

Digital and Social Media

A brief primer for government affairs executives.

NationalJournal LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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Research Staff

Project Director

Alec Latimer

Researcher

Abigail Kleva

Executive Director

Aaron Young

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I. Influence in the digital age

Defining our terms

Social Media



A type of digital media that emphasizes social connections and community. Achieved chiefly through open dialogues and consumers sharing content (messages, articles, images, and videos) with their online networks. Accessed either through the web or on apps in mobile and tablet devices.

Hallmarks of Social Media

Nonhierarchical



Non-elites speak directly with elites

Open and Visible



Almost everything that's said can be seen by others

Consumer-Driven



Users decide which messages and content are shared, which aren't

Networked Structure



Users can find and engage others outside their immediate list of contacts

But what's the difference between social and digital media?

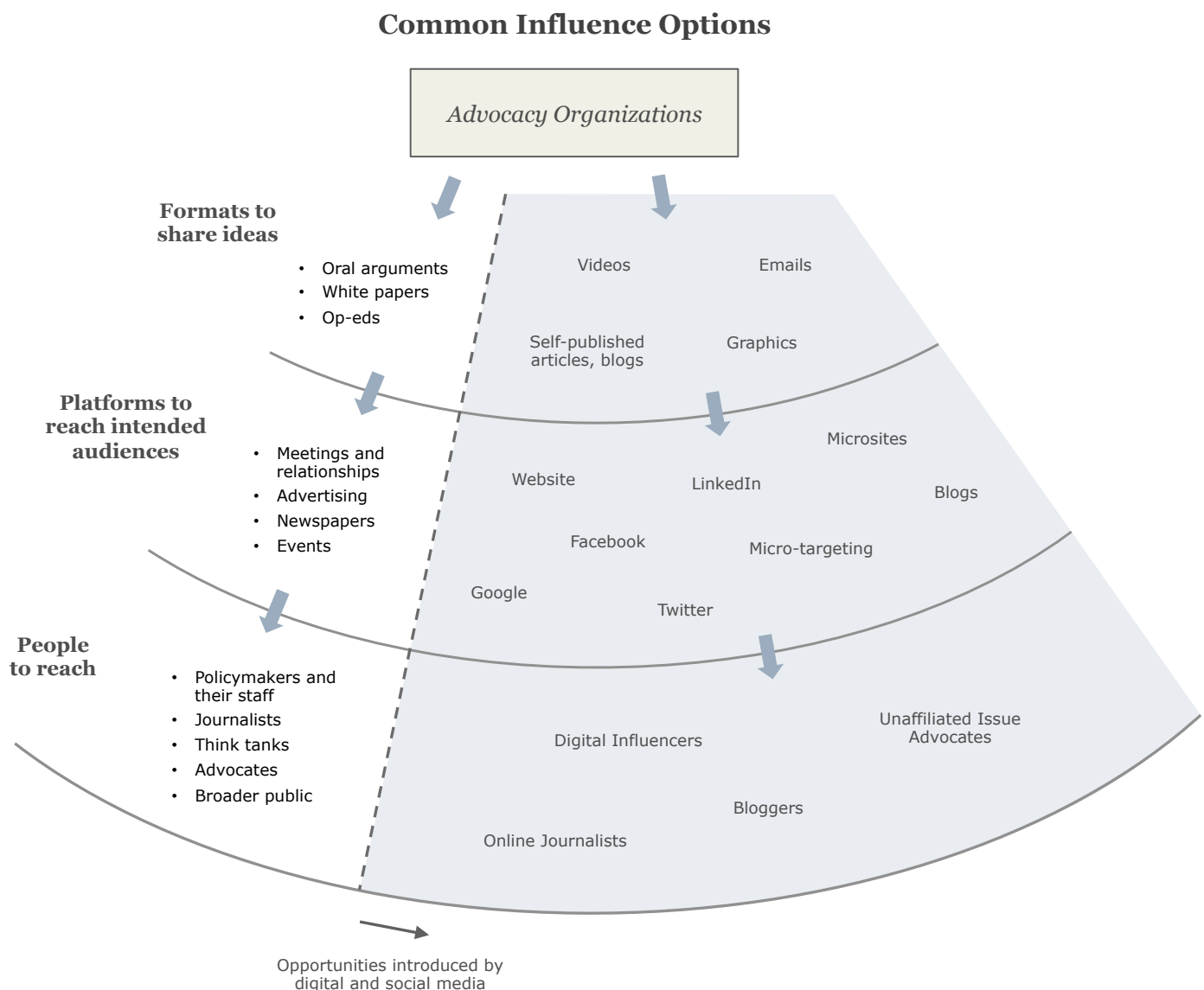
Increasingly, not much.

