check the accuracy of news and information they have come across on the internet and in messaging apps.

EMBs can use similarly structured services to respond to queries from the general public leading up to Election Day. Prior to its 2020 elections, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) of Brazil developed a chatbot for WhatsApp that answered election-related questions and helped users identify whether information was fake. The chatbot also provided information on candidates and when and where to vote. The TSE reports that the feature was used by 1.4 million unique users in the run-up to the election, with 8 million messages exchanged on Election Day alone.⁸

⁸ This example, and others, are included in the IFES chapter on "[Election Management Body Approaches to Countering Disinformation](#)" in the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening's Countering Disinformation Guide.

Figure 4 shows the "home screen" for the WHO chatbot, from which users can jump off to explore any of the nine subsections.

Figure 4: Main Menu for WHO Chatbot for COVID-19 Information on WhatsApp

1. **LATEST** 📄 Numbers & cases
2. **PROTECT** 🙌 Protecting yourself
3. **FAQ** ? Your questions answered
4. **MYTHS** 🗣️ Know the facts!
5. **TRAVEL** 🗺️ Travel advice
6. **NEWS** 📰 News & Press
7. **SHARE** ➦ This Service
8. **DONATE** 🙏 Help fight coronavirus
9. **LANGUAGE** 🌐 Change language

💡 *TIP: Use numbers, emojis or **BOLD** key-word shortcuts to explore topics*

Figure 5 shows the "home screen" for the WHO chatbot, from which users can jump off to explore any of the nine subsections.

Figure 5: FAQ Section of WHO Chatbot for COVID-19 Information on WhatsApp

Your questions answered ?

Reply with the number to get the correct answer:

10. What are coronaviruses, what is COVID-19 and how is it related to SARS?
11. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?
12. How does COVID-19 spread?
13. Can I catch COVID-19 from feces, animals or pets?
14. Can I catch COVID-19 from infected surfaces or packages from infected areas?

3

Strategies for Use Across Platforms

Strategies for Use Across Platforms

Power of Storytelling

When discussing topics in the public sphere, some of the most powerful content portrays how an issue or phenomenon affects people in a personal way.

Audiences tend to engage with media containing personal stories. As opposed to information presented in a faceless manner heavy on statistics, people are more likely to finish reading or watching personal stories until the end, remember them and tell their friends about them.

Information is consumed; personal stories get shared.

Imagine two articles on global warming. The first contains statistical overviews and interviews with climate scientists. The second describes the life of a coastal community in Oceania forced to abandon its village. The latter article would likely drive more online conversation, lead to more shares on social media and enjoy better recall among readers.

Of course, it is not possible for EMBs to imbue every piece of content with a personal story. Instead of trying to impose a story upon existing information, it might be easier to think in a ground-up mindset. What stories can an EMB tell that touch upon relevant themes (e.g., community, democracy and civic pride)? Video reels consisting of short interviews with multiple people could be produced with the following potential subjects, among others:

- Individuals planning to serve at polling stations could describe why they decided to participate.
- Older voters could speak about either their first memories of voting or their memories of a single – yet politically neutral – event in the nation’s history (e.g., when the nation first gained independence).
- A broad spectrum of voters could speak to how they feel (e.g., proud, powerful, a sense of community spirit) when voting and participating in a civic event.

In addition to personal narratives, another compelling story motif depicts a subject undergoing transformation over time. An EMB could place photos and videos from past elections – e.g., candidates upon daises, campaign posters, masses of people attending rallies and voting on Election Day – inside a video montage set to music that progresses over time until the present day. The video could then show a black screen with a white text overlay: “[Country Name] 2021,” then close with the rapid alternation of photos of individual people in the present day followed by a final text screen: “The future is unwritten. Here is your pen.” An image of a ballot box then slowly emerges into view beneath the text. In short, the EMB can tell a story about the current election

by placing it within the broader span of a country's history, while giving voters a role to play in the narrative. However, if a country's political history is too contentious to foreground elections-related images, the narrative could focus on development in a more general sense and document the country's evolution through culture and the built environment (e.g., new bridges and buildings; the evolution of cityscapes; popular singers and athletes; major sporting events).

