

# Using Social Media to Tackle Intolerance

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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*The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is running an experimental action research pilot project, funded by Open Society Foundations (OSF), which seeks to understand the potential impact of social media on attitudes and intolerance in Europe. This literature review has been produced to summarise existing knowledge on the role of social media in influencing social attitudes, particularly in relation to inter-group dynamics. Published in April 2012, this review also includes a number of recent case studies from the social media and campaigning sector. © Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012. The Institute is registered with the Charity Commission as Trialogue Educational Trust, Charity No. 1076660.*

### What is social media?

There is a little doubt that any organization aiming to shape or challenge the way that people behave and think needs to attend to the possibilities created by what we tend to refer to as “social media”, as it plays an ever-more central role in our everyday lives (Rainie et al, 2006). The term itself can be a confused one, sometimes used as a synonym for social

networks, but really encompassing a wider group of applications that aim to change the way that people interact with online content and, by association, with one another.

One common definition – found appropriately, amongst other places, on the knowledge-sharing site Wikipedia - is offered by Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein who define it as, “a group

*of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In other words, social media has been integral to changing the internet from a space which was in large part about transmission or broadcast of information, to a place where most users are involved in generating their own content (whether short films on YouTube or Facebook status updates), and signposting their networks to content created by others (through tools like Digg, for instance). (Beer, 2008; Thelwell, 2009). For a more detailed list of social media sites, see Appendix 1.

As a result, the category of social media can be extremely broad and includes subcategories, such as:

1. **Social networks** (related to the internet – this term is also sociologically significant beyond the internet): focused on establishing social ties between individuals online, often drawing on pre-existing offline social ties as an initial foundation. Obvious examples include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace.
2. **Content-sharing sites**: where content produced by both professional and amateurs can be viewed, rated and discussed – YouTube and Flickr, for instance.
3. **Content-ranking tools**: where individuals signpost other users of the platform to content they think is especially worth attention. It includes sites like Digg, which

create individual profiles based on what a particular person “Diggs”, but also aggregates the data to create a sense of the web according to Digg users.

4. **Geo-location tools**: give users the opportunity to share their physical location with other users often with a view to potentially meeting up in person. For instance, Foursquare.

#### CONVERGENCE AND OVERLAP

The four categories identified here are not sufficient for characterizing the full gamut of social media. First, there will be social media innovations which fall outside these three broad categories – they cannot be exhaustive. Second, there is a degree of overlap between the different functions identified above. Facebook, for instance, increasingly concentrates on making non-Facebook content easy to share within the platform, rather than requiring users to leave Facebook in order to view content on other sites, such as YouTube. Equally, sites like Twitter may have started life as a conversation between people with relatively loose ties, but are used by an increasingly large number of people as an easy way to converse with friends and acquaintances.

Thirdly, many platforms that wouldn't fall within an obvious definition of what constitutes social media increasingly try to find ways to “plug in” to those platforms online. For instance, Spotify, an online music platform, allows people to log in to their profile using

their Facebook details, and then automatically shares the music they are listening to with their Facebook friends in real time, unless they opt out with a higher privacy setting.

## Social networks and making change

For the purposes of this literature, there is a clear focus on the extent to which social media can be transformative in the way that people relate to one another. The evidence from other forms of influencing and campaigning is that this is most effectively done primarily through people's existing social relationships. (Alinsky, 1971; Freire, 1970) Although all social media play a part in this, there is a sense in which social networks have become especially powerful. For the purposes of this review, therefore, there will be a primary focus on the impact of social networks, with examples and broader case studies brought in from other social media where appropriate.

## Social networks in Europe: who uses what, and how?

Most social networks were initially established with a more tailored proposition than simply creating a shared social space online for people to interact. MySpace, for instance, started life primarily as a place for aspiring musicians to publicise their own work and gain cheap, or free, access to others'. (Pace, 2006) Facebook started life as a service for students at elite universities in the US, and then gradually broadened their

offer to non-US universities, before finally making the platform available to everyone. (Kirkpatrick, 2010) LinkedIn is still used for professional connections, first and foremost. Google's social networking offer – Google Plus – tried to combine elements of all of these as well as the “following” behaviour on Twitter, but has yet to prove itself as a serious force in social networking.

