



Using social media in CBP - Chapter 10

Ads, Outreach and Advocacy

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how to use Social Media for outreach and advocacy, and how to use online ads. It also describes how to use Social Media to engage communities on issues related to human rights and forcibly displaced populations.

1. Online ads

You can reach persons of concern with targeted advertising that they will see on their Social Media feeds. But pushing paid content in front of random users doesn't achieve much. Audience demographics should guide your ad spend, content selection and publication frequency. Having AGD-disaggregated information about the audience is a good start.

When done properly, Social Media advertising can help you create an audience critical mass of PoCs and engage them in the way they prefer, long-term. You can use Social Media ads to

:

- Create large enough audience at the beginning of your project;
- Target a specific subset of the population, based on AGD characteristics, location, interests, etc., with tailored information;
- Invite to action, both online and offline.



Tip

If you want to implement the ideas in this chapter, re-read [section 1 of Chapter 9](#).

Important considerations when creating ads for specific groups include:

1. Negative perceptions PoCs might have when being 'targeted' with 'refugee-focused' paid content. Feeling 'tracked' or 'watched' may erode trust and heighten anxiety among the very people we hope to reach with protection information and services.
2. Risks of drawing attention to services for PoCs (i.e. through geographic targeting) which could heighten negative perceptions in host populations, who don't see 'targeted services/support' for themselves.
3. Considerations of peaceful coexistence, especially if you are trying to reach people who may be discriminated against or seen as draining resources from the local population.

If you are interested in creating ads, there are a few basic steps to follow. You can reach out to colleagues in Public Information for further information



Step 1: Know your campaign objectives and how to measure them

Set clear goals for your ads. Over time, they may be adjusted. Clearly formulating your goals will allow you to determine if your investment has paid off. Normally people use ads to:

- **Increase Traffic:** If you want your account to be seen by as many PoCs as possible, it helps to increase traffic. This is especially true when you are promoting a new account, service or group;
- **Increase Visibility:** Higher awareness of protection services means PoCs are better able to protect themselves. Recognition of UNHCR's role and trust in the organization will also grow. Being visible increases your reach. Visibility is not the same as self-promotion;
- **Increase Engagement:** Ads can help you understand if users like your posts and what type of posts raise engagement. Video views, shares, comments, likes and retweets can help you understand what content works best;
- **Increase Conversions:** See the specific actions people are taking on your website, such as subscribing to a newsletter or making a donation. To track conversions, you need to install a certain piece of code across your pages, for example Facebook pixel.



Step 2: Select your target audience

Select your target audience, based on the objective identified at step 1. Targeting an audience for Social Media ads is not easy. You need to find the middle ground with the population and take time to create and refine a receptive audience.

Most platforms allow you to create targeted ads based on the some or all of the following:

- Age and gender;
- Language;
- Location;
- Interests;
- Behaviors.

Selecting an audience is a compromise between the “perfect audience” you have in mind and the people actually using the platform. Building the audience is a matter of trial and error. The best way to start an ad campaign is to select a narrow audience, and then expand it when you get the first results. Using a community-based approach will help you pick the right audience for your intended goal.

When segmenting a campaign to reach different audiences,¹²³ make sure ads are not overlapping, to avoid double delivery and ad fatigue. Some platforms, such as Facebook and Google, have automated audience expansion settings that allow algorithms to reach more people than those defined in the detailed targeting. (This usually doesn't apply to location and age/gender targeting options.) To be on the safe side, switch off this setting and target only your intended audiences.

¹²³ See more about audience segmentation [here](#).



Step 3: Blend in with organic content

Once you have built an audience, you will need to decide what content to advertise. Social Media offers a range of options for paid advertising.

Not every type of ad will work. This is why you need to know the various ad formats so you can blend with the content on the Social Media Platform. For example, Facebook currently offers six variations of video ads that brands can use on the platform. These include link posts, video ads and lead generation form ads, where you ask your audience to fill out a form. You may also opt to boost a particular post. Weigh the pros and cons of each format before you post.

One of the best techniques when creating paid content is to blend seamlessly into feeds, walls and timelines. Your ads don't always have to make people take immediate action. Instead, you can use them to blend in and make them feel like natural content to users. People generally know when they see an ad, which is why you want to avoid seeming too spammy or promotional. Make the ads useful to your audience, so as to draw them in to find out more. Regarding transparency, Social Media platforms give users the option to find out why they are being targeted with an ad. Bear this in mind when you configure your posts.



Step 4: Review, measure, optimize and reiterate your social media ads strategy

To get the most out of any ad cycle, it's essential to test your content and refresh or alter it, if necessary. The worst thing you can do is let your ads get stale. Changing them catches the attention of the audience and hopefully keeps them engaged.

