

**NAVY SOCIAL  
MEDIA PLAYBOOK  
*FOR LEADERS***

**2022**



For social media queries  
please email:  
**NavySM@us.navy.mil**

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## ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1400 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1400

DEC 20 2021

Public Affairs

### MEMORANDUM FOR MILITARY SERVICE CHIEFS OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS NATIONAL GUARD CHIEF OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: Core Operational Principles on the Use of Official Social Media Accounts within the Department of Defense

While the information and technological environment continue to evolve, our professional and ethical conduct must remain steadfastly aligned to the highest core principles of our service to the Nation.

The Department of Defense's (DoD) reputation for transparency rests in large part on the foundation of the Department's Principles of Information contained in DoD Directive 5122.05, "Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ATSD(PA))," and the Department's adherence to these standards. DoD's use of official social media plays an important role in ensuring a free flow of information to the public consistent with these principles. In accordance with DoD Directive 5122.05 and DoD Instruction 8170.01, "Online Information Management and Electronic Messaging," I am sharing these core principles to guide departmental use of official social media accounts and to set expectations of proper conduct for all official account holders.

The core operational social media principles are described below.

1. **Governance.** Public Affairs oversees and manages official DoD social media accounts. This ensures proper alignment with communication and information plans across all media and social media platforms.
2. **Professionalism.** All official social media content reflects upon the Department. Public Affairs Officers and social media administrators must exercise the same high standard of professional and ethical behavior on these accounts as with any other communication function or capability. Official social media accounts must not be used to promote or endorse non-Federal entities or personal financial interests.
3. **Propriety.** Information authorized and publicly released by DoD constitutes official DoD information; therefore, accuracy, appropriateness, timeliness, and proper tone are imperative.
4. **Acumen.** Official social media account administrators should have current knowledge of social media tactics, best practices, and trends, coupled with an understanding of public affairs objectives (e.g., DoD Communication Playbook) to act quickly and remain effective by properly employing social media to meet Departmental objectives in an appropriate manner.

5. **Establishment Appetite.** Establishing new official social media accounts should be carefully considered against existing accounts and platforms. More for the sake of more is not necessarily better.
6. **Transparency.** Content, including replies, will not be deleted from official accounts unless there is a factual or typographical error; violation of a law, policy, term of service, or user agreement; or a security concern. Removal of content will be publicly acknowledged and communicated to audiences to provide context and clarity of the action.
7. **Retention of Content:** DoD social media posts are agency records pursuant to the Federal Records Act (44 U.S.C Chapters 31 and 33). Public Affairs Officers and social media administrators are responsible for retaining information posted to their respective social media sites in accordance with the guidance provided by their DoD component records managers.

As leaders, public affairs practitioners, professional communicators, and public servants, we will continue to advance and improve the quality of information that we share with all DoD audiences, the news media, and the American public. These principles, coupled with a pending DoD instruction on social media usage, are necessary to sustain the trust and credibility of our message on a global information stage.



John F. Kirby

Cc:

Secretaries of the Military Departments  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Under Secretaries of Defense  
Chiefs of the Military Services  
Chief of the National Guard Bureau  
Commanders of the Combatant Commands  
General Counsel of the Department of Defense  
Chief Information Officer of the Department of Defense  
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict

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## TOPLINE: THINGS LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

*Communicating in an ever-changing environment requires that our communication be agile enough to remain effective and lands in the digital space as intended, while it resonates and informs the wider audiences we wish to reach. Social media is therefore a necessity vice a nice-to-have. Operating efficiently in the social media space means much more than “I have a Facebook account.”*

### OVERVIEW

Social media, when used effectively and responsibly, presents an opportunity to share the U.S. Navy story in an authentic, transparent, and rapid way by building relationships with a much broader audience in the online community.

Because social media is the fastest way to disseminate timely information, planning for social media should be an integral part of your communication strategy from the beginning of the planning process. When approached as an afterthought, it cannot reach its full potential and often falls flat.

Facilitating the free flow of information while preserving security, respecting privacy, and maintaining proper conduct online are critical considerations for all social media users. It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure information disclosed or shared online does not violate applicable policy or law, jeopardize operations security (OPSEC), adheres to strong identity management (IdM) best practices, and protects the safety and privacy of U.S. Government personnel and their families.

Of course, as with every communication tool, appropriate precautions, guidelines, and best practices must be developed prior to execution and for the appropriate audiences. To this end we have constructed two other guides in addition to this one -- The U.S. Navy Social Media Administrators Playbook covers platforms, describes audiences, tackles content planning, and addresses how to develop meaningful objectives to accomplish communication goals to assist your team in staying aware of the latest trends and tools in the digital space to help elevate your command’s chapter in the overarching Navy story and reach new audiences with your key messages. And the Navy Social Media Handbook for Sailors and Families covers what Sailors and their loved ones need to know regarding some of the pitfalls in the social media space and how best to avoid them and protect themselves.

This version was designed specifically with leaders in mind.

Let’s dive in!



Produced by  
The Navy Office of Information (CHINFO)

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## TO SM OR NOT TO SM... AND HOW?

### Should I Have A Social Media Presence?

There are multiple avenues on which to publish content. These spaces are referred to as social media platforms, networks, or channels. Some are widely familiar such as Facebook, and others are continuously emerging and gaining traction week to week and month to month. Not every platform is an appropriate fit for communicating your messages and/or achieving your communication objectives.

Determining which platforms to utilize largely depends on two factors:

1. Which audiences are you attempting to reach; and on which platforms do they engage?
2. Can you meet the appropriate posting frequency, content demands, and engagement responsiveness the audiences of these platforms demand?

To answer the above and determine where you should be, have your staff research each platform to determine which make sense for your available content and desired messaging. Evaluate where your efforts will have the most impact.

\*\*\* Note: Not only is it unnecessary, but it is counterproductive to maintain a presence on every social media platform. (See Platform Demographics for basic platform information and audience breakdown.)

**Quality > Quantity:** Select **quality** of content/messaging/engagement with your desired audience, over **quantity** of social media accounts.



What do you want to accomplish? What are your communication objectives? How do they move your command closer to achieving its mission? Is the level of transparency required in social media appropriate for your command and its mission? Do you have the content and personnel to routinely engage with the desired audiences?

### Do You Have the Bandwidth?

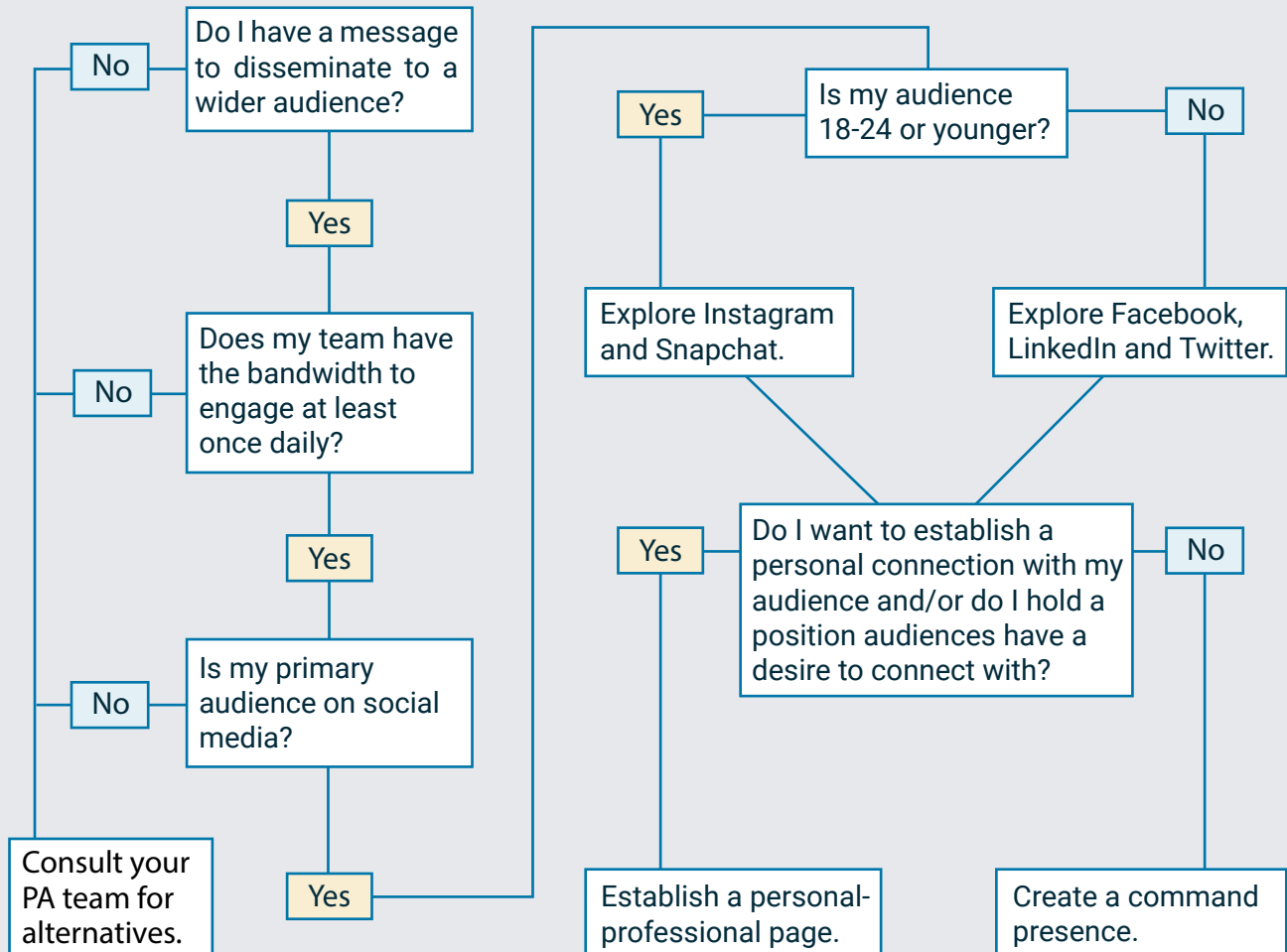
A platform is only as good and as effective as the content posted to it. It is important to have reliable access to monitor and engage audiences as necessary. Social media is not a fire-and-forget system!