Research from December 2011 shows that Facebook is consistently the most popular of the social network sites in most of Europe. (Google; Alexa 2011) There are exceptions to this pattern, particularly in Eastern Europe. In Latvia, for instance, a platform called Draugiem dominates social network usage. ([www.draugiem.lv](http://www.draugiem.lv)) In Russia, Armenia and the Ukraine, it is Odnoklassniki, a network for old schoolmates and friends to find one another online. ([www.odnoklassniki.ru](http://www.odnoklassniki.ru))

Twitter usage varies more significantly across Europe, although figures for the whole of Europe are harder to obtain, not least because of people accessing the site through mobiles and via alternative platforms, such as Tweetdeck. But Twitter usage continues to grow rapidly in a range of European countries according to the latest figures, including 151% growth in users in Spain in the last 12 months. (Edelman Digital / ComScore, 2011).

Patterns of internet usage also vary widely across Europe, with the implications of the “digital divide” – in other words, the relative

disadvantage experienced by those unable to get regular, broadband access to the internet compared with those who do – presenting in different ways in different parts of the region. By 2013, the entire EU is aiming to have coverage by commercially viable broadband services. (Digital Agenda Scoreboard, 2011) But there are still significant variations within Europe: 2010 data found that fewer than 20% of rural areas in Bulgaria had broadband coverage while in many wealthier European nations, including France, Luxemburg, Denmark and the UK coverage was already over or close to 100%. (Digital Agenda Scoreboard, 2011).

Equally, demographic variation in the usage of different social networks globally also suggests subtle differences between users. Research from the US found that women dominated all of the social networks in terms of user numbers, except LinkedIn, where white men predominate. (O'Neill, 2011)

## Barriers to engagement with social media

Barriers to engagement with social media are similar to barriers to using the internet more generally. Understanding and confidence in using technology, access to technology and attitudes to learning more generally all have implications for the degree to which people will engage with social media. Research into barriers to internet usage in Europe found that the main reasons people gave for not having an internet connection at home included:

- Don't want the internet because content isn't useful, etc: 41%
- Equipment costs are too high: 25%
- Lack of skills: 24%
- Access costs are too high (e.g. phone line): 23%
- Have access elsewhere: 18%
- Don't want internet because content is harmful, etc: 8%
- Privacy or security concerns: 6%
- Physical disability: 1%
- Other reasons: 13% (van Dijk, 2008)

More recent UK research has also reflected that these barriers remain a significant factor in explaining why people don't have access to the internet. In the UK, in 2011, 19 million households had access to the internet – about 77% of the population. The other households gave various reasons for not having a connection, including the expense of equipment necessary to get online (19%) or lack of skills (21%). But over half of those without a connection said they didn't have one because they “don't need the internet”. (ONS, 2011)

Access Europe, a further relevant factor in experiences of internet usage may be the size of the language “universe” to which the user has access. The Anglophone web is larger – and therefore arguably a more wide-reaching resource – than other language groups on the web. In 2010, research found that there were over 500 million English-speaking users of the internet, but only 75 million German-speaking

users. (World Internet Statistics, 2010) In countries where the main language spoken has a smaller number of global speakers, speakers of two languages are likely to have a radically different – and potentially richer – experience of what the web can offer. By association, speakers of more than one European language (especially where the other language spoken has a large number of speakers globally) are likely to be disproportionately advantaged in their use of the internet generally, and specifically in consuming the shared content that characterises many of the interactions on social media. Equally, as speakers of multiple languages are disproportionately likely to be educated to a higher level, in many places these language patterns may have the effect of exacerbating the advantages experienced by those in society that already have good access to information resources.