There are different ways to keep ads relevant and interesting:

- **Use the right language:** Watch how your words, phrases and calls to action affect your audience. Check your text. Have you used the right language and tone?
- **Change the formats:** Are you using photos or images with your ad? Have you tested variations to see which gets the strongest response? The simplest design change could make a difference;
- **Update the landing page:** Check your landing page to make sure ads are successfully going through the funnel.¹²⁴ Don't block the funnel with ads; Don't block the funnel with ads;
- **Adjust your ads when the audience changes:** The audience can change with the situation on the ground. For example, a large influx of refugees could change the regular audience for your Social Media account. In this case you will need to refine and refresh your ads;
- **Adjust ads according to trends or issues identified by analytics/indicators:** Change the audience, message, style or other aspect of the campaign depending on what analytics tell you about its effectiveness, reach and engagement. If the audience is not engaging, consider how to reach them and make the ads more accessible or appealing;
- **Check ad previews across different placements, especially** if you are advertising beyond the main platform. For example, in addition to traditional feed and stories, Facebook lets advertisers run ads across audience network placements (external sites and apps) as well as in the Facebook Messenger inbox, page right column and search results. Do your ads look good here?
- **Refresh your ads** to combat ad fatigue.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ An online ads funnel is a way of tracking how your ads guide potential customers through a process and lead to actions.

¹²⁵ Find more information on ad fatigue [here](#).

2. Outreach

For the purpose of this section, we define “outreach” as the ability to reach sectors of the population we are not currently engaging (online and offline). UNHCR is used to conducting outreach¹²⁶ activities offline, on the ground. Methods vary from using community structures (e.g. service centers, info-lines and hotlines) to engaging volunteers to conduct door-to-door information campaigns and identify people with specific needs.

In some UNHCR offices, outreach is also done via WhatsApp, Facebook and dedicated websites. (For example, [here](#) is information about some of these offices and how to contact them.)



Important

Social Media can help us reach isolated or stigmatized populations. However, it can also introduce risks for PoCs and expose them to dangerous situations or negative comments. UNHCR staff must consider the harm they could do by targeting Social Media ads to hard-to-reach, stigmatized populations. One way to prevent harm is to preemptively implement detailed Social Media guidelines for monitoring and responding to negative feedback on targeted Facebook ads. UNHCR staff should also identify other risks through a Risk Assessment, completed together with the community (see [Chapter 2](#)).

Social Media is by definition an exclusive tool. You will rarely find that the entire population of a country uses or has access to the same platform in the same way. For example, a ‘digital gender divide’ is often very pronounced in many contexts – with women and girls much less able/likely to use Social Media. So, your outreach on Social Media should be as integrated as possible with all other outreach activities you have online and offline, including the UNHCR corporate Social Media accounts. Consider if specific targeted interventions to address digital divides are required and feasible; this can be determined during participatory assessment processes.

126 [UNHCR Resettlement Service, UNHCR-NGO Toolkit for Practical Cooperation on Resettlement. Community Outreach - Outreach to Refugee Communities: Definitions and FAQs, June 2011](#)

Social Media Outreach is helpful to:

- Educate young children and teenagers on the safe use of Social Media and allow them to protect themselves (e.g. you could create a Social Media game);
- Communicate with groups who may feel the internet guarantees them a degree of anonymity (e.g. LGBTQI groups or specific ethnic groups);
- Identify and reach out to groups who may be using the online space to discuss specific issues (e.g. women's groups discussing maternal health or groups set up to discuss asylum procedures)

The steps to create an online outreach strategy using Social Media are similar to the ones you would follow offline:



Step 1: Find a middle way between the topic you want to address and the interest of your audience

Users have a choice as to whether they give you their attention. When you select a subject, it should be something they are interested in and that is conducive to being discussed online.



Step 2: Pick your audience and find them where they are

If you are trying to engage with a new audience, find out;

1. whether they are online;
2. what they normally discuss online;
3. what space already exists to discuss the same issues you want to discuss.

The more your outreach strategy uses existing channels, the better.



Step 3: Use ads and trusted networks to expand your reach

As with all community-based work, the ecosystem of actors - from governmental to civil society to informal community structures - is going to be crucial to making your outreach response effective. A targeted use of ads can help enlarge your network, reaching people who might not normally navigate towards your channel. Look through the available brand safety settings to exclude dangerous or inappropriate websites.