The Electoral Commission of India serves as one example of an EMB that occasionally invokes history on its Instagram account. [See this post showing election materials being carried across a river from 1951](#), and these two posts showing voting in tribal regions, with [one photo from 1971](#) and [one from 1983](#). Images such as this could be pieced together in service of a narrative that evokes national pride and places the current election within a historical context.

Again, while it is not certainly not possible to create a story out of every piece of information, EMBs can still set a goal of periodically creating a certain number of story-centric items.

Commenting on Third-Party Content

By commenting on content posted by other more popular accounts, EMBs can “stand on the shoulders of giants” and distribute messaging to a wider audience. Unlike some other partnering tactics described in subsequent sections of this paper, commenting on a third party's post can be done without any planning or formalized joint protocol with the “partner” whose content you are commenting on.

Comments on almost every social media platform, including those covered in this paper, are sorted, at least to some degree, by popularity, with the most liked and commented-upon comments ranked higher and displayed earlier in people's feeds. Comments within a third party's comment stream should not be overtly self-promotional (e.g., “*Visit our site to learn more about this topic!*”). If a comment is sufficiently engaging, people will signal their approval through likes and replies, the comment will be viewed by more people and visits to the commenter's profile will create the potential for additional subscribers.

EMBs should consider tracking relevant keywords and hashtags, especially within the bounds of selected accounts belonging to major press and civil society organizations, to locate posts that merit comment. If misinformation is being spread around a certain topic, an EMB can prepare stock responses to counter the misinformation in the form of explanatory images, videos or simple text. These stock answers can then be dropped into comments as needed. At the same time, EMBs can also prepare “thumbs-up” style comments to lend their endorsement to posts that provide accurate information. Maintaining the EMB's neutrality and staying aware of the reputations and political affiliations of accounts they are engaging with is key.

A final note on comments: The sorting algorithms for comments tend to prioritize comments from official accounts. Getting verified as an official account therefore not only establishes credibility before users, but also facilitates content distribution. If they have not done so already, EMBs are advised to secure official/verified status on the platforms where they are active. Here are relevant links on securing verified status: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#). For EMBs with which the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has a working relationship, IFES may be able to assist EMBs in this process.

Conversational Voice

Success on social media is dependent on your ability to elicit measurable engagement with your content. People tend to respond to messages delivered in a conversational tone, as opposed to the type of language typically found in press releases. Use short sentences and simple words. The second person (“Find your voting location here”) is preferred to the third (“Voters can locate their voting locations here”). Express emotion on occasion. As circumstances dictate, the emotion could be sweet and sunny, [as in this tweet from the Australia Electoral Commission](#), or indignant and outraged, as in [this Twitter thread from a county government in the United States](#) that questions the professionalism of an election audit – or any emotion in between.

A conversational tone is not only a matter of voice but of content formatting as well. For example, video posted to Instagram that features individual speakers should be shot using a [vertical aspect ratio](#) (9:16), as it conforms to the natural dimensions of both the human body and mobile phones held upright.

User Feedback

Digital metrics are obtainable through analytics tools or simply reviewing the number of likes and comments your posts receive. At the same time, reach out to users and neutral third parties for feedback. If you notice someone has frequently commented on your posts, send them a direct message asking if they have any suggestions or thoughts on how you can improve.

Advertisements (Paid Media)

Paid advertising allows marketers to target users based on a number of attributes,⁹ including but not limited to:

- Demographic (age, gender, marital status, income level, education level, job title)
- Geographic (country, state/province, city/town)
- Interests (people who have demonstrated an interest in certain topics)
- Keyword targeting (people who have searched specific terms)

For example, if a marketer determines that married women between the ages of 30 and 35 with college degrees who have at least one child between the ages of nine and 12 and live in Toronto are a valuable audience, they could, for example, restrict their ad targeting to that specific subset of users.

For EMBs that want to reach underserved or marginalized populations, or deliver custom messages to specific demographic groups, targeted ads – delivered to groups more broadly conceived than tennis-playing teachers in Toronto – can supplement general-interest messaging published to the central stream of a social media account. A few illustrative ideas that are more relevant to voter outreach follow:

- Information on assisted voting procedures could target older voters.
- Young adults could receive information relevant to first-time voters.