In considering the impact that language can have on using the internet in general and social media in particular, it is worth bearing in mind that for many minorities living in European countries, language can act as a much bigger factor in accessing a whole range of media and information sources. Lack of confidence in a second language can be a significant barrier, especially for the sort of content creation that is an integral part of engaging with most social media. Even for bilingual people (or speakers of more languages), content creation (even in something as simple as a status update on Facebook and Twitter) requires committing to

one or other of the language groups to which they belong. The result may be that rather than encouraging the different aspects of an individual's life to be cohesive in their online identity, the opposite can also occur.

## Social media and identity

Issues of identity are, unsurprisingly, significant in understanding the way that we engage with social media. Many of the most high profile conversations about identity and the internet focus on the potential for dishonesty and distortion in people's online portrayals of themselves. There is little question that many seize the opportunity offered online to create a new persona for themselves, or to be anonymous. Huge online platform games, most notably Second Life, have built this with great success. ([www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com)) Other research indicates that being sparing with the truth on online dating sites, for instance, is extremely common. (Hancock and Toma, 2009; Toma and Hancock, 2010)

But there are quite clearly expectations among many users that this sort of behaviour will be less widespread in other parts of the internet. There was a significant outcry when a "Syrian" blogger and human rights activist turned out to be an academic based in Scotland, who had changed his race, gender and sexual orientation to "author" an account of life during the uprising in 2011 (not to mention a further upset when one of those who "unmasked" him was revealed to be engaged in a rather similar

deception himself). (The Guardian, 14 June 2011)

It would be easy to draw the assumption from cases like these that deception about fundamental aspects of identity are commonplace online, and that conclusions we might try to draw about how people express their identity would be shaky, at best. The truth is less dramatic. Cases like the ones described above are remarkable precisely because they are rare: the online equivalent of the confidence trickster who gets away with millions of pounds of other people's money. In fact, the more remarkable phenomenon is how little deception people seem to try and get away with, despite the seemingly limitless opportunities to do so on the internet. Apart from a little embellishment on dating sites, it seems most people are still relatively cautious about presenting a false image of themselves. (Back et al, 2010)

For that reason, the internet in general - and social media in particular - still offer a useful position from which to examine identity. In fact, it could be that social media/networks offer us a new opportunity to re-integrate aspects of our lives which have become increasingly disparate over recent decades. Historically, people were much more likely to spend most of their lives close to where they were born – geographical mobility is a recent trend. (Donovan et al, 2002; Eurofound, 2011) As a result, there were high levels of continuity in the groups of people they associated with through education, religious worship, political involvement, sports, work and

so on. As people in Europe have become more mobile, both in terms of geography and employment, these areas of our lives are much less likely to intersect with one another. (Welsh and Baltzell, 1984) Our lives have become far more compartmentalised. Social networks push against that trend, by maintaining and re-establishing connections between people from all stages of their lives, and allowing them to interact with one another. The ties are far looser than in geographically-bound communities of the past, but they do offer a different sort of integration between the facets of our lives which once was increasingly rare.

Other research indicates another benefit of social networking, which particularly relates to younger members of minority groups within wider society. It indicates that social networking activity can support young people belonging to a minority in embracing their own identity, by giving them additional opportunities for “strengthening their cultural identities, for teaching them how to navigate both public and private dimensions of their racial lives, and for providing them access to a more globalized yet unfixed conversation about their community histories.” (Byrne, 2007)

For the purposes of the project, however, this greater integration will not be enough. It is important to understand how the emerging ties in social media shape our attitudes to one another and how, in turn, those tools can be used to bolster understanding and cohesion, as opposed to increasing division.