The phrases "digital media" and "social media" are often used interchangeably now as social media has become the dominant force driving activity on the internet. Consider how you might see a *Wall Street Journal* article on Facebook (social media), but clicking it takes you to the *Journal's* website (digital media) where you can click a button to "like" the article back on your Facebook page (social media).

This primer will thus reference both digital media (e.g., Google searches, websites and microsites, digital video ads) and social media together, with little distinction.

Digital and social media have expanded our access to tools and avenues for influencing policymakers...

In the last two decades, opportunities for influence in Washington have proliferated. Digital and social media have greatly expanded our options for how we can share ideas, what platforms we can use, and who we can reach.



Source: National Journal Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

...but they've also empowered policymaking audiences, threatening our role in their work.

In 2017, Hill offices read policy newsletters over email, prepare for meetings with briefs in PDF, and catch up with the latest news and analysis by checking Twitter. Government affairs offices increasingly report that by the time they arrive for a meeting, Hill offices have already formed a framework and an opinion on an issue.

The Hill is doing its own issue research¹...

Seeking out industry perspectives online

77%

Consumed information from organizations' blogs and websites

Consuming news and analysis shared by peers online

60%

Accessing information on social media is an important part of my daily work

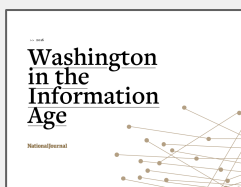
61%

Consumed an organization-produced newsletter

43%

Relying on information found on social media to help formulate their opinions.

Washington in the Information Age



For 15 years, National Journal's *Washington in the Information Age* research has explored the changing information consumption behaviors of DC influentials. The 2016 survey yielded feedback from over 1,000 senior policy professionals across Capitol Hill, the Executive Branch, and Private Sector. Topics covered in the annual study include: Who Washington Insiders Trust and Rely on Most, When and How Insiders Seek Information, and What Content and Media Brands Insiders Prefer.

¹ All data from Capitol Hill survey respondents, n=122: *Washington in the Information Age*, National Journal, 2016.

The Hill also has more direct access to their constituents. They're gauging the opinions of Americans on social media with or without the help of advocacy organizations. And those evaluations are proving powerful enough to trigger a response and even changes some Members' positions.

...and independently taking the pulse of their constituents.

Enough to trigger a response

80% of staffers report that it takes 30 or fewer similar comments on social media to get attention.

*#SocialCongress 2015,
Congressional Management Foundation*

"On some issues, social media provides the best possible read on whether a position we'd like to take will be popular and that certainly affects whether we push for it, how hard we push, and when. It's an essential tool for reading the environment before pursuing action."

Enough to change a position

"We've definitely re-thought a vote or taken a different angle based on what's happening in social.... We've changed positions more than once based on what we've learned in social media channels."

"We listen to social spaces. Sometimes it just helps us to form a narrative...but sometimes someone introduces new intel that forces us to go back...and this has led us to change positions in the past."