⁹ The precise constellation of targeting attributes differs by platform and country. For example, not every facet available on Facebook is available on Twitter, and vice versa. Also, the attributes available to advertisers on the same platform in two different countries might differ.

- Geographic targeting could be used to communicate information in minority languages spoken in specific regions.
- Information on expatriate voting could be delivered through a combination of geographic targeting and a second attribute. If, for example, the election commission in Indonesia wants to target the 1.5 million Indonesians living in Saudi Arabia, it could set the geographic target to Saudi Arabia¹⁰ and add any of the additional parameters:
 - Users who have their app’s interface set to the Indonesian language
 - People who have liked pages for Indonesian celebrities, music groups, newspapers, sports teams, airlines or banks
 - Indonesian expats as determined by [Facebook’s expat targeting feature](#)

To enhance the effectiveness of an ad campaign, customized ads should be developed to address the targeted audience. To continue from the last example above, the Indonesian election commission could create unique ads for each country with significant populations of overseas Indonesians. One generic ad for all (“Will you be abroad on Election Day?”) could be replaced with specific ones that reference the audience in each location (“Will you be in Saudi Arabia on Election Day?”).

Narrowly targeted groups come with two potential downsides. The first is that the cost of ads increases as tighter, more specific targeting attributes are applied. The second is that advertising systems apply machine learning techniques to optimize the placement of ads. For machine learning to work, the systems need to ingest enough data to understand the types of people likely to respond to the ads. The more money that is spent on a specific ad group, the smarter the algorithm becomes. On the other hand, when an overall ad budget is distributed across many niche groups, each with a small budget, the algorithm might never obtain enough data to draw definitive conclusions. The overall point is that while it might be tempting to run a lot of narrowly defined experiments, it can be costly and might result in forgoing more affordable opportunities for reaching voters.

The targeting examples described above determined the parameters of the group based on some well-defined personal characteristic that holds true offline (e.g., age, location). However, it is also possible to classify ad groups based upon certain online behaviors. If an EMB wants to target people more likely to engage with an ad and share it with their followers, they can use topic-based targeting on Facebook and Instagram to reach people interested in politics or keyword targeting on Twitter to focus on users who have used specific hashtags and words related to politics in their tweets, as well as people who have interacted with those tweets. (Of course, people interested in politics are perhaps the group least in need of targeted messaging to encourage them to vote. The idea is to leverage them as a segment likely to share and further distribute content.)

Ads can also be used to promote upcoming online live events (for more on online events, see Section 5). Calls to action in ads can encourage people to click and submit their questions. After events have concluded, ads can also be used to drive people to view more content (e.g., Instagram Stories and Twitter Moments) that summarizes event highlights.

Another advertising tool available is the promoted post format (also referred to as boosted posts on Facebook), which allows advertisers to turn existing content into ads. Like regular ads, promoted posts can target specific demographic groups and geographic regions. Promoted posts should be used to amplify the reach of content

¹⁰ Some restrictions on the placement of political or issue advertisements from outside the country may limit this ability.

that has already been well received. Resources should not be expended trying to make unpopular content popular. For more information on promoted posts, visit [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

EMBs wishing to buy ads on social media should familiarize themselves with any special conditions the platforms might impose on political content. Conditions include additional verification procedures the advertiser must fulfill and abiding by any quiet periods mandated at the national level. These conditions generally apply to political parties and advocacy groups focused on political issues. It is unclear whether EMBs may be subject to the same conditions, which vary based on the platform and the country the ads target. For example, Twitter generally places strict limits on political advertising. However, it also maintains some exceptions for EMBs: “In limited cases, Twitter has approved Electoral Regulators to promote informational content about election results within their jurisdictions. Twitter believes this content supports election integrity efforts and serves the public conversation.”¹¹ Policies related to political advertising tend to be revised frequently. Here are links to the policies on political content at [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

Additional resources on the larger, general suite of ad products for each platform are available here:

- [Facebook and Instagram](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [YouTube](#)

Not All Files Belong on Social Media

Social media accepts most media formats, including text, images, animations, audio and video. However, just because it is technically possible to post a digital item to social media does not necessarily mean social media is the right environment for hosting it. A full-page newspaper ad uploaded as a JPEG file will likely not be legible on a mobile phone. And outside of YouTube, a half-hour video recording would stand out (in a negative way) for its length among shorter-form content more frequently consumed by users.