## Social media vs. other media: is there a difference?

There is already a wealth of research about the ways in which other media shapes our attitudes to one another. Research seems to confirm that mass media can have a powerful role to play in developing people's ideas about other groups within society, especially minority groups. (Appelius, 2009) An extension of "contact hypothesis" contended that where people do not experience minority groups directly, their depiction in media (both positive and negative) could be tremendously influential in shaping the way in which people formed or changed their views. Controlling the message that was given out in this sort of media seemed to have a powerful role to play in shaping the attitudes that took root amongst society at large. (Cottle, 2000)

Comparisons between online and offline media have always been challenging. The differences in the way in which the internet operated from the very beginning – challenging traditional journalistic conventions on corroboration, for instance – made it a very different medium. Now, the upsurge in interactivity associated with the emergence of Web 2.0 has created a further shift away. In traditional media, editors, journalists and channel commissioners still make the overwhelming majority of decision of what makes its way into the public realm. (Richards, 2005) In contrast, in social media settings, the emphasis is on extremely light-touch regulation. Aside from interventions in criminal activity (e.g.

phishing scams) and extreme cases of hate speech, bullying and impersonation (and, with some sites, copyright infringement), the owners of these sites tend to take a hands-off approach. As a result, much of the theory about attitude formation and influence through mass media is of limited relevance in considering social media.

## How does social media shape our attitudes?

There are some areas of overlap, however. The psychological research that underpins advertising and marketing offers insights into human behaviour online, as well as offline. Among the most powerful of these is social proof: the idea that people are much more likely to take a course of action if others before them have done so, even if those people are not known to them. In his book, the Psychology of Persuasion, Cialdini explains how salespeople are encouraged to make use of the idea that if many others have purchased a particular product, it will become more attractive to new customers for that reason alone (as well as because of implied potential scarcity – another factor that produces a knee-jerk psychological reaction in most people and which salespeople are frequently encouraged to exploit). (Cialdini, 2007)

It is this exact pattern of behaviour which can make social media so influential. Among other things, social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as ranking sites like Digg, act as giant aggregators of social proof: evidence of



the choices that people you value are making, about everything, all the time. They grant a whole new range of opportunities to check what others are doing as a way to make choices about what we want to do ourselves.

The marketing world's enthusiastic embrace of the opportunities offered through social media offer perhaps some of the most compelling signs that it can be effective in shaping attitudes and changing individual behaviour. Very few companies are now without presence on a range of social media platforms, and there are a whole host of organisations that have sprung up to advise companies on how to take advantage of these opportunities. But it is not only in the commercial realm that the potential for social media marketing is clear.

The huge impact of social media in the outcome of the 2008 presidential election in the US provides one of the most high-profile case studies of the extent it can shift and shape attitudes. (Plouffe, 2009) The Obama campaign used video content, email and social networking platforms to get the message of their candidate across. One the day of the election, there was a global "donate your status" action on Facebook that attracted a huge response. They worked effectively within the medium, allowing the "memes" of the campaign (for example, the visually striking Shepherd Fairey campaign posters) to be adopted and subverted in a whole host of ways across social media. They were extremely effective in marshalling these tools to

convert an "outsider" candidate into the President of the United States. (Plouffe, 2009)

There are also more subtle examples of the way in which social media shapes our attitudes towards others. Research by Facebook's own data team discovered that there was a strong correlation between our friends' behaviour on the social networking site and our own, for instance. (Zhang, 2010) The research conducted in-depth analysis of the words that people used in status updates, using a standardized word-categorisation system that differentiates the function (e.g. pronoun, noun), theme (e.g. work, school) tone (e.g. positive, negative) and character (e.g. emotional) of words. Researchers looked at the relationships between the word groups an individual used and the words used by their friends. They found a strong, positive correlation – in other words, we're likely to be Facebook friends with people who use same word categories as ourselves. More research would be needed to establish the direction of causality in this relationship – do we like people because they express themselves in a similar way to ourselves? Or do we express ourselves similarly to those we like and spend time with (albeit virtually)? It seems likely, however, that the pattern is mutually reinforcing: we may initiate a relationship because of a similarity, but if the relationship persists, it is likely that similarity will be reinforced and potentially increased.