When your content is infrequent, but no less important, one option is having your staff push content to more senior organizations to share — your higher command HQ or the Navy Flagship accounts managed by the Navy Office of Information (CHINFO), for example.



If you do have the staffing to publish content regularly to a platform, the next question is whether you need a personal professional page or a command presence or both? And if both, what the purpose of each will be. There should be clear communication objectives for each; the personal/professional page is more first-person with a behind the scenes tone in order to better connect with the audience whereas a command presence is more formal and not attached to a particular individual or principal.

## Decision Tree For Leaders





## Official Command Presence

An official command presence is a page listed by the name of your command and that pushes out content to tell the story of that particular command and mission writ large. These pages speak officially on behalf of that command to include news, press releases, Sailor life, and other pertinent subject matter; infusing command messages throughout.

## Personal Pages

A personal page, conversely, is a non-official page not tied in any way to the Navy or the uniform. This is your own presence for your close friends and family. Personal pages should NOT be used to announce official DoD information.

## Personal-Professional Pages

A personal-professional page is an official page where you represent yourself as an individual, but also represent your office/position in a professional capacity. For example: @SECDEF versus @LloydAustin. Professional pages should represent the institution. This is also an official page, but the difference between an official personal-professional page and an official organization page is that while they cover the same topics and messaging, the former speaks from first-person perspective and in a more personality-driven, conversational way.



Professional Page

Source: Twitter@SecDef



Personal Page

**!** This example does Not reflect a real Twitter page. For demonstration purposes only.

Leaders should be prepared for Sailors, families, the general public, etc. to reach out via direct message for emergencies, grievances or personal issues. Please consult your PA teams as to the best solution given your time constraints. Solutions may include: placing a central POC in the about section (PA Office, Public Inquiries line, etc.), disabling DMs, or referring them to the appropriate POC.

If you're considering a personal-professional page, one thing that must be kept in mind is the number of impersonation pages that will likely pop up. Though most are not cause for alarm, they can cause some angst amongst PA teams and security personnel. In order to help thwart these efforts and enable audiences to distinguish between real and fake presences, have your PA teams work to obtain page verification.





### Verification Example

Source: Twitter@USNavy

## What Is Page Verification?

Page verification is essentially a blue badge with a checkmark associated with an account that lets people know the page is authentic and verified by the platform. These blue badges appear on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and convey that a given page is a credible source for information and/or a legitimate representation of the individual or organization it claims to be. LinkedIn has worked very hard to ensure their registration process catches any imposters up front and therefore badges are not used on that platform as of yet.

## Why Get Verified?

As with all good things, bad actors can use social media for nefarious purposes. While having a presence has definite communication benefits (and is encouraged), it also carries the risk that actors will impersonate you and/or your command. More and more scams are being seen where photos are used to create imposter profiles which solicit money, information, or seek to discredit or embarrass the individual and/or the Navy.

“ One way to ensure your audiences know it’s you, is to get verified. Think of it as a “firewall” for your account, as this helps audiences distinguish between official/real pages and impersonator pages at a glance. ”

## How To Get Verified

To get your page(s) verified, have your PA team reach out to CHINFO OI-2 at **NavySM@us.navy.mil**. They will need to have your About/Bio sections fully filled out with current working links to bio pages on **Navy.mil** (for personal professional pages) or command page on **Navy.mil** (for organization pages), provide email addresses of admins to the page(s), and the URLs for the pages.

\*\*\* Please be patient as this process CAN and DOES take time, because platforms must review each presence for certain criteria. This could take from two weeks to two months depending on the platform and current events.

## Reporting Fake Pages

If you or your team notice fake/impersonator pages made in your likeness or under your command name/logo, have your team do the following:

1. Report it within the platform (for Twitter, this will yield a case number).
2. Send links to the impersonator pages as well as a link to your REAL page(s) to CHINFO, OI-2 at **NavySM@us.navy.mil** for action.
3. If this becomes a trend, please also report to NCIS.