Congressional Chiefs of Staff

“

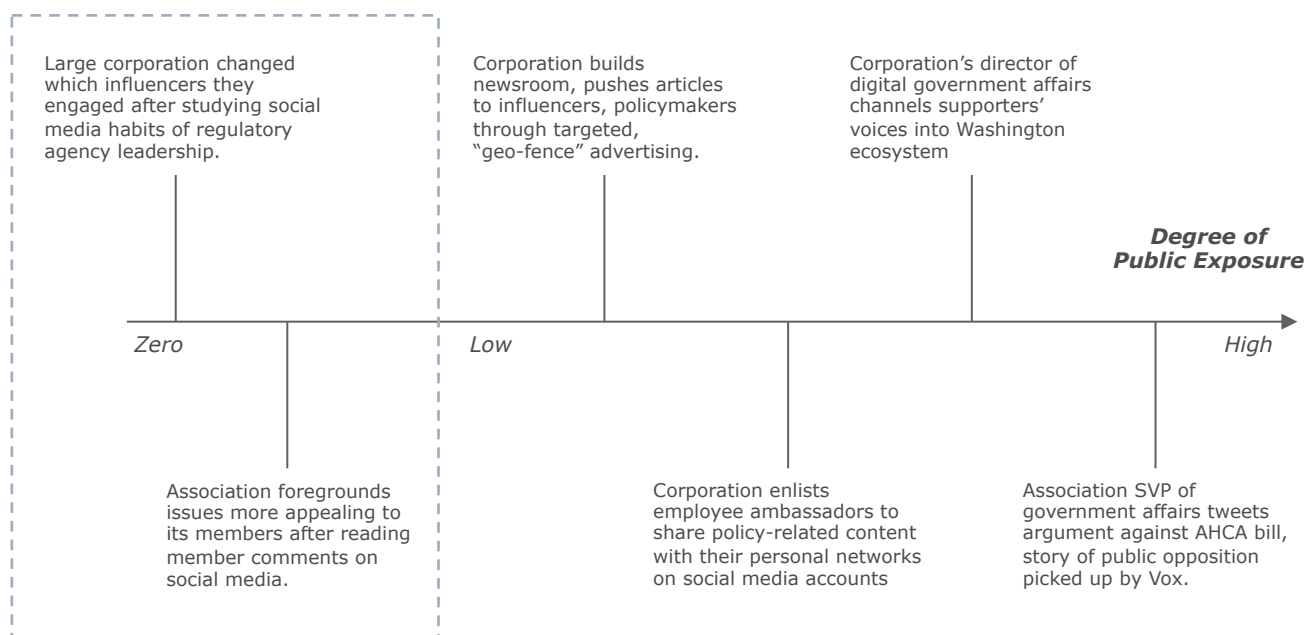
Members are developing their views on issues much closer to the way the general population does. By the time you get there for that 15-minute conversation, you might have missed the boat already.”

SVP Government Affairs, Association

A ripe opportunity? Or unnecessary risk?

Many government affairs offices have wisely approached digital and social media with caution. Online environments are more public and less controlled than a meeting on the Hill. But government affairs organizations of many stripes – corporations, associations, the risk-averse, the risk-takers – have found tactics within their comfort zone. Notably, “listening” tactics require no public exposure at all. Many organizations begin with these listening tactics and advance into more public-facing exploits as they became more comfortable with online spaces.

Examples of Government Affairs Digital and Social Media Tactics by Degree of Public Exposure



Public statements aren't a requirement

"Listening" tactics feature virtually no public exposure, focus only on analyzing the contents of social media.

II. 3 patterns of effective digital and social media use

National Journal Leadership Council research has revealed that leading organizations are using digital and social media for three purposes. They're gathering intelligence, growing mindshare in policy debates, and deploying an expanded network of supporters. The six pages that follow illustrate how these patterns of use unfold and are accompanied by brief case profiles.