If the evidence is powerful that social media encourages us to engage with others like



ourselves, it seems logical to assume that it may increase our hostility to more different groups within society. There is certainly no shortage of evidence that groups that thrive on encouraging racial or religious hatred and those articulating some forms of religious extremism appear to thrive online. (Gerstenfeld, 2003) Research examining the Italian far right also showed the extent to which these sites are closely networked between themselves. (Tateo, 2005)

Research carried out by the think tank Demos, however, seems to indicate that the online presence of such groups far outweighs their capacity to mobilise in person, in the UK at least. They looked at a far-right English organisation, the English Defence League on Facebook, which has been associated with Islamophobia and which many have associated with the British National Party, the racist party of the far right (a link partially proved by this research: 34% of those surveyed for the research said they would vote for the BNP). By surveying nearly 1300 people who claimed an association with the EDL on Facebook, researchers were able to find out more about the depth of commitment that lay behind their Facebook allegiance. The result suggested that the EDL's capacity to mobilise was a fraction of its perceived strength on Facebook. (Bartlett and Littler, 2011)

There is also powerful evidence that social media can improve understanding and help to establish ties between traditionally opposing groups. Facebook's own project – a partnership

with the Peace Dot initiative at Stamford University - "Peace on Facebook", counts new friendships forming on the site between people who come from groups with a history of difficult relations. The count is done in real time, revealing connections established across geographic divisions (e.g. friendships between Israelis / Palestinians, Albanians / Serbians); religious divisions (e.g. Muslim / Jewish; Christian / Atheist; Sunni / Shi'ite) and US political divisions (liberal / conservative). On March 11th 2012, for instance, the count included 210,714 connections between India and Pakistan; 64,850 between Albania and Serbia and 41,405 between Israel and Palestine. On the same day, 123,844 Muslim / Christian connections were made, and 641 Muslim / Jewish. It would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that these counts necessarily represent concrete progress towards greater real world harmony, but they do reflect the way that social media can help to maintain relationships online that may prove difficult in person, due to wider social censure or political and logistical constraints.

The statistics emerging on these starkest conflicts may point to another significant strength of social media for those hoping to increase cohesion across different groups in societies. Much of the research on networks has highlighted the emphasis that human beings place on the closest ties within their own networks. (Putnam, 2000) This pattern also seemed to be true on social networking sites:

users tend to focus heavily on the relationships that are closest in their offline lives.

There is plenty of evidence which suggests that these patterns can also be found on social networks online. (Thelwell, 2009) But there is also evidence that weaker ties, outside these most bonded relationships, can still have an important role to play. Weak ties can be a source of fresh ideas, and most people do tend to weaker ties on occasion, albeit more sporadically than other, closer relationships. (Manjoo, 2012) It may be from these weak ties – the old friend who profile you rarely visit, or the former colleague you rarely see in person - that the greatest potential lies for establishing the sort of ties that will help to break down divisions and debunk myths about other groups in society.

## Trends in social media

### INCREASING INFLUENCE OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY (INCLUDING IMPACT OF GEO-LOCATION)

As smartphones usage increases, so does the extent to which people are accessing social media through their phones. Almost all smartphones now have applications that facilitate easy integration between different social networks (e.g. Motorola Blur for Android). They also come with applications installed that will allow easy access to social media content sites, such as YouTube.

### SOCIAL TV

In a bid to retain a share of the entertainment market in the face of increased competition from online TV options, there will be a significant upsurge in “social TV”. (Techcrunch, 2012) Through a combination of new technologies that will facilitate the easy integration of real-time social networking activity and TV programmes, as well as other innovation in the way that existing programming interacts with online activity, social TV will be a much bigger area of activity in social media in the years to come.