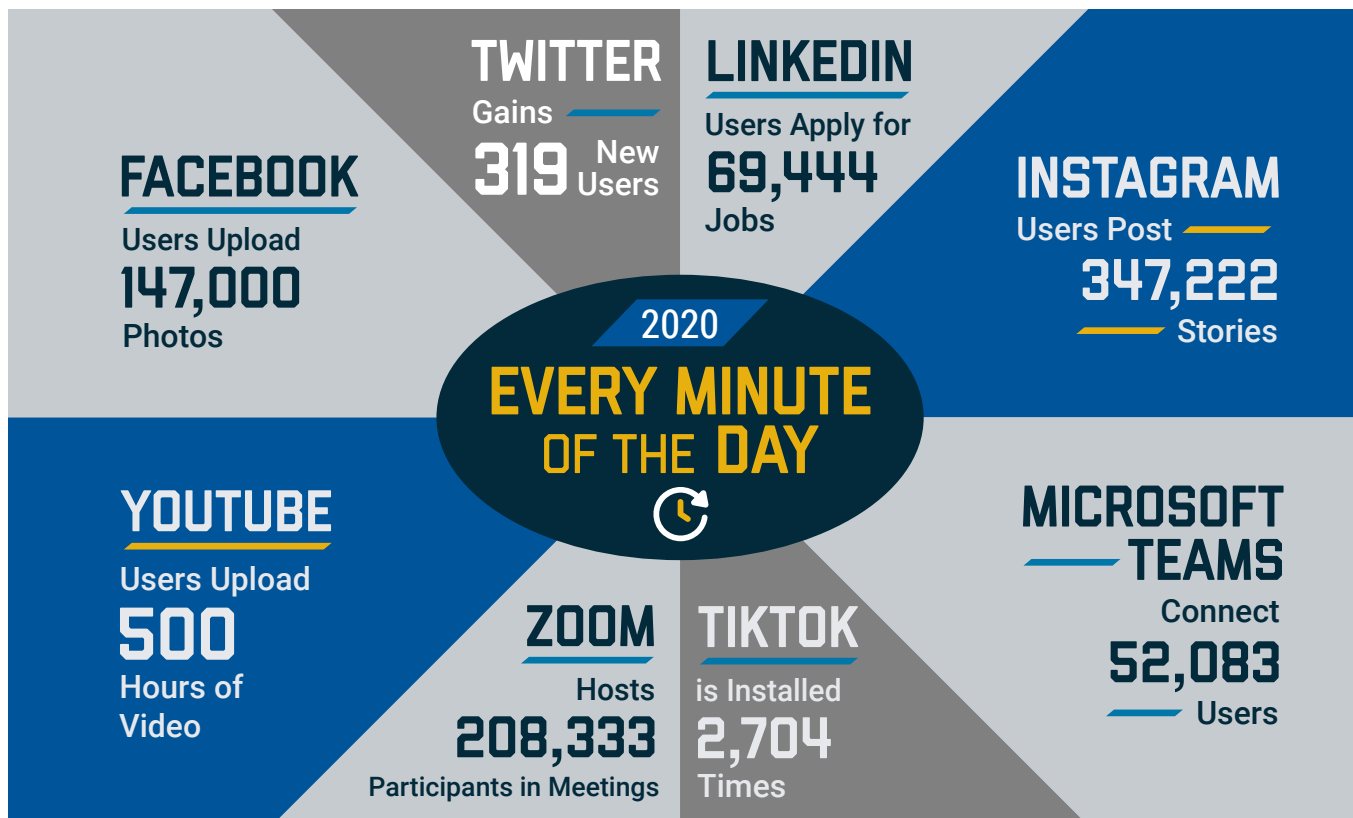


## AUDIENCES

One of the most important components of maintaining a successful and effective presence on social media is clearly defining your target audience, understanding their expectations, curiosities, and “meeting them where they’re at.” Tailor the language in your messages in such a way that your intended audience will be receptive and engaging.

### Audience-First Approach

When there were a limited number of news sources, we could package news, pitch it, get it published; and expect it to be consumed. Today, with a 24-hour news cycle, and so many different entities competing for the audiences’ attention, we must put the audience at the forefront of our planning — where do they consume information? In what mediums do they most consume/absorb information? How can I obtain and maintain their attention? This is difficult and requires continuous evaluation and innovation; and perhaps an element of risk.



Source: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/every-minute-internet-2020/>

### Who Do We Want To Talk To And Where Can We Find Them?

- **Journalists:** Journalists and celebrities often maintain a significant presence on Twitter, a fast-paced, news source and amplification platform. Though they are certainly found on other platforms. Twitter is the space in which we primarily talk to and engage with them and is where they are going for their news as well. Many use Twitter to gauge what is happening before digging deeper on other or more traditional platforms.



- **Sailors and Families:** This is age dependent. Much like their civilian counterparts, 18-34 year old Sailors are likely to be found on Instagram Reels, Snapchat, and TikTok (NOT approved for use on DoD devices), while 34+ are more likely to be found on Facebook and LinkedIn. Sailors tend to hang in the background on Facebook until issues related to pay, allowances and uniform changes arise.
- **Local Community:** Same as above; however, hashtags and geotags are very effective in connecting with your local community. Hash-tagging the town, county etc. where your command resides and/or adding location tags for special events (after they take place for OPSEC reasons; UNLESS it's an outreach event where you are hoping to boost attendance) works very well in better connecting with the local community.
- **Veterans:** We find the largest percentage of our Veteran audience on Facebook, with younger Vets gravitating a bit more to Instagram.
- **Partnership Nations/Allies:** Our allies and partners tend to engage with us most on Twitter and Instagram. Tagging their pages in your posts — during joint exercises, for example — is a great way to engage.
- **Civilian Workforce:** The Civilian workforce, much like the Sailor audience, spans all channels. However, for connecting with human resources (HR), hiring, and recruiting, LinkedIn is the best place to connect and make an impact. Most commands do not have a LinkedIn presence and LinkedIn is one area where we particularly encourage submission of information and products to CHINFO for inclusion on the U.S. Navy page.
- **Industry:** LinkedIn is where we engage most with industry, though they pay attention to Twitter as well. LinkedIn allows us to position the Navy as a thought-leader in the industrial space in areas from HR to Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM).
- **Academia:** Twitter and LinkedIn are likely the best places to reach faculty. (Although, University and college brands overall have become more actively engaged where their student audiences live — Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)
- **Congress/HASC/SASC:** Twitter is the best place to reach these audiences.
- **Potential Recruits:** We find potential recruits engaging with us most heavily on Instagram, and some on Snapchat. Potential recruits seek positive spaces on which to engage and ask questions of those who have served to get a sense of what to expect. Creative and humorous memes do particularly well with this audience.



#### **Adversaries and Competitors Are Listening...**

We **MUST** remain vigilant and be aware of these audiences as well. Their monitoring and consumption of messages should be taken into consideration when planning content on platforms. Any mission-related information you voluntarily post on social media (personal accounts included) can potentially assist the adversary's intelligence collection activities. Additionally, misinformation and disinformation attempts from adversaries using bots and/or memes **MUST** be countered with factual and consistent information.



## Tone and Voice

Just as you likely speak differently with your spouse or friends than you would, say, to your parents – the way in which you communicate on each platform should vary by the audience that is there. The tone and the voice you hone on each respective platform should speak to the primary audience of that platform in a way in which they will understand it and most positively receive it. This applies to the post copy, the content itself, and the responses to comments on a given platform. There are many ways to get a point across; and though the voice will vary between platforms, your key messages should remain consistent.



Use clear public language, get rid of mil-speak and consult your PA staff when in doubt.

## Audience vs. Platform

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Snapchat	TikTok
Journalists						
Sailors & Families						
Local Community						
Veterans						
Partnership Nations & Allies						
Civilian Workforce						
Industry						
Academia						
Congress / HASC / SASC						
Potential Recruits						

*Selecting the right voice for a given platform:* People do their best work when they are interested in what they are doing. Though not required, a passion and interest in social media can hold the key to being effective in the space. Many times the most junior person is tossed the responsibility to “do social media”. This is not always the best approach. Though it is helpful to be a “social media native”, our recommendation is that you ask who has an interest in social and go from there. Those who have an interest will likely excel in the space and continue to innovate and try to find creative ways to communicate/connect with their audiences.



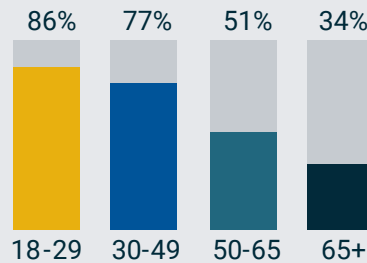
## PLATFORM DEMOGRAPHICS

Generalities and platform by number. What are each platform's demographics and culture? These infographics will give you a sense of where these audiences live, you can better provide guidance to your team on where you would like to have a presence.

### Facebook

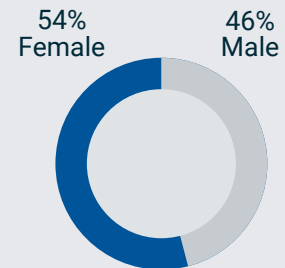
Facebook is a social networking website where users can post comments, share photographs, and post links to news or other interesting content on the web, chat live, and watch short-form video and live event streaming. Shared content can be made publicly accessible, or it can be shared only among a select group of friends or family, or with even a single person.

#### Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age

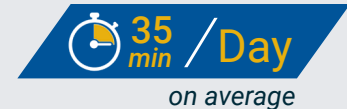


Monthly Users  
2.7 Billion

#### By Gender



#### Time Spent

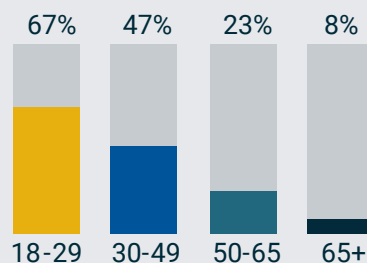


Demographics source: *The 2021 Social Media Users Demographics Guide* | Khoros

### Instagram

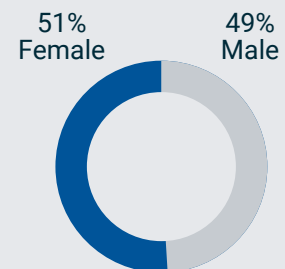
A photo and video sharing app that has adapted to include an ephemeral content feature (modeled after Snapchat) called Stories and its newest feature Reels (modeled after TikTok). Instagram makes sharing really simple and includes a powerful hash-tagging system which allows users and brands to reach beyond their audiences and engage in broader conversations; as well as track against their own hash tagged content.

#### Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age

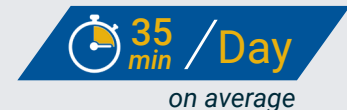


Monthly Users  
1 Billion  
Daily Users  
500 Million

#### By Gender



#### Time Spent



#### Most Followers

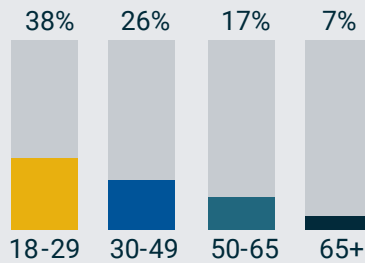




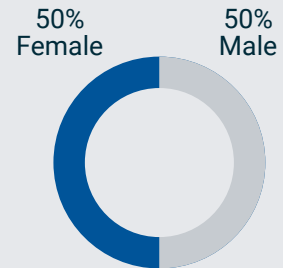
## Twitter

An online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets. Tweeting is posting short messages for anyone who follows you on Twitter, with the hope that your words are useful and interesting to someone in your audience. Another description of Twitter and tweeting might be microblogging. Twitter is the place to find out about what's happening in the world right now. Whether you're interested in music, sports, politics, news, celebrities, or every-day moments — Twitter enables you to see and join in on what's happening/trending now.

Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age



By Gender

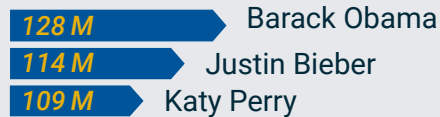


Monthly Users  
330 Million

Time Spent



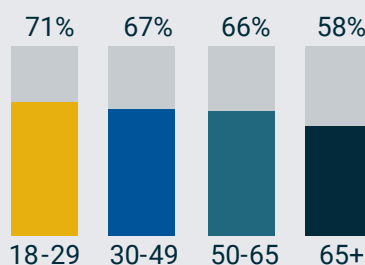
Most Followers



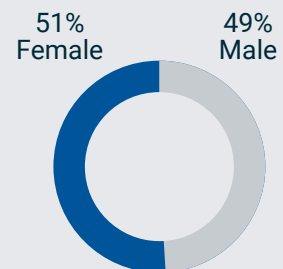
## YouTube

A free video-sharing website and the second largest search engine behind Google Search. All you need is a Google account to create a YouTube account to watch videos or create your own content.

Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age



By Gender



Monthly Users  
2 Billion

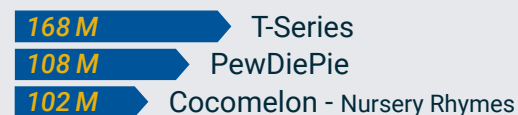
Time Spent



Additional Facts

- ★ 81% of people ages 15-25 use YouTube
- ★ 1 billion hours of video is viewed each day
- ★ Available in 80 languages

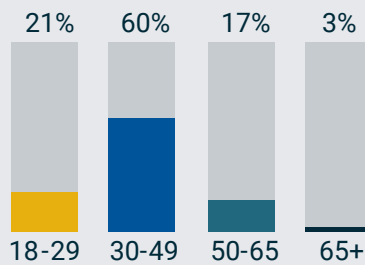
Most Followers



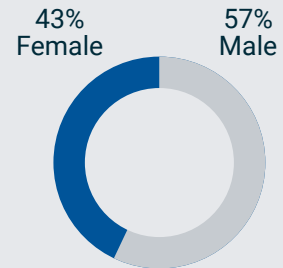
## LinkedIn

Considered the social media platform for the working professional, young entrepreneur, or networking individual. LinkedIn users leverage job opportunities, connect with colleagues, and expand their professional network. Successful content on LinkedIn features thought pieces on technological advancements, inspiring anecdotes of success, and connecting like minded individuals in similar interest. LinkedIn currently has a less monetized algorithm than Facebook/Instagram/Twitter, therefore the organic reach is wider.

Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age



By Gender



Monthly Users  
260 Million

Time Spent



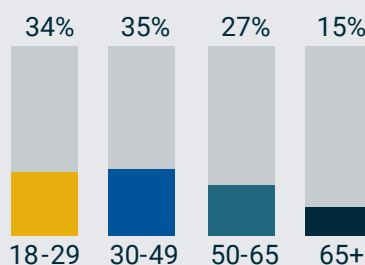
Most Followers



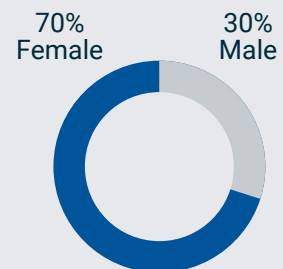
## Pinterest

A visual discovery engine for finding ideas like recipes, home and style inspiration, and more. Your home feed is the center of Pinterest. It's where you'll find ideas, or Pins, with recommendations based on your interests, as well as what people you follow on Pinterest are saving.

Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age



By Gender



Monthly Users  
322 Million

Time Spent



### Additional Facts

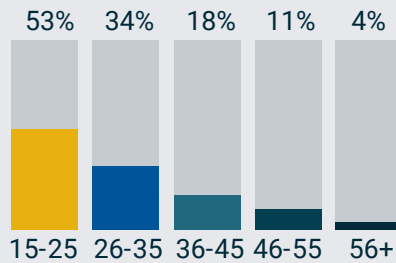
- ★ 90% of weekly pinners used Pinterest to make purchase decisions
- ★ Pinterest drives 33% more referral traffic to shopping sites than Facebook
- ★ People who travel are 2X more likely to use Pinterest



## Snapchat

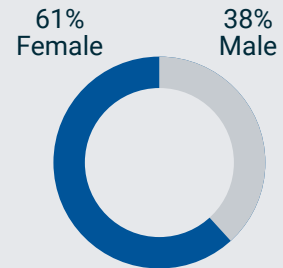
Both a messaging platform and a social network. It can't be used from a desktop and opens directly to a camera which makes it unique to other platforms. There is no feed or commentary. Just streams of ephemeral content, or moments in time that may be shared directly to another user to vanish or to your "story" for 24 hours. Snapchat is particularly popular amongst teens and young adults. A 2018 Pew report showed that 49% of Snapchat users visit the app several times a day.

Percentage of People Who Use Platform, By Age

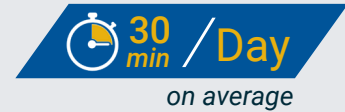


Monthly Users  
381 Million

By Gender:



Time Spent

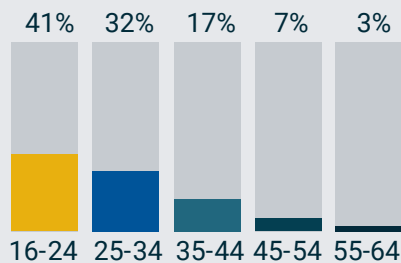


## Twitch

A live-streaming platform for gamers and other lifestyle casters that supports building communities around a shared and streamable interest.

Twitch streamers "broadcast" their gameplay or activity by sharing their screen with fans and subscribers who can hear and watch them live. There are both free and paid versions of Twitch, with paid tiers removing ads and giving users access to more robust social, streaming, and storage features.

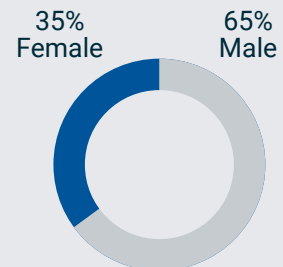
Age of Platform Users



Monthly Streamers  
9.5 Million

Monthly Users  
2.9 Million

By Gender:



Time Spent



### Additional Facts

- ★ Twitch has market share of 67% content hours watched, and 90% of content streamed.

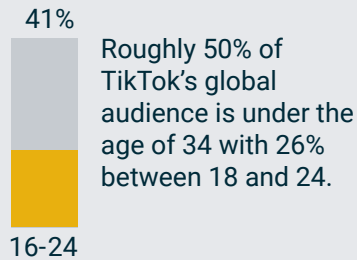


## TikTok

A short-form video sharing app with a feed that features an endless slew of micro-videos made by its users. Videos can be a maximum of 15 seconds long, with the option to combine videos for a 60 second long compilation. The app is known for its charming, often hilarious content featuring real people and real, home-made videos.

Currently not approved by DoD.