Step 4: Link your outreach to overall content, including offline and partners' activities

Social Media can support your work on the ground, especially if you have lots of activities and the audience is large. In this regard, Social Media can amplify existing efforts, even reaching outside the country.

3. Advocacy

'Advocacy' is a set of coordinated activities (ideally contributing to a broader strategy) that seek to protect persons of concern by promoting changes that bring policy, practice or law into line with international standards. UNHCR and its partners undertake various kinds of advocacy activities, including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research and lobbying.¹²⁷

Advocacy aims to influence decision makers and stakeholders to adopt policies and practices that will protect refugees, internally displaced people, stateless people and other affected populations. It is a central element of comprehensive protection and solution strategies.

Combined with other protection activities (such as information sharing, monitoring, negotiation), advocacy can help to transform attitudes, systems and structures that put Persons of Concern at risk. Advocacy messages must have clear objectives and audiences.¹²⁸

Social Media Advocacy can be used to enhance the following protection outcomes:

- To prevent and end human rights violations, and encourage States to respect, protect and fulfill their human rights obligations;
- To ensure humanitarian actors deliver protection and assistance to Persons of Concern in a safe and dignified way, on the basis of need and without discrimination;
- To ensure relevant actors and stakeholders make funds and resources available to meet the needs of PoCs;
- To bring the policies, practice and law of a State into line with international standards (notably refugee law, humanitarian law, human rights law, guiding principles on IDPs, international standards on the prevention of statelessness and the protection of stateless people);
- To promote greater acceptance of Persons of Concern by host communities and combat discrimination and xenophobia.

As with offline advocacy, decisions on advocacy messages should be made on a case-by-case basis, weighing the risks. Will publicizing a statement disrupt an important dialogue with stakeholders in the field? Or persuade stakeholders to open vital areas to humanitarian access? Or heighten the risks faced by persons of concern, host communities, and/or humanitarian staff? Decisions should always be made in the best interests of affected populations. People usually know perfectly well what is best for them. Whenever possible, they ought to be asked whether it is appropriate and safe for advocacy messages on a given topic to be made public.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ [UNHCR, Advocacy, accessed June 2020](#)

¹²⁸ [UNHCR Emergency Handbook, Advocacy in Emergencies, accessed June 2020](#)

¹²⁹ [UNHCR Emergency Handbook, Advocacy in Emergencies, accessed June 2020](#)



Resource

See more on this topic on the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), Standard Operating Procedures on Public Advocacy Messaging.

To create and manage an advocacy campaign on Social Media you should:



Step 1: Define your objectives

What do you want to say? What issues require advocacy? What do you want to achieve with the intervention? What is the key information you want people to take from it? Answers to these questions should emerge from a well-informed, evidence-based analysis. Don't build advocacy messages on rumors or unconfirmed information. In an emergency setting, it may sometimes be necessary to initiate advocacy before detailed evidence has been gathered and confirmed. Think about what short and long-term effects you want to see, offline and online.



Step 2: Select the audience

Your audience may be organizations, decision-makers or influential people. They could be allies or the actors you are targeting for behavioral change because their actions raise protection concerns. Adopt the appropriate approach for each type of audience and use the Social Media platform that suits them. To reach and build your audience, target ads that are right for them.



Step 3: Decide on your content

Content may be public or restricted; and shared via private chats, selected group chats, public posts, ads, photos, videos, statistics and maps, infographics, video dramas or even online games. Always consider the impact a chosen channel will have; the need for confidentiality; and the potential to harm your sources of information, persons of concern, partners and/or UNHCR. Think practically. Who will do what? How? What channels will be used (Messaging Apps, Social Media, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) systems)? Establish an action plan with clear responsibilities, bearing in mind your Social Media advocacy strategy will need to be interactive and responsive.



Step 4: Be ready to engage and to discuss issues openly

Social Media advocacy differs from offline advocacy in one important respect: it is done in real time and must have an engagement component. When you are advocating for rights online, expect responses, positive and negative, that need to be addressed almost instantaneously. You may have to engage with groups who do not agree with you, and you will find yourself doing so in a public forum. Before you start any online advocacy project, make sure you have a clear and tested system to handle sensitive issues and political conversations, and that your staff is well trained.



Resources

See [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#) of this Guide for more on how to engage in conversations and handle sensitive issues and political topics on Social Media.



Step 5: Make links

Advocacy activities should be joined up with other forms of influencing efforts (e.g., information exchange, reporting, monitoring, negotiation, conferences, etc.). Partners, community groups and influencers, including national advocacy groups, are often the best allies for this. Remember that Social Media allows you to join international campaigns and attract Diaspora into your advocacy strategy. Make sure you have identified and engaged groups who