### CURRENCIES / CREDIT SYSTEMS

Facebook Credit and other online payment systems will increasingly remove the need to leave social networking platforms to complete other tasks online. These systems could, in time, have a major impact on offline payment methods as well. They are likely to start in the US, and then spread towards Europe as part of a broader rollout of these innovations globally. (Techcrunch, 2012)

### FILTERING

Another extremely significant shift in social media in recent months is the growth of filtering activity in the results that show on newsfeeds, and in searches. Increasingly, sites predict which information you would like to see, rather than presenting all the information in a feed for the user to select between. This is a pattern which has been highlighted as potentially problematic

in search engines – Google started filtering search results as a matter of course in 2009. (Pariser, 2011) The risk – in both search engine filtering and filtering on social network site – is that it diminishes the number of opportunities to break away from our usual habits (e.g. read news-related search results as opposed to YouTube clips, or engage with content posted by a less close friend). In social media terms, the chances to engage with “weak ties” are made relatively fewer.

## Using social media to create change: international case studies

There is no shortage of examples of the way in which social media can be used to make change in a whole variety of different ways. From shirting consumer behaviour or increasing people’s commitment to voting, it is clearly a powerful tool of influence. For the purposes of this review, however, there has been a focus on work which has endeavoured to convey an effective challenge to widening divisions between different faith and racial groups in Europe.

### HOPE NOT HATE, UK

In the UK, for instance, Hope Not Hate remains an extremely powerful force for anti-racism campaigning which works effectively online and makes much use of social media. They were credited with making the British National Party’s anticipated electoral surge in 2009 much less powerful than it would

otherwise have been. They have also maintained opposition to other far-right groups, including the EDL, since that time and have achieved some significant victories.

Hope Not Hate has a straightforward methodology. They began by emailing supporters with very straightforward requests for support. Supporters were asked to sign up to show their opposition to the messages of far right parties in the UK, and were encouraged to share the campaign with friends. A YouTube video was made, showing opposition from celebrities and campaigners to the building electoral presence of the BNP in some areas of England. They also made proactive use of their Facebook page with a variety of content – from sharing music videos to offering live reporting of clashes with far right groups who were having demonstrations.

Hope Not Hate then gradually increasing the depth of engagement. There were two key avenues down which people were encouraged to go. First, they began calling for donations. In some cases, their asks were based on being able to deliver particular tactics (“hypothecated”). In others, there were gifts offered that in turn also helped to increase the visibility of the campaign offline – for instance, on one occasion donors giving above a certain amount got a free t-shirt.

Campaigners were also encouraged to get involved offline. Hope Not Hate arranged coordinated groups to go to areas with a strong far-right electoral campaign. They were

encouraged to talk to local voters, explaining why so many people were strongly opposed to beliefs of parties like the British National Party. They were also active in telling people to vote, as low turnout has frequently been identified as an issue driving improved electoral performance for the far-right in the UK.

#### AFROES, SOUTH AFRICA

Like many organizations working in Africa, Afroes aims to generate social change by harnessing the social potential of mobile phones, rather than relying on access to computers. This reflects a broader pattern across the continent: across most of Africa, phones offer the easiest and cheapest access to the internet and create the largest cohort of possible users. As the number of people accessing the internet increases globally, work done all over Africa will be a leading source of learning for the way in which mobile technology can be used to generate social change.

Afroes worked with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund to develop a Champions for Children Campaign. As part of the campaign, they developed three key elements. First, they produced a game for which promoted child safety, Champ Chase. This uses a standard platform game formula to educate children about the risks from abuse, and sets them on missions to protect other children around South Africa from potentially dangerous situations. Signposts to real-life sources of help and

support – like the Childline number – are distributed throughout the games.

Second, they set up a test reporting line to ensure members of the public could report issues relating to child safety. By using either a project website or a shortcode, people can tell the relevant authorities about both positive and negative incidents relating to child safety in their locality.

Finally, they equipped a number of young “child protection ambassadors” with mobiles phones and associated apps to allow them to do their work. These young people work both online and offline to increase the profile of the project in their communities, directing other young people towards the game, conducting surveys and acting as a source of information for others on child protection.