The content posted to social media should feel native to the platform. A newspaper ad could be simplified into a streamlined image that focuses on one main point and that borrows just one or two design elements from the original file. Alternatively, separate parts of the larger image could be broken down into discrete posts and stitched together within an Instagram Story or Twitter thread. See [this Twitter thread on COVID-19 guidelines from the governor of a U.S. state](#) that excels at using small, simple, separated images appropriate to the platform.

Meanwhile, an extended video recording could be distilled into four or five 10-second highlight clips and assembled together inside an Instagram Story or Twitter Moment. The clips could also be joined together as a minute-long reel with title cards for a post on IGTV, an Instagram app for longer videos.

Audience as Force Multipliers

A way to increase the potential reach of a message is by enlisting online audiences in the process of content creation.

¹¹ <https://business.twitter.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-content-policies/political-content/faqs.html>

Let's take a hypothetical example where an EMB wants to encourage voters to bring their own pens or other implements to the voting booth as a means of limiting contact with communal tools, as had typically been used in elections before the COVID-19 pandemic.

A graphic produced by the EMB reminding people to bring their own pens, no matter how attractively produced, has a maximum reach defined in part by the number of people that follow the EMB's account. There is one account with "N" number of followers producing one piece of content.

But, if the EMB were to hold a photo contest with the goal of encouraging people to "bring your pen, leave your mark" on Election Day, there could be 1,000 accounts that together produce 1,000 pieces of content that will collectively be seen by 1,000 times "N" people. A modest prize (not necessarily a monetary one) can attract entrants. A hashtag that contains both "pen" and "elections" would be helpful for framing the contest. Possible themes include art on the theme of community/democracy, calligraphy that spells out the hashtags or ballpoint pen sketches that illustrate an aspect of voting. Volunteer celebrity guest judges from the arts and entertainment field, who in turn would be expected to spread word of the contest on their social media accounts, could help boost interest. A corporate sponsor whose business ties into the theme could help promote the contest and furnish the prize.

Analogous ideas could be applied to any granular aspect of the voting process. The detail above is merely intended to outline how enlisting the participation of the general public, well-known individuals and corporate sponsors can multiply the promotional capabilities of an EMB.

Prioritize Accessibility

The accessibility of digital content should be considered throughout the design and implementation of a social media strategy. The major social media platforms have recently made several accessibility upgrades, especially related to automatic captioning of video content and the provision of alt-image description fields. Social media managers should use these features whenever possible while being mindful that computer-generated captions will still need to be reviewed for accuracy. If automatic captioning is not yet supported for a particular language, captions can still be uploaded as separate files, typically using the SRT format, or burned into the video frames.

Social media managers should also pay attention to text accessibility. Text on social media – brimming with hashtags, emojis and nonconventional punctuation – is marked by informality and linguistic experimentation. Unfortunately, screen readers can sometimes have trouble interpreting these innovations. Overall, adhering to conventional spelling and punctuation standards is advised. However, there are methods available to address some potential issues. Here are two examples:

- Emojis are OK but do not use them to replace essential text. The first of the following two sentences is preferred.

Time🕒 is running out to vote 📬 by mail 🗳️.
 🕒 is running out to 📬 by 🗳️.

- Capitalize the first letter of each word in a hashtag, so it is easier for screen readers to interpret (e.g., #VoteByMail, instead of #votebymail).

4

Live Video Events

Live Video Events

This section covers best practices for live video events, a format available on each of the social media platforms covered in this paper.

Common live video events include Q&A sessions, interviews and discussions. The following guidelines focus on Q&A events as the inherent interactivity of Q&A makes it popular with audiences.

Recommendations

Hosts should publicize all events at least a few days in advance. In the publicity materials for Q&A sessions, hosts should make the following details clear:

- The topic and the types of questions that will be fielded
- Where, when and how the audience can pose questions
- Date and time when the host will go live to answer questions
- Official hashtags should be distinct and customized for the event. Generic hashtags – e.g., #COVID19 – would make it difficult to find and organize questions. Preview desired hashtags to ensure they are sufficiently distinctive and not associated with problematic content.