1



Gathering new intelligence

- Head off hidden threats
- Chart new pathways to influence

2



Growing mindshare in policy debates

- Seed ideas into communities of influence
- Educate digital learners
- Strengthen policy brand reputation

3



Deploying an expanded network of supporters

- Channel pressure into public spaces
- Organize unknown allies to support your issue

Gathering new intelligence

Pattern of effective use #1



Head off hidden threats

Threats to policy agendas often show warning signs in public online spaces before boiling over into policy consequences.

Organizations are using social media to spot warning signs of threats and deploy responses before real problems have a chance to develop.

How it Works

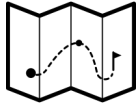
- 1** Identify individuals online with the potential to impact policy
e.g., an online influencer or individuals in a district of an important Member
- 2** Set automated alerts for unusual activity levels on relevant issues
e.g., brand mentions in Washington
- 3** Address problems before they spread, using online or offline responses

Case Example



Geographic hotspots monitored for popular opposition

A Fortune-50 corporation tracked publicly available online conversations in regions of the country with significant proposed corporate investments. A social media specialist monitored these conversations for negative comments about the corporation and its issue-set. He was empowered to respond quickly and authorized to respond on behalf of the organization using a pre-approved response protocol and a flexible budget for small media buys.



Reveal new pathways to influence

How it Works

1 Map out online influencers' online relationships and interactions

- Who do they talk to?
- Who do they source?
- What do they talk about?
- Who do they listen to?

2 Chart pathways for reaching target audience directly or indirectly

e.g., who does my target listen to online?

Social media reveals our connections through who we talk to, what we talk about, and who we listen to online. These connections are often hidden or obscured in real life.

Organizations are analyzing these digital and social media “footprints” to reveal new important policy voices and discover novel ways of breaking through to influencers.

Case Example



Locating the obscure academic who had the ears of think tank leaders

An association revealed a previously unknown voice with outsized impact on industry influencers by reviewing their digital and social media footprints. The review mapped out each influencer's online connections and graded the strength of the connections based on information-sharing patterns. This process revealed that one individual in particular, the academic, was particularly influential with think tank leaders with whom the association had difficulty getting traction.

Growing mindshare in policy debates

Pattern of effective use #2



Educate digital learners

Washington audiences are answering their questions with online searches and consuming content shared with them on social media.

Leading organizations are distilling their insights and reformatting policy papers into digital-friendly formats to reach these digital learners.

How it Works

- 1** Simplify organization's insights into pithy, accessible ideas
- 2** Convert ideas into digital-friendly content
*Articles, graphics, videos
– not just PDF files.*
- 3** Publish content online and share by email, social media channels, or advertisements

Case Example



Policy insights shared with Hill staff as “snackable” online content

A large trade association converted its white papers and policy experts' insights into much shorter digital deliverables – like articles, graphics, and “whiteboard videos” – that are shared via social media, weekly emails, and the association's website. Policy experts distill their insights into the core ideas, and a digital producer converts those ideas into accessible digital content.

Growing mindshare in policy debates (cont.)

Pattern of effective use #2



Seed ideas into communities of influence

Influencers are having policy debates online, with or without a government affairs perspective.

Leading organizations are inserting themselves into these conversations by building relationships with these communities and sharing unique insights with the group.

How it Works

- 1** Identify influencers online
- 2** Locate influencers' online hangouts, where they routinely engage
- 3** Share unique perspectives and information in ongoing conversations

Sharing information that can't be found elsewhere – like proprietary data – is an effective way to set yourself apart.

Case Example



Anointed policy experts enter online debates between influencers

A large trade association hand-picked a group of policy experts on staff to participate in niche policy debates online. Selected employees built their social media reputations over time with communities of online influencers on their policy issue. The association regularly trains these individuals and has granted them license to speak online on behalf of the organization, sharing their policy positions through a human voice.