#### IT'S TIME: GETUP, YOUTUBE AND MARRIAGE EQUALITY, AUSTRALIA

In Australia, GetUp has been a leading force for progressive online campaigning work since 2005. Under the current Australian government, a major priority for campaigners has been to secure marriage equality for gay and lesbian Australians. Over many months, GetUp's supporters had been campaigning for this change to Australian law.

Towards the end of 2011, the campaign group identified the need to communicate about marriage equality more broadly, both to underpin broader change in social attitudes, and to articulate the campaign's demands in a more

populist, broadly available channel. They developed a short video, called “it’s time”. This film was shot through the eyes of one half of a couple and showed the story of their relationship – meeting for the first time, first kiss, meeting one another’s families, through arguments and difficult times through to the point where one of the couple proposed. At the point where he offered the ring, the camera spins round and it’s clear that the couple is a same-sex couple, who want to get married but cannot.

The campaign put the video on YouTube, and drove their existing supporters to watch the film. They then encouraged supporters to donate to ensure that the video could also be shown on Australian television. The response was extraordinary. The film was watched all over the world, and was picked up and used by gay equality movements globally. The campaign group exceeded their fundraising targets and through thousands of micro-donations were able to show the advert on television frequently. When the Australian Labour Party met, they agreed to make marriage equality their official policy.

## Conclusion

### FIVE SIMPLE LESSONS

Certain simple lessons seemed to emerge from the case study organisations and also from the wider research on social media:

- ***One “ask” per email (or post):*** many organisations found that with the volume of communication coming through to most people on the various platforms they occupied, it worked much better to ask supporters to do one thing at a time.
- ***Plan together:*** social media massively increases people’s expectations of being involved with all aspects of a campaign. Finding ways to engage supporters in all aspects of a campaign, including developing new plans, is essential.
- ***Test everything:*** even after testing to make sure everything works well, make use of free tools to draw in high quality data about supporters’ behavior, develop hypotheses about the best way to engage people and then test, systematically, to see if the theories are right.
- ***Respond to supporters:*** be proactive in responding to supporters who get in touch via social media channels. The outlets are one of the primary ways in which people will see how an organisation really views its supporters.
- ***Hypothecate fundraising asks:*** the more clearly an “ask” is attached to a particular campaigning tactic, the more people will be persuaded to give. Although organisations also need core

funding, these sorts of funding asks can be hugely successful in enhancing their capacity.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNING: WHAT WORKS?

Key factors also appear to be consistent in the most effective campaigns, many of which are also reflected in the literature about effective social media campaigning.

- ***Communicate with people where they already are:*** the successful campaigns appeared to focus on reaching people in the places where they were already active, rather than trying to draw them across to other settings (e.g. not emailing people to tell them to join a particular group on Facebook).
- ***Linked with current events:*** effective campaigns linked to existing events which were happening and aimed to engage people on issues which they already found interesting, rather than telling them what they “should” be interested in.
- ***“Badging” and ladders of engagement:*** many campaigns started by asking people to publicly acknowledge a commitment they’d made on a particular issue, either by forwarding an email or, within social media, by sharing a link to a particular

action or piece of content. These “badging” activities gave people the opportunity to make a simple step to associate themselves as caring about an issue without simultaneously asking them to take a significant action.

- ***Working through people’s existing network ties:*** again, the campaigns were happy to work through people’s existing ties, correctly anticipating that people would be more receptive to engaging with an issue presented to them by a friend than promoted in an advert or through other media.
- ***Link to offline experience:*** very few campaigns choose to stop only at online engagement, even if that is their primary mode of contact. Rather, they seek out opportunities to take people into offline contact and activism, ensuring a deeper experience that is, in turn, more likely to lead to a sustained involvement on a particular issue.

The five characteristics of the successful campaigns identified above correlate closely with effective influencing work offline. Learning the lessons from this sort of work – and reapplying it to an online context – will be essential to build the sort of movements that are truly transformational in the societies where they operate.