Before an event starts, a host should review submitted questions, select the ones they will answer and prepare responses. While preparation is essential, a host should avoid sounding overly scripted. A host can set a deadline for question submissions or they can continue to field newly submitted questions while an event is live. While internet culture differs from country to country, audiences are generally aware that hosts are unable to answer every submitted question, so EMBs should not feel compelled to answer every submission.

Depending on the sensitivity of the political situation in a country and the issues surrounding COVID-19, an EMB may consider setting up channels for anonymous – or at least private – question submission. An easy way to field private questions is through internal messaging systems native to the platforms (e.g., Facebook Messenger, Twitter direct messages, Instagram direct messages).

If an inadequate number of questions have been posted in advance of the event, a host should prepare some talking points in response to common questions they have fielded through other channels.

For events that are co-hosted by staff from an EMB and a partner organization, the hosts should agree on which host will field which types of questions and the maximum length of time that should be devoted to each answer.

After an event goes live, a host can invite other speakers to join the event's live feed if they are at a remote location. The specifics differ by platform, with Twitter guests limited to audio only. Guests can be dropped and added throughout an event. If a Q&A session addresses various topics, each related to a specialized area

of expertise, different guests can be invited to join at specific points to address questions relevant to their respective fields.

Events that plan to field new questions while live should consider enlisting the help of off-screen moderators. These moderators would be responsible for monitoring chat windows for questions to feed to the on-screen hosts. Without moderators, hosts would otherwise be forced to spend valuable screen time scrolling through a potentially fast-moving comment stream for appropriate questions to answer. The off-screen moderator and on-screen host would need to develop a separate communication channel so the former can feed questions to the latter.

[The online help section of the Facebook Live website provides guidance on spurring audience interaction](#) during an ongoing event.

After an event concludes, a host can save a copy of the video and make it available as a permanent piece of content on social media. They can also edit the video file into segments and select highlights for cross-posting inside new content: e.g., Facebook Posts, Instagram Stories, IGTV, Twitter Moments.

One closing caveat: Live events have a certain glamour but, to be successful, they need to be tightly organized with particular care devoted to ensuring that “dead time,” or periods without any event activity, is minimized. For in-person events, people will happily check their phones for two minutes while waiting for a microphone issue to be fixed. During a live online event, however, if a user tunes into a feed with six seconds of silence and confused paper shuffling, they will exit and search the web for something more compelling. Moderators should therefore have well-organized questions, and hosts should be prepared to address a few general topics in case a technical difficulty temporarily interrupts the flow of questions.

Additional Tools for Live Events

Premium Equipment and Paid Software

For live video events, this paper assumes a basic hardware and software setup. The features offered by the social media platforms in tandem with a laptop or smartphone provides all essential functionality. While this report does not review premium equipment or software external to the social media platforms, if a basic setup proves insufficient, EMBs can consider investing in paid software, higher-end video cameras or outside production help. For those interested in exploring add-ons, [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) provide lists of their live video partners. Many of the listed tools also integrate with the live video services on Instagram and YouTube.

Multistreaming

For live video events, several third-party software tools allow for simultaneous broadcasting to multiple platforms. (A quick search on the term “multistreaming” will yield a number of solutions.) While multistreaming affords the potential for quickly multiplying audience reach, it can prove difficult to manage multiple comment streams and engage with siloed audiences across different platforms at the same time. Depending on an EMB’s capabilities, multistreaming should be reserved for one-way broadcast events that are less interactive (e.g., formal speeches).

Additional Resources for Holding Live Video Events

- [Facebook Live, Basic Overview](#)
- [Facebook Live, More Advanced Topics](#)
- [Facebook Live With](#), which allows a broadcaster to invite outside guests
- [Instagram Live Video](#)
- [Twitter Live Video](#)
- [YouTube Live Video](#)



5

Partnership Considerations

Partnership Considerations

Value of Partnerships

Formally or informally partnering with other entities, such as civil society organizations, via social media can enable EMBs to reach new audiences, including audiences that might be less likely to seek out or engage with EMB accounts directly. It can be an opportunity to reach diverse audiences by speaking to the experiences of groups that the EMB has prioritized for outreach, such as first-time voters, overseas voters or voters from specific marginalized groups. Partnership often brings new ideas and fresh voices to content, while alleviating challenges that EMBs might face due to low follower counts on their official social media accounts.

