



UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Introduction

Social media creates dynamic new opportunities for United Nations communicators, enabling direct and real-time interactivity with UN audiences. DPI welcomes and recognizes the benefits of these tools while acknowledging associated risks and challenges. Social media tools – web-based and mobile technologies, tools and platforms that provide the opportunity for people and organizations to quickly and easily publish their own material, make comments and/or engage with others – often blur the distinction between internal and external communication, and professional and personal communication.

Purpose

These guidelines are for DPI staff¹ responsible for posting content on social media platforms for professional organizational communication. Staff should keep these guidelines in mind for personal use as well.

These guidelines aim to:

- Set out an **overarching set of ideas** to consider when employing social media for professional communications and outreach, including outlining potential risks and challenges.
- Provide a **framework** for using social media tools effectively and in line with existing UN policy.
- Protect the **privacy** of individuals, including colleagues, depicted in social media materials (videos, photos, etc.).
- **Protect the Organization** from misrepresentation on social media.

Key principles for professional communications

- Use of social media is one tool in communications strategies that helps project a **coherent, timely** and **consistent message** for the Organization.
- Messaging and accuracy are as important on social media platforms as in other public information materials. Creation of new accounts should be considered carefully with supervisors and colleagues as with every new communications initiative, taking the **planning, staff** and **monitoring** sections outlined below into account.
- Posting on social media platforms requires sound **editorial judgement** with due attention paid to content, organizational priorities and user preferences.

Ground rules

While social media platforms are new, the ground rules governing use of traditional media by UN staff still apply along with general common sense. As such, all participation in social media activities is subject to the **UN Secretariat's Core Values** of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity, as well as other related behaviour codes, standards and policies, including, but not limited to:

- *Charter of the United Nations*
- *United Nations Staff Rules (ST/SGB/2010/6) and Staff Regulations (ST/SGB/2009/6)*
- *Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members (ST/SGB/2002/13)*
- *Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants (International Civil Service Commission 2001)*
- *Media Guidelines for United Nations Officials*

¹ For the purpose of these guidelines, the term "staff" includes DPI staff, volunteers, consultants and interns.

Ground rules (continued)

- Do not share information that is **confidential** and/or **internal** or that could have security-related implications (including, at times, location and travel information).
- Respect **copyright laws**, citing sources as necessary, including UN sources.
- Do not post **anonymous** comments or publish content related to the United Nations under a pseudonym or false name.
- Never mislead your audience, post spam or **offensive content**.
- Check with your **supervisor** if you are uncertain whether specific content is appropriate for posting online. Follow established procedures for approval and clearance for content.
- As with any other form of official communication, social media content should be in line with the **United Nations overall policy** and positions on the subject at hand.
- Respect the privacy rights of colleagues, partners and beneficiaries, particularly when posting **photos and videos**. Posting personal or identifiable information may raise safety and security concerns.
- Remember that the UN may not **legally own content** or control how long content appears on social media platforms.
- Social media content should not be considered the same as keeping a **permanent record**. For example, if you post a photo on a photo sharing site, that photo should also be stored in an official UN-owned site.

Staff responsible for content posted on social media tools should be active users of the tool so as to better understand the rules and etiquette of the communication medium. This, along with sound editorial and political judgement, will help ensure avoiding unnecessary errors that might harm the organization's reputation.

Add value

The UN's participation on social media platforms offers a unique perspective on the organization and the world. Additional content, such as links to original documentation or sources can provide useful context.

Consider the audience

It's helpful to post explanatory content that helps put information in context and add value to content shared in the news or other related accounts.

Remember that the general public may not understand UN acronyms or procedures.

It is important to have information about the Organization's social media use on related UN web sites to ensure the widest possible audiences are reached as use of social media varies widely and not all social media platforms are accessible to all users.

Writing style

Employ a consistent voice using engaging and approachable, yet professional and timely content, keeping in mind that many access social media content on mobile devices.

Not all social media content has to be original content. Already approved/published communications materials may form the basis of useful social media posts and often limits the need to seek content approval. Whenever possible, link back to the original source rather than copying entire documents/text, etc., onto social media platforms.

Proofread your content carefully and make sure links are active before posting.

Monitoring and responding to comments and questions

When possible, answer genuine questions with links to helpful information. It is not necessary to respond to every question or comment or to respond directly.

It is usually not effective to address hypothetical questions or comments that are degrading, mocking, rants and incitements to anger. Remove comments that are obscene, defamatory, profane, libellous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to any person or entity.

Discretion should be used when deciding to delete inappropriate or unacceptable content. Allow user-generated content that may be off topic or critical, but is not offensive. A disclaimer may be useful to describe deletion and other posting policies.

If you come across misrepresentation of the UN's work, correct it with factual information and, whenever possible, a link to additional information. Notable comments or trends should be shared with supervisors and/or forwarded to substantive departments and/or the Office of the Spokesperson for information purposes.

Coordination

Coordination with colleagues in DPI and across the system will be essential for effective content planning. As such, keeping colleagues, supervisors and senior managers informed about all social media activity is essential.

Evaluate

A profile or group left to stagnate for too long and become outdated may give the impression of apathy or lack of professionalism. Accounts no longer receiving regular attention should be deactivated to avoid confusion.

Guidance and best practices

Planning and staffing

All social media accounts should have a clear goal and objectives, with appropriate content approval policies in place. Always remember that engaging in social media activities is a long-term endeavour. Define a clear plan and responsibilities, including appropriate staffing, as with any other communications project.