## Appendix 1: Social media sites

**Bebo:** Bebo is a social networking site for young people. It facilitates standard social interactions, as well as offering games.

**Digg:** Digg is a peer-ranking site which allows people to highlight content on the web through a bookmark “button” on their browser. Content is then aggregated through Digg and the relative popularity of particular content is used to signpost other Digg users.

**Facebook:** currently the most successful social network, Facebook started life as a networking tool for US college graduates but has developed into a global platform. The most popular social networking site in all but a small number of countries, Facebook is increasingly diversifying to ensure that its members other social networking activity can be conducted within Facebook through “plug-ins”.

**Flickr:** Flickr is a photo-sharing site, where people can post their own photographs, and comment on and (in some cases) make use of photographs shared by others.

**Foursquare:** one of most successful social media platforms to make use of the opportunities presented by mobile internet, Foursquare allows its users to “check-in” at particular locations. This data is then made available to their friends, as well as potentially to other Foursquare users nearby. Foursquare remains most popular in the US, and has been seen as a major marketing

opportunity for businesses to reward customer loyalty and create specific incentive schemes.

**Friends Reunited:** predominantly used in the UK, Friends Reunited connected people with former classmates from school and university. The site was most popular in the early 2000s.

**Google +:** Google’s social networking offer has aimed to draw together the most successful elements of other social media, while also taking advantage of the vast number of people currently with a Gmail account. Launched in 2011, the site has yet to build up a critical mass of users in Europe.

**LinkedIn:** one of the only social networks to explicitly connect itself with people’s professional identities, LinkedIn carries most detailed information about users’ career history and creates connections with people with shared backgrounds. It is the only male-majority social network.

**MeetUp:** a tool which allows people to meet up with others in their locality with shared interests, MeetUp has been most successful in the US although is also used elsewhere.

**MySpace:** MySpace was arguably the first social network to achieve global breakthrough in the mid-2000s. Initially established as a way for musicians to share their music for free (as well as publicise performances, etc), MySpace grew to encompass a vast number of users who used it simply to interact with their friends. Now with a smaller number of users, MySpace diminished

in popularity as Facebook emerged into broader usage.

**Ning:** Ning is a platform which allows users to network through the different technical features available on the site, including sharing content and threaded conversations. Users can customize to a larger extent than on some other platforms, and pay for some services. It remains a relatively smaller platform than many other social networks.

**Orkut:** Launched in 2004, Orkut is a social networking platform. Although it never rose to prominence in the US or Europe, it has been one of the primary social networks in both India and Brazil.

**Pinterest:** One of the newest social networks, Pinterest is one of the newest social media platforms currently increasing in popularity. It allows users to collect images from online list, which they then “pin” to themed boards which can be viewed by other users of the site. So far, the site has achieved highest profile in the US, but is increasingly popular in the UK and Europe, where it has become especially popular with designers and developers.

**Reddit:** Another peer-ranking tool which allows users to post content of which they approve and

then allows other users to rank the content “up” or “down”.

**Tumblr:** Another short-form blog, Tumblr allows users to post content and see content posted by other users they follow. Launched in 2007, most of its users are based in the US, although it also has some European users.

**Twitter:** A “micro-blogging” site, Twitter allows its users to make short, regular statement about their own experiences, as well as signposting followers of their newsfeed to other content, and re-produce other Twitter content of which they approve (“re-tweet”).

**Vimeo:** Another film-sharing website, Vimeo has yet to rise to prominence compared to YouTube, but has a significant following from independent filmmakers in the US and the rest of the world.

**YouTube:** The most popular video-sharing website on the internet, YouTube also offer users the opportunity to comment on and engage with others’ social media. Users of the site can rank others content with simple “like” and “dislike” buttons, as well as setting up their own channels for their own content – in fact, around half the videos on the site have been ranked in this way. Over 70% of their viewers come from outside the US.

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