While partnerships might help an EMB reach new and larger audiences, preserving the neutrality and reputation of the institution is critical. An EMB should conduct due diligence to ensure that affiliations do not cast doubt on the independence or impartiality of the EMB.

Limitations of Partnerships

Social media partnerships with outside institutions may be limited by a number of factors.

- **Quantity.** A partner generally is not willing to post or host an indefinite number of items at another party's behest.
- **Editorial Control.** The partner may enforce editorial constraints, reserving the right to review and make edits to content before posting it.
- **Format.** The third party may limit the partnership to certain media (e.g., posts only; no events).
- **Platform.** They may also decide to limit the partnership to a restricted subset of the social media platforms where they maintain a presence.

EMBs therefore need to hold discussions at the outset to understand any conditions a partner may impose and let that help inform the content strategy. If a partnership is limited to three "pieces," for example, it might be prudent to focus on a few impactful events or pinned stories, rather than a smattering of offhand, less durable posts.

Platform and Content Selection When Working With Partners

Additional tips and strategies for working with partners include:

- In initial discussions with a partner, EMBs should obtain information regarding the engagement levels the partner sees on the platforms where it is active and the types of content that have tended to perform well with their audiences. Any advice given in this paper or presented in website articles about social media in general should be superseded by the partner's direct knowledge of the distinct attributes and behaviors exhibited by their audience.
- Reposting – whether through Facebook shares or retweets – should generally be reserved for amplifying the reach of content with proven popularity. If a partner only agrees to republish a limited number of posts, EMBs should publish first on their own account and assess the relative level of engagement a post receives. Reposting should not be used to try and force the distribution of content that has previously demonstrated weak engagement levels. EMBs can use their own account as a testing ground to determine the material worthy of promoting through cooperative arrangements with third parties. Material developed for a specific audience that the EMB is not currently reaching via their social media channels may be an exception to this guidance.
- For co-branded events, EMBs might wonder if they or their partner should be the host of record. Although there is no uniform answer, an EMB with a small number of followers that wishes to host an event under their own account should ensure they have a robust promotion strategy in place. Meanwhile, if an event is hosted under the partner's account, occasional references to the EMB's social media handles during the event can help generate new followers. In these latter instances, it might be worthwhile to employ software that enables graphic overlays on video streams so that an EMB can publicize its accounts during the event. One free open-source solution for graphic overlays is Open Broadcaster Software, available for download at obsproject.com.
- “Social media takeover” is when a guest is given authority to post content or host events on a social media account. This allows the guest to bring a fresh perspective and possibly new audiences to EMB accounts. This can also be a means to highlight underrepresented voices and build visibility and credibility with diverse audiences. EMBs need to establish clear guidelines to safeguard their neutrality and reputation. Conducting an internet search of the term “social media takeover” will yield additional guidance on effective ways to use this approach.

Partnering on Events and Content Distribution

EMBs can partner with popular accounts to help disseminate messaging on the electoral process. Partners should ideally be perceived as politically unbiased. Or, instead of expecting absolute neutrality among potential partners, an EMB could pursue a big-tent strategy that consciously integrates people and organizations from across the political spectrum to defuse any perceptions of one-sidedness.

Partner selection may be informed by current events. For example, starting in 2020, public health authorities (PHAs) in many countries started to amass significant followings on social media, as people sought out credible information sources regarding COVID-19. Without an immediate crisis driving new followers to their accounts, EMBs typically have less reach on these platforms. By co-creating content and publishing it in concert on each other's accounts or by holding joint online events (e.g., live Q&A sessions), EMBs can take advantage

of the wider subscriber bases PHAs may command to distribute important messages related to elections and COVID-19 risk minimization. Despite the imbalance in social media subscriber counts, EMBs and PHAs share an equal interest in ensuring a safe electoral process, and their mutual goals can help create a meaningful partnership.

