

EEA-Eionet Day 2023- Cut across workshops

2.4 Social media & impact: a myth or an untapped potential?

Social media presence has increasingly been seen as an indicator of impact. But can a public body achieve impact through social media, and how?

This workshop focused on the EEA's expertise and experience to reflect on the evolving nature of social media channels, changes in audiences and ask and answer some key questions, to help us and Eionet define what role social media can play in external communications.

Summary report

Communication is about the message, its sender and receiver and the specific context, including the timing, medium and other messages. Since their inception, various social media platforms have been regarded as both opportunities and threats for communication, including for public institutions.

Common perceptions about social media communication include that it comes without a cost, it is easy and quick, it connects people and gives access to valuable information, it can be fully public or fully private, and it is very trustworthy or completely unreliable. In reality, the picture is both more nuanced and complicated.

What users see on social media platforms is a mix of both **curated and non-curated content**, filtered by opaque **algorithms**. The content is often presented to users based on the **positive or negative reactions** it triggers, or based on how much **advertising money** is put behind it. Like with most mass media, social media platforms are also businesses, striving for **profits**.

Several individual people, and to lesser extent institutions, have considerable **influence** through their social media platforms. Moreover, social media platforms offer very robust and **detailed data** on this influence, so it has become attractive for organisations to measure their **'impact'** through social media. At the same time, a more critical look at **audiences** reveals fake accounts, bots, trolls and other elements that make the picture more murky.

From the perspective of institutions and corporate communication, **social media can be much more** than about conveying and multiplying messages to influence audiences. Social media can be used, for example, for aligning internal narratives and positioning, claiming ownership of specific topics, in crisis communication, employer branding, stakeholder engagement, supporting other business processes, such as recruitment, or listening and analysis.

Importantly, social media should not be seen as a stand-alone project for specific audiences but as part of the institutional **communication strategy**. As such, the tone, content etc. should match the **corporate vision (strategy)** of the institution, which in turn should be aligned with the corporate **culture**. Only this way **key stakeholders**, and many of them would also be on social media, will have a consistent, clear and trustworthy **image** of the institution.

Good practices for social media activities for institutions include:

- **Align with strategy** to create an authentic and consistent brand.
 - **Broaden objectives** and success criteria: use social media for more than sending out messages.
 - **Consider ambitions**, risks and resources. Avoid ghost platforms that are not maintained.
 - **Define (preferably light) governance**. Clear roles and responsibilities help the day-to-day operations
 - **Explain guidelines** for staff: simple dos and don'ts can be useful. But remember that social media is much like any other public forum: staff need to use their own judgement.
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Workshop hosts:

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Supporting documents

- Presentation: Social media & impact: a myth or an untapped potential?

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