### Age of Platform Users



### Total Users

800 Million

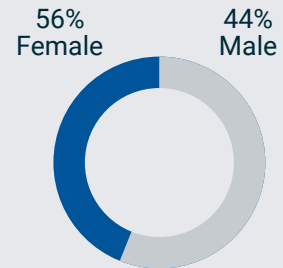
### Total Downloads

1.65 Billion

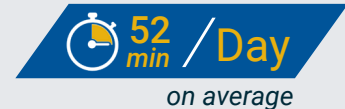
### Daily Views

1 Billion

### By Gender:



### Time Spent



### Additional Facts

- ★ 26.5 million monthly active users are from the USA
- ★ In less than 18 months, the number of US adult TikTok users grew 5.5 times.
- ★ 90% of TikTok users visit the app more than once per day
- ★ TikTok is available in 150 markets, in 75 languages
- ★ It's currently the third most downloaded non-gaming app of the year

## Clubhouse

An audio-based social media app. The company describes itself as "a new type of social product based on voice [that] allows people everywhere to talk, tell stories, develop ideas, deepen friendships, and meet interesting new people around the world."

This app allows users to gather in audio chat rooms to discuss various topics, whether it's sports, wellness, or Bitcoin. Rooms are usually divided into two groups: those who are talking and those who are listening (participants can see a list of everyone who is in a conversation, and the numbers sometimes run into the thousands).

Unlike Twitter, Clubhouse is a closed, hierarchical platform: A moderator oversees discussions and has the ability to let someone chime in or to kick out the unruly. In addition to the "clubs" sorted by topic, two or more users can join together and start their own chat room. Essentially, a podcast with audience participation.

### Additional Facts

- ★ Clubhouse has over six million users, most of which were added in early 2021
- ★ Over ten million people have downloaded the app
- ★ Celebrities such as Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, Drake, Kevin Hart and Chris Rock have all hosted conversations on the app



## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

### The Art of Storytelling

Times have changed, with new apps and trends popping up daily. But the art of storytelling remains the same. What makes a good story/a good storyteller remains the same. What elements of storytelling you already know can be applied to the social space? What mediums can you use to bring a story to life in an attention-grabbing and engaging way?

### Social-First Planning

“ If a tree falls in a forest and no one Tweeted, Facebooked, Instagrammed, or posted a #TreeFallChallenge to TikTok, . . . it didn't happen. ”

One thing that has changed is that communication has been flipped on its head. Where media used to lead the news cycle; with people posting and reposting what they share. The media is now finding much of their news on social media, retweeting and sharing or repurposing stories they find on Twitter or a story gone viral.

So how does that apply to our communication planning? Well, too often social media is an afterthought, an “oh yeah, can you put this on social media, too?” When looking at planning it is important to have social media in your initial consideration set. How (or will) this play in the social media space?

Example: Visuals. Let's say a conference is planned and the day comes and 15 photos posted to Facebook of a person at a podium. This gets little to no engagement and falls flat because it's not visually interesting or intriguing and because no one thought of the visuals or social media at the start of planning for that event. If social media is kept top of mind at the beginning, interactive/experiential elements can be added to that conference — like a photo booth or interactive comment wall that grows on a time-lapse photo as people post stickies to a wall — or there are quote graphics pulled from the speech the speaker is to give that get scheduled and posted shortly after their portion concludes.

## THE AGE OF THE INFLUENCER



What is an influencer? **One who exerts influence:** a person who inspires or guides the actions of others; often, specifically: a person who is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it on social media.

More and more, brands are beginning to rely on influencer marketing. That is, having someone with a large and/or engaged following in a given area carry your messaging for you to their own audiences in an organic way. These are usually paid partnerships but, with service branches, many influencers are willing to participate for brand equity alone.



If your team brings you a list of influencers they'd like to reach out to in order to amplify their message or event, here are some questions to ask:

1. Have they been vetted? That means has your team looked at their previous post history to ensure their feed isn't politicized one way or the other, that they have not posted anything derogatory with regard to the U.S. Navy, that they are verifiably who they claim to be.
2. Do their audience demographics include the audiences you are attempting to reach.
3. What level of influencer are they? What is their estimated reach? And do they have an organic tie to the subject matter being discussed or the U.S. Navy. Bigger isn't always better. Someone might have a very large audience, but not be a good brand fit; while another influencer might have a smaller audience but in a very engaged niche that reaches the target and/or is better aligned to the messages you're wanting to convey and the U.S. Navy. Example: Smarter Everyday YouTuber paired with ICEX.

## **DOD PERSONNEL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY: THE HATCH ACT**

### DoD Personnel and Political Activity: The Hatch Act

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) routinely receives questions from federal employees and others about when the use of social media could violate the Hatch Act. Social media platforms are easily accessible to most employees while at work — on computers, smartphones, or other devices. OSC has created this guidance to help federal employees understand what the Hatch Act does and does not.

In general, all federal employees may use social media and comply with the Hatch Act if they remember the following three prohibitions:

1. On Duty or in the Workplace Prohibition — Employees may not engage in political activity while on duty or in the federal workplace.
2. 24/7 Prohibition — Employees may not knowingly solicit, accept, or receive a political contribution for a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.
3. 24/7 Prohibition — Employees may not use their official authority or influence to affect the outcome of an election.

**Military Personnel:** DoD has a longstanding policy of encouraging military personnel to carry out the obligations of citizenship. However, AD members will not engage in partisan political activities and all military personnel will avoid the inference that their political activities imply or appear to imply DoD sponsorship, approval or endorsement of a political candidate, campaign or cause.

**Civilian Personnel:** For DoD civilians, participation in political activity is regulated by a number of sources: the Hatch Act (5 U.S.C. §§ 7321 - 7326), implementing regulations (5 C.F.R. § 733 and 5 C.F.R. § 734), as well as DoD policy. For purposes of the Hatch Act, political activity is defined as "an activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office or partisan political group". Because application of the rules may vary depending on an employee's position or office, it is extremely important that employees who are considering engaging in political activity know which rules apply.





With regard to civilian employees, there are two sets of restrictions for three groups of employees. The first and more restrictive set of restrictions applies to: (1) individuals appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate and individuals serving in non-career SES positions; and (2) career members of the SES, contract appeals board members, and all employees of the National Security Agency (NSA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Geo-Spatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). The second and more lenient set of restrictions applies to all other employees (including Schedule C political appointees).

Employees in Groups 1 and 2 are prohibited from taking an active part in partisan political management or political campaigns and are referred to as "further restricted" employees.

For further details on the above please see Appendix B.

## CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You are now armed with what you need to know in order to steer your team in the right direction in the social space.

See glossary and Appendix for additional information. For further guidance, please refer to the Administrator Playbook and/or Sailor and Families Handbook; or reach out to OI-2, CHINFO, at **NavySM@us.navy.mil**

GO NAVY!



# GLOSSARY

**Avatar:** A static or moving image or other graphic representation that acts as a proxy for a person or is associated with a specific digital account or identity, as on the internet: Not the blue animated characters, an avatar is another word for profile picture or icon that visually represents and identifies your organization on the social media platform.

**Bio:** Biography, or short description in profile that easily describes who and what your organization is about. Recommend sharing website links, common hashtags, contact information, or disclaimers in this section.

**Bots:** A software program that can execute commands, reply to messages, or perform routine tasks, as online searches, either automatically or with minimal human intervention (often used in combination): *a social media bot retweeting certain posts; a customer service chatbot to answer product questions*. Especially prevalent on Twitter, a bot is an automated account run by software capable of posting content or interacting with other users. Some bots pretend to be humans.

**Catfishing:** When a person assumes a false identity or personality on the internet, especially on social media websites, as to deceive, manipulate, or swindle.

**Command Presence:** A profile on a social networking website which is considered distinct from an actual user personal or personal-professional profile in that it is created and managed by at least one other registered user, usually Public Affairs staff or Mass Communication Specialist as a representation of a non-personal online identity for that command. These pages are listed by command and/or ship name vice and individual and push out content to tell the story of that particular command/ship and its mission writ large.

**Content:** Something that is to be expressed through some medium, as speech, writing, or any of the various arts.

**Cover Photo:** A header image on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube that tells people what your organization is about at first glance upon coming to your page.

**DM:** Direct message, or not publicly posted communication between two accounts. Keep in mind, however, that this correspondence is only private to the extent that one user can screenshot and publish the conversation.

**Engagements:** Social media engagement measures the public shares, likes and comments for an online business' social media efforts. Engagement has historically been a common metric for evaluating social media performance. How people react to the content, including likes, comments, retweets, shares, reactions, and more.

**Ephemeral Content:** Sometimes called "disappearing content," these social media posts delete automatically after a set amount of time has lapsed. Instagram and Snapchat stories disappear after 24 hours. However, content is also susceptible to screen recording or other methods of indefinitely capturing the content.