Strengthen policy brand reputation

How it Works

- 1** Build an online “self-publishing” capability
e.g., a website for policy, a Twitter policy account, LinkedIn profiles for policy experts
- 2** Create editorial standards that reflect desired policy brand
- 3** Position branded content in front of Washington audiences

As policymaker offices increasingly use digital and social media to answer their policy questions, leading government affairs offices are leveraging the opportunity to establish or bolster their position as trustworthy policy resources. They are using online spaces to reinforce their brand of thought leadership with policymakers.

Case Example

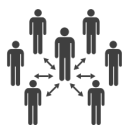


A policy brand for public consumption

IBM created a new brand, THINKPolicy, to market its policy agenda in online spaces. IBM publishes brief, actionable policy positions to its website under the THINKPolicy brand. These position briefs are shared on Twitter and in personalized emails. The separate brand distinguishes its content from the cacophony in Washington, helps audiences draw connections between different pieces, and identifies the policy brand with the organization’s unique history, culture, and values.

Deploying an expanded network

Pattern of effective use #3



Channel pressure into public spaces

The public nature of digital and social media has proven a powerful antidote to silence from a policymaker's office.

Leading organizations are channeling pressure online from advocates en-masse, influencers, and even policy experts and GA executives to stimulate policymakers into taking public stances on policy.

How it Works

- 1** Organize supporters on digital or social media
e.g., with an app or a Facebook group
- 2** Supply supporters with content or tools to help express themselves online
e.g., articles, videos, or graphics
- 3** Call supporters to act on social media

Case Example



“Twitter Cards”: a public form letter that demands a public response

The American Medical Association empowered advocates to share customizable policy-focused graphics with Members of Congress on Twitter. Each Card featured an advocate's personal photo, his or her name, location, and a message from a curated list of options. Advocates provided their zip code, email address, and selective access to their Twitter account. In 2 months, advocates created and shared 27,000 cards on Twitter.



Organize unknown allies to support your issues

How it Works

1 Identify characteristics of likely issue-supporters

- *What organizations would they 'like'?*
- *Where would they live?*
- *What are their demographics?*
- *What are their demonstrated interests?*
- *What actions might they take online?*

2 Recruit supporters using social media targeting capabilities

Digital and social media reveal a new world of potential advocacy participants – allies and advocates alike.

Organizations are leveraging the sophisticated ad targeting tools offered by social media platforms to find and engage these individuals.

Case Example



Just-in-time advocate recruitment and activation

In the week before a key vote, an association coordinated over 1,000 previously unknown advocates in the same district to contact their congressperson. The digital director recruited these advocates to a Facebook page using ads directed at likely supporters. Ads were targeted with criteria such as geography, interests, and behaviors. Once on the page, the advocates formed their own community and largely kept one another engaged. Cost amounted to less than \$500.

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Save Time and Be More Effective with Tools and Case Studies

Social Media Defense Checklist

- ☐ We have identified the 3 most likely attacks to come from important policymakers.
- ☐ If an attack happened, I would know within 90 minutes.
- ☐ I have choreographed my first 3 actions (e.g., who to call, what people to convene) for each likely attack.
- ☐ I know what I am accountable for in the event of an attack.
- ☐ I have defined roles for my staff (e.g., who's in charge, who will reach out to allies) for each likely attack.
- ☐ I have empowered staff to take action pursuant to their roles for each likely attack.
- ☐ We know which external networks we will tap for each likely attack.
- ☐ I have set aside budget (or can free up resources) to use in the event of an attack.
- ☐ We know what government affairs' role would be in an organization-wide effort, and have coordinated our response plans with other external-facing functions at the organization (e.g., corporate communications, investor relations).
- ☐ My staff knows what steps to take and who is in charge if I am unavailable immediately after an attack.
- ☐ I know how to get in touch with the right people, even if I don't have my mobile phone with me.

Ready your government affairs office for social media attacks.



Enlist advocates to share your perspectives online.

To access these tools, case studies, and more, visit www.nationaljournal.com/

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