There need not be a direct connection to the electoral process, however, for a placement or partnership to be effective. Voting is akin to a mass-market good like soap or gasoline. The owner of a soap company knows that everybody needs their product. If they could arrange for product exposure before any audience or interest group, they would take advantage of the opportunity. Likewise, Instagram accounts with a high number of followers – whether they center on sci-fi, biking, yoga or dogs – are all potential partners for a live Q&A event with EMB staff.

EMBs should meet audiences where they are. If an EMB can deliver voter education to 50 people who share a postal code at a local town hall, it should be equally willing to meet with 500 people online from across the country who share an interest in dogs. Particularly until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and in-person events are once again possible, now is a great time to push the envelope with innovative ways to engage voters online.

While the manager of a popular Instagram account on poodles may not have much to offer in the way of expertise on elections or infectious diseases, they could still preface a Q&A session with EMB staff by relating their own thoughts on the importance of voting.

Forging these partnerships, like any business development effort, will entail some rejection, but success will be determined by the absolute number of people reached and not, for example, the percentage of partnership rejections.

6

**Suggested Content
Strategies for Elections
During the COVID-19
Pandemic**

Suggested Content Strategies for Elections During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A Tone of Hope in the Time of COVID-19

EMBs must walk a fine line when detailing the modifications they plan to introduce in response to COVID-19. Paradoxically, overinforming the public about measures intended for their protection can heighten anxiety. By way of analogy, perhaps the most nerve-wracking aspect of a commercial flight experience is when the safety procedures are announced. It is important to note that the public mood in many countries is at historically pessimistic levels.

Within this context, EMBs should try to soften the edges of COVID-19 messaging. Content should project a sense of optimism, confidence and control, rather than provoke alarm, however inadvertently.

Good:

We're introducing new steps to ensure a safe Election Day for all Kenyans 📦💪
Learn more and check your voter registration here 📌

Informative Yet Slightly Disquieting:

We're working hard with medical teams to keep you safe from the threat of COVID-19.
Learn more about our efforts to minimize the risks on Election Day.

Before and After Montages

To summarize planned modifications to electoral processes in an easily digestible format, EMBs can create a pinned Instagram story using a “Before and After” theme. The story could consist of four to 10 story clips, with each containing a split-screen of two images. The one on the left would show how a specific process was conducted before COVID-19. The image on the right would show the modified procedure for the upcoming election.

7

Conclusion

Conclusion

This paper provides some helpful ways to translate broad strategy for social media campaigns into specific tactics. The operative word is “tactics”, as opposed to “tricks.” There are unfortunately no shortcuts to success in social media. There is no substitute for quality, engaging content that responds to audience need. Social media is not a magic medium. It does not miraculously make dry content interesting. Focus first on creating quality content. The social media platforms, armed with state-of-the-art artificial intelligence, demote tedious, low-value content and promote posts from people and organizations that invest in the production of high-value content. Similarly, there is no button that can automate the painstaking yet valuable work of cultivating community and responding thoughtfully to comments and questions from followers.

If your audience size and engagement do not increase after making your best efforts at building content and community, consider going out to meet audiences where they already are, by partnering with third-party accounts with dedicated and substantial followings.

On the bright side, social media provides a free, always-open testing ground for experimentation. Take advantage of the endless opportunity it affords to test out new approaches. Follow the accounts of peer organizations in other countries and successful influencers, whether individual or corporate, for a constant stream of new ideas on how to creatively engage with audiences. You do not need to start with a blank sheet of paper when devising a social media strategy.

Lastly, while elections are both a bureaucratic process and a mammoth logistical exercise, they also encompass a very human narrative, distilling the hopes and ambitions of a multitude of individuals, each with their own unique story and relationship to national politics and history. Try to imbue some of your social media activity with a sense of that human drama. Relinquish power over the microphone on occasion. Allow citizens without obvious ties to partisan groups the opportunity to convey why voting is important to them. In many instances, everyday people are the most effective spokespeople. Distribute stories in addition to information. In political arenas around the world increasingly marked by cynicism, disinformation, nihilism and negativity, a message centered on empowerment and the possibility of change has great potential to stand out, resonate and spread.

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