**Feed:** A social media feed is an updated list of all the new content posted by the user follows on social media platforms. This stream of content published by other users, most often the “homepage” and most common way to see and engage with posts. Rather than being purely chronological, most social media feeds are controlled by an algorithm.

**Hashtag:** A word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media websites and applications, especially Twitter, to identify digital content on a specific topic.

**Header:** Your header photo is the **image that spans the top of your Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube profile page**. It’s quite a bit larger than your profile photo so make sure to save it at the highest resolution possible. Because you have more room to be creative with this picture and it will likely be the first thing your visitors see, make it something captivating.

**Identity Management:** IdM and IAM are terms often used interchangeably, however identity management is more focused on a user identity (or username), and the roles, permissions, and groups that user belongs to. IdM also focuses on protecting identities through a variety of technologies such as passwords, biometrics, multi-factor authentication, and other digital identities.

**Impressions:** How many people potentially saw the post; how many times the post was shown in users’ feeds, can be duplicated, and different social media networks define (and therefore calculate) this metric a little differently.

**Influencer:** **One who exerts influence:** a person who inspires or guides the actions of others; often, specifically: a person who is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it on social media.

**Internet Sites:** Any website or web page.

**Mentions:** **Social mentions include any mention of your organization or personal brand** on social media. It’s important to remember this doesn’t only include the mentions that tag your page. There are tons of conversations about your organization on social media that you aren’t receiving notifications for. Keeping an eye on mentions, following what your audience is saying; more passive approach than social listening.

**Microinfluencer:** A micro-influencer is someone who has between **1,000 to 100,000 followers**. Micro-influencers focus on a specific niche or area and are generally regarded as an industry expert or topic specialist. “[Micro-influencers] have stronger relationships than a typical influencer.

**Personal Page:** Personal web pages are world wide web pages created by an individual to contain content of a personal nature rather than content pertaining to a company, organization or institution.

**Personal-Professional Page:** A page where you (or your team) represent(s) yourself as yourself; but in a professional capacity; tied to your official Navy title and in your official Navy capacity.

**Platform:** Also may be referred to as a social media “network” or social media “channel”.

**Post:** A post is a message, such as text or photos, published online by a user while referring to a message board, comment section, or social network.



**Reach:** **Post reach** is the number of people who saw a specific post in their news feed. **Page reach** is the number of people who saw any of your post content during a given period of time (daily, weekly or monthly).

**Reels:** **Reels** was created as a new way for users to create and discover short, entertaining videos on the platform. Unlike other short-form video platforms, **Reels** are 15 or 30-second multi-clip videos that you can record and edit them with audio, effects, and creative tools in a similar way to TikTok.

**Social Listening:** Tracking conversations around key topics and terms related to your brand, gathering mentions, comments, hashtags, and posts to provide insight on conversations surrounding your brand.

**Social Monitoring:** In basic terms, social media monitoring is the act of using a tool to listen to what is being said across the internet; monitoring media not just from traditional publishers, but on millions of social sites too.

**Stories:** See *Ephemeral Content*.

**Target Audience:** A particular group at which a film, book, advertising campaign, etc., is aimed.



# APPENDIX A: CONTROLLED UNCLASSIFIED INFORMATION TOOLKIT

What is CUI?

- Government created or owned UNCLASSIFIED information that must be safeguarded from unauthorized disclosure.
- An overarching term representing many difference categories, each authorized by one or more law, regulation, or Government-wide policy.
- Information requiring specific security measures indexed under one system across the Federal Government.

Why is CUI important?

- The establishment of CUI was a watershed moment in the Department's information security program, formally acknowledging that certain types of UNCLASSIFIED information are extremely sensitive, valuable to the United States, sought after by strategic competitors and adversaries, and often have legal safeguarding requirements.
- Unlike with classified national security information, DoD personnel at all levels of responsibility and across all mission areas receive, handle, create, and disseminate CUI.
- CUI policy provides a uniform marking system across the Federal Government that replaces a variety of agency-specific markings, such as FOUO, LES, SBU, etc.

Where did CUI come from?

- Executive Order 13556 established CUI on November 4, 2010.  
<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-11-09/pdf/2010-28360.pdf>
- Part 2002 of 32 Code of Federal Regulations prescribed Government-wide implementation standards on September 14, 2016.  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2017-title32-vol6/pdf/CFR-2017-title32-vol6-part2002.pdf>
- DoD Instruction 5200.48, "Controlled Unclassified Information," established DoD CUI policy on March 6, 2020.  
<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/520048p.pdf>

With the issuance of DoD Instruction 5200.48, the Department is proud to be an early adopter of CUI Program requirements.



# APPENDIX B: POLITICAL ACTIVITY

## Overarching Guidance

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) routinely receives questions from federal employees and others about when the use of social media could violate the Hatch Act. Social media platforms are easily accessible to most employees while at work — on computers, smartphones, or other devices. OSC has created this guidance to help federal employees understand what the Hatch Act does and does not allow when using social media.<sup>1</sup>

In general, all federal employees may use social media and comply with the Hatch Act if they remember the following three prohibitions:

- (1) On Duty or in the Workplace Prohibition — Employees may not engage in political activity while on duty or in the federal workplace.
- (2) 24/7 Prohibition — Employees may not knowingly solicit, accept, or receive a political contribution for a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.
- (3) 24/7 Prohibition — Employees may not use their official authority or influence to affect the outcome of an election.

Some employees are considered “further restricted” under the Hatch Act.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the three prohibitions above, further restricted employees are subject to a fourth prohibition:

- (4) 24/7 Prohibition — Further restricted employees may not take an active part in partisan political management or campaigning.

As such, further restricted employees may not engage in political activity on behalf of or in concert with a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group. For instance, taking an “active part” would include: distributing material created by a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group; speaking at a political rally organized or sponsored by such entities; or serving as a campaign volunteer.

This guidance will discuss each of the above prohibitions in turn. The last prohibition discussed is applicable only to further restricted employees. There are some very limited exceptions to these prohibitions for certain employees in specific positions and, when in doubt, employees are encouraged to contact OSC at [hatchact@osc.gov](mailto:hatchact@osc.gov) or (202) 804-7002 with any additional questions.

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<sup>1</sup> This Hatch Act Guidance supersedes OSC’s prior guidance on social media in 2012 and 2015.

<sup>2</sup> You are a further restricted employee under the Hatch Act if you are a career member of the Senior Executive Service, an administrative law judge, a contract appeals board member, an administrative appeals judge, or if you work in one of the following agencies, or agency components: (1) Central Intelligence Agency; (2) Criminal Division of the Department of Justice; (3) Defense Intelligence Agency; (4) Election Assistance Commission; (5) Federal Bureau of Investigation; (6) Federal Election Commission; (7) Merit Systems Protection Board; (8) National Geospatial- Intelligence Agency; (9) National Security Agency; (10) National Security Council; (11) National Security Division of the Department of Justice; (12) Office of Criminal Investigation of the Internal Revenue Service; (13) Office of the Director of National Intelligence; (14) Office of Investigative Programs of the United States Customs Service; (15) Office of Law Enforcement of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; (16) Office of Special Counsel; or (17) Secret Service. See 5 U.S.C. § 7323(b)(2)-(3).





**(1) ON DUTY OR IN THE WORKPLACE PROHIBITION** – Employees may not engage in political activity while on duty or in the workplace.<sup>3</sup> Political activity is an activity directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.

**(A) Posting, Liking,<sup>4</sup> Sharing, or Retweeting Partisan Messages**

**Rule:** Employees may not post, like, share, or retweet a message or comment in support of or opposition to a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group while on duty or in the workplace, even if their social media account is private.

**Example 1:** You are at home after work. You may like or tweet a message encouraging others to vote for your favored candidate in a partisan race.

**Example 2:** You are on duty and looking at Facebook on your personal cell phone. You see that a friend posted a message encouraging others to vote for members of a certain political party. You may not like or share that message while you are on duty.

**Example 3:** You stay at work during your lunch break and check Facebook on your personal cell phone. A Facebook friend posted a message about an upcoming event supporting a candidate in a partisan race. Even if you are not in a pay status during your lunch break, you may not like or share that post while you are in the workplace.

**Example 4:** You are teleworking from home and on your lunch break in which you are not in a pay status. You are looking at Facebook on your personal iPad and see that a friend posted a message about an upcoming event supporting a political party. Because you are on your lunch break and not in a federal building, you may like or share that post.

**Example 5:** You are teleworking from home and looking at Twitter on your personal computer. You see that the President tweeted an endorsement of a congressional candidate. You may not like or retweet that message while on duty.<sup>5</sup>

**Example 6:** You are teleworking and looking at Facebook on your personal cell phone. You see that a Senate candidate posted a message asking for votes on Election Day. You may not post a comment in support of that message while on duty.

**(B) Liking, Following, or Friending Candidates or Partisan Groups**

**Rule:** Employees may not like, follow, or friend the social media account of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group while on duty or in the workplace.

**Example 1:** You are at home after work and find the Instagram account of a partisan political group. You may follow them on Instagram and like their posts.

**Example 2:** You are at work and looking at your private Facebook account on your personal iPad. A Facebook friend shared the post of a candidate in a partisan race announcing that he or she received an endorsement. You may not like, follow, or friend the candidate's Facebook page while on duty or in the workplace.

**(C) Liking, Following, or Friending the Official Social Media Accounts of Government Officials**

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<sup>3</sup> Employees also may not engage in political activity while wearing a uniform or official insignia identifying the office or employee's position, or while using a government owned or leased vehicle.

<sup>4</sup> Liking includes the use of other emojis or reactions, such as those in the "like" function of Facebook.

<sup>5</sup> The President and Vice President are not covered under the Hatch Act and, as a result, are not subject to its social media restrictions.



Rule: Employees may continue to follow, be friends with, or like the official social media accounts of government officials after those officials become candidates for reelection.

Example 1: You follow the official government Twitter account of the President or a Member of Congress, who has just announced their candidacy for reelection. You may continue to follow these official accounts.

#### (D) Using an Alias on Social Media

Rule: Employees may not use an alias on social media to engage in any activity that is directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group while on duty or in the workplace.

Example 1: Your name is John Smith, but you create a Facebook profile as John Jones. You are at home after work and see that a Facebook friend posted a negative message about a candidate in a partisan race. You may share or like that post.

Example 2: Your name is Jane Smith, but you create a Twitter account as Jane Jones. You are at work, on duty, and looking at your alias Twitter account on your personal cell phone. An actor you follow on Twitter posted a negative message about a political party. You may not like or retweet that message either as Jane Smith or Jane Jones while on duty or in the workplace.

#### (E) Profile Pictures on Social Media Accounts

Rule: Employees may display a political party or current campaign logo or the photograph of a candidate in a partisan race as a profile picture on personal Facebook or Twitter accounts; however, they may not post, share, tweet, or retweet on those accounts while on duty or in the workplace.<sup>6</sup>

Example 1: You decide to use a current campaign logo as your profile picture on your personal Twitter account. Although you may use the logo as your profile picture, you may not tweet or retweet any messages on that account while on duty or in the workplace.

#### (F) Cover and Header Photographs on Social Media Accounts

Rule: Employees may display a political party or campaign logo or photograph of a candidate in a partisan race as a cover or header photograph on their personal Twitter or Facebook accounts.<sup>7</sup>

Example 1: You recently took a photograph with a candidate in a local partisan race. You may use the photograph as the header on your personal Facebook account.

**(2) 24/7 PROHIBITION** – Employees may not knowingly solicit, accept, or receive a political contribution for a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.

#### (A) Posting or Tweeting Solicitations

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<sup>6</sup> Because a profile picture accompanies most actions on social media, employees would not be permitted, while on duty or in the workplace, to post, share, tweet, or retweet any items on Facebook or Twitter, because each such action would show their support for a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group, even if the content of the post, share, tweet, or retweet is not about those entities.

<sup>7</sup> Unlike profile pictures, cover and header photographs do not accompany most actions on social media. Therefore, the Hatch Act generally does not prohibit employees from using their social media accounts at work, even if they display a political party or campaign logo or photograph of a candidate in a partisan race as their cover or header photograph. But employees should always consult their agency's computer-use policies before using any social media at work.



Rule: Employees, even when not on duty or in the workplace, may not post or tweet a message that solicits political contributions or invites people to a fundraising event.

Example 1: You may not tweet a message asking your Twitter followers to contribute five dollars to help a candidate in a local partisan race.

Example 2: You are attending a political party's annual fundraising event. You may not post a message on Facebook inviting friends to join you at the event.

#### (B) Liking, Sharing, or Retweeting Solicitations

Rule: Employees, even when not on duty or in the workplace, may not like, share, or retweet a post that solicits political contributions, including invitations to fundraising events.

Example 1: Someone tweets a message offering to match the donation of the first five friends that donate to a certain candidate in a local partisan race. Although the Hatch Act does not prohibit you from donating to the campaign, you may not like, share, or retweet that post.

Example 2: A friend shares a post on Facebook that includes an invitation to a local fundraising event for a political party. You may not like or share that post.

Example 3: Someone tags you in a post, or posts a message to your Facebook page, that asks for donations for a partisan political group. You do not have an affirmative duty to remove that post from your Facebook page or un-tag your name from the post; however, you may not like or share the post.

#### (C) Accepting Invitations to Fundraising Events on Social Media

Rule: If not on duty or in the workplace, employees may accept invitations to, or mark themselves as "attending," a fundraising event on social media.

Example 1: A friend sends you an invitation on Facebook to a fundraising event for a candidate in a partisan race. You may accept the invitation or mark yourself as "attending" the fundraising event, provided you are not on duty or in the workplace.

#### (D) Using an Alias on Social Media

Rule: Employees, even when not on duty or in the workplace, may not use an alias on social media to solicit a political contribution for a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or a partisan political group.

Example 1: Your name is John Smith, but you create a Facebook profile as John Jones. You are at home after work and see that a Facebook friend posted a message that solicits campaign contributions for a candidate in a partisan race. You may not share that message either as John Smith or John Jones.

**(3) 24/7 PROHIBITION** – Employees may not use their official authority or influence to affect the outcome of an election.

#### (A) Using Official Title or Position in Social Media Profile

Rule: Employees may include their official titles or positions and where they work in their social media profiles, even if they also include their political affiliation or otherwise use their account to engage in political activity.

Example 1: Your Twitter profile includes your official title or position and where you work. You



may also list your political affiliation.

Example 2: Your Facebook profile includes your official title or position, where you work, and your political affiliation. You may post a message supporting a candidate in a partisan race, provided you are not on duty or in the workplace.

#### (B) Using Official Title or Position in Social Media Communications

Rule: Employees may not use their official titles or positions when posting messages directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.

Example 1: While at home after work, you decide to post a positive comment on the Twitter account of a candidate in a local partisan race. You may not mention your official title or position in that comment, even if your Twitter account is private.

Example 2: Your LinkedIn profile headline includes your official title or position. You may not use that LinkedIn account to post or share messages directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.<sup>8</sup>

#### (C) Using Official Social Media Accounts

Rule: Employees may not use a social media account designated for official purposes to post or share messages directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group. All such official social media accounts should remain politically neutral.

Example 1: While accessing the Twitter account you use for official purposes, you see that a political party tweeted its support for a candidate in a partisan race. You may not retweet or like that post from the account used for official purposes (or from your personal social media account if you are on duty or in the workplace).

#### (D) Misusing Personal Social Media Accounts

Rule: Employees may not engage in political activity on a personal social media account if they are using such accounts for official purposes or posting in their official capacities. Factors indicating that a personal social media account is being used in ways that suggest it is an official social media account include, for example: (1) the account contains little to no personal content; (2) the account identifies the individual as a federal employee; (3) the account extensively uses photographs of the employee's official activities; (4) the account often references, retweets, likes, comments, or otherwise shares material related to official activities; or (5) the account is linked to an agency website or other official page. No one factor is dispositive.

Example 1: You are a federal employee and maintain only a personal Twitter account. While you have some personal posts about family vacations and events with friends, most of your posts are retweets of your agency's initiatives and photographs of you at official events. You may not use this account to make posts directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.

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<sup>8</sup> A LinkedIn profile headline accompanies most actions on LinkedIn. Therefore, employees who include an official title or position in their LinkedIn profile headline would not be permitted to post or share any messages on LinkedIn that are directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.



## (E) Targeting Subordinates and Certain Groups<sup>9</sup> in Social Media Communications

**Rule:** Supervisors and subordinates may be friends or follow one another on social media platforms. However, supervisors may not send to subordinates, or to a subset of friends that includes subordinates, any message that is directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.

**Example 1:** You are a supervisor. You may tweet generally about your support of a candidate in a local partisan race even if one of your subordinates follows you on Twitter, provided you are not on duty or in the workplace.

**Example 2:** You are a supervisor. You may not mention, or use the Twitter handle of, a subordinate who follows you on Twitter when tweeting your support of a candidate in a partisan race.

**Example 3:** You are a supervisor. You want to send via Facebook Messenger your opinion about which candidate to support in an upcoming partisan election. You may not include a subordinate employee in the recipient group of that message.

**(4) 24/7 PROHIBITION** – \*Further restricted employees\* may not take an active part in partisan political management or campaigning.

### (A) Sharing or Retweeting Partisan Messages

**Rule:** Further restricted employees may not share or retweet posts from, or the page of, a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group, even if they are not on duty or in the workplace.

**Example 1:** You are at home using your personal cell phone to look at Facebook. You see that a political party has posted a message about voting on Election Day. You may not share that post.

**Example 2:** You may like the campaign Facebook page of a candidate in a partisan race, but you may not share that page.

**Example 3:** A friend has shared a Facebook post from the campaign of a Presidential candidate. You may not share that post.

### (B) Linking to Partisan Material or Websites

**Rule:** Further restricted employees may not link to campaign or other partisan material of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group, even if they are not on duty or in the workplace.

**Example 1:** You may not include in your Facebook profile the link to the website of a candidate in a partisan race.

**Example 2:** You may not tweet a message in support of a candidate in a partisan race that includes a link to that candidate's Twitter account.

### (C) Posting to or Liking Partisan Social Media Accounts or Messages

**Rule:** Further restricted employees may post to or like the social media accounts or messages

<sup>9</sup> The Hatch Act prohibits an employee from knowingly soliciting or discouraging the political activity of any person who, for example, has a grant application pending before, or is the subject of an investigation by, the employee's employing office.



of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group, provided they are not on duty or in the workplace.

Example 1: Your friend is running for Congress. You may like her campaign Facebook page or post a message of support on her page, provided you are not on duty or in the workplace.

#### (D) Posting Personal Political Opinions

Rule: While not on duty or in the workplace, further restricted employees may engage in political activity on social media, provided it is not done in concert with or on behalf of a political party, candidate in a partisan race, or partisan political group.

Example 1: You may tweet your own message advocating the defeat of a Presidential candidate, provided you are not on duty or in the workplace.

### Guidance For Armed Forces

Q1. What is the DoD policy regarding political activities by members of the Armed Forces?

A1. DoD has a longstanding policy of encourage military personnel to carry out the obligations of citizenship. However, AD members will not engage in partisan political activities and all military personnel will avoid the inference that their political activities imply or appear to imply DoD sponsorship, approval or endorsement of a political candidate, campaign or cause.

Q2. Can political candidates visit a DoD installation or facility?

A2. A candidate for civil office may not be permitted to engage in campaign or election related activities (e.g., public assemblies, town hall meetings, speeches, fund-raisers, press conferences, post-election celebrations, and concession addresses) while on a DoD installation, which includes overseas installations and areas under the control of combat or peacekeeping forces of the United States military.

Q3. Can a seated politician visit a DoD installation or facility if they are campaigning for office?

A3. A candidate who holds a civil office may visit a DoD installation or facility for the purpose of conducting official business or to access entitlements or benefits the candidate is authorized to use; however, no candidate running for office is permitted access for campaign or election purposes.

Q4. How does DoD define when a political campaign begins and ends?

A4. According to DoD policy, a political campaign or election begins when a candidate, including an incumbent officeholder, makes a formal announcement to seek political office or when an individual files for candidacy with the Federal Election Commission or equivalent regulatory office. Once initiated, a political campaign or election does not end until one week after the conclusion of the relevant election.

Q5. What political activities can a service member participate in and which ones are prohibited?

A5. DoD has a longstanding policy of encouraging military personnel to carry out the obligations of citizenship, and certain political activities are permitted, such as voting and making a personal monetary donation. However, active duty members will not engage in partisan political activities, and all military personnel will avoid the inference that their political activities imply or appear to imply DoD sponsorship, approval or endorsement of a political





candidate, campaign or cause.

Examples of political activities that are prohibited include campaigning for a candidate, soliciting contributions, marching in a partisan parade and wearing the uniform to a partisan event. For a complete list of permissible and prohibited activities, please consult

DoD Directive 1344.10, Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces Guidance for Military Personnel.

Q6. Does that mean a service member can vote, but not actively support a particular candidate or cause?

A6. Unquestionably, service members can exercise their right to vote. However, AD members will not engage in partisan political activities and will avoid the inference that their political activities imply or appear to imply DoD sponsorship, approval, or endorsement. For a list of permissible and prohibited activities, please consult DoD Directive 1344.10, Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces (reference (c)).

Q7. Does DoD support and encourage its personnel to vote?

A7. DoD encourages all members of the Armed Forces and federal civilian employees to register and vote. The department actively supports the Federal Voting Assistance Program to ensure its personnel have the resources, time and ability to participate in their civic duty. Additionally, department leaders and military commanders appoint voting assistance officers at every level of command and ensure they are trained and equipped to provide voting assistance.

Q8. Can a DoD installation be used as a polling place in an election?

A8. As of December 31, 2000, if an installation facility is designated as an official polling place by an election official or has been used as a polling place since January 1, 1996, installation commanders will not deny the use of that facility as a polling place for any election. The Secretary of Defense or the secretary of the military department concerned may grant a waiver of the requirement to allow use of the facility if it is determined that security is a concern. All members of the Armed Forces on AD are instructed to remain clear of all polling places except when voting.

Q9. Does DoD provide any voting assistance?

A9. Yes, DoD provides voting assistance via the Federal Voting Assistance Program. FVAP works to ensure service members, their eligible family members and overseas citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so – from anywhere in the world – via FVAP.gov. The services also provide voting assistance officers at the unit level to facilitate in-person assistance when required.

## **Guidance For Civilians**

Before posting about politics on social media, Department of the Navy civilians need to consider the Hatch Act and DoD policy.

In general, as a federal employee, you may use social media and comply with the Hatch Act if you:

- Don't engage in political activity while on duty or in the workplace, even if you're using your



personal smartphone, tablet, or laptop to do so. Federal employees are “on duty” when they’re in a pay status (including during telework hours, but not including paid leave) or are representing the government in an official capacity.

- Don’t post political opinions, likes, shares, etc. while on government property, even if inside your vehicle on a lunch break, using your own device to post to your personal account.
- Don’t engage in political activity in an official capacity at any time. Political activity refers to any activity directed at the success or failure of a political party or partisan political group or candidate in a partisan race.
- Don’t solicit or receive political contributions at any time.

As a civilian, you may express your opinions about a partisan group or candidate in a partisan race by posting, liking, sharing, tweeting or retweeting, but there are a few limitations. The Hatch Act prohibits federal employees from:

- Referring to your official titles or positions while engaged in political activity at any time; it’s important to note that including your official title or position in your social media profile is not an improper use of official authority.
- Suggesting or asking anyone to make political contributions at any time, including providing links to the political contribution page of any partisan group or candidate in a partisan race or liking, sharing or retweeting a solicitation from one of those entities.
- Liking, sharing or retweeting an invitation to a political fundraising event; however, you may accept an invitation to a political fundraising event from such entities via social media.
- Posting political opinions/likes/shares while on government property, even if inside your vehicle on a lunch break, using your own device to post to your personal account.

Civilians who fall in the “further restricted employees” category may express opinions about a partisan group or candidate in a partisan race by posting or sharing content, but there are a few limitations. In addition to the limitations above, the Hatch Act prohibits further restricted employees from:

- Posting or linking to campaign or other partisan material of a partisan group or candidate in a partisan race. Sharing those entities’ social media sites or their content, including retweeting.

Civilians are allowed to identify their political party affiliation in their social media profiles, even if the profile also contains their official title or position, without more. As a civilian, you may display a political party or campaign logo or a candidate photograph in your profile picture, but it’s subject to the following limitations: Because a profile picture accompanies most actions on social media, while in the workplace you would not be permitted to post, share, tweet, or retweet any partisan social media content because each such action would show your support for a partisan group or candidate in a partisan race, even if the content of the action is not about those entities.

For the full policy and more details, see the U.S. Office of Special Counsel website at: <http://www.osc.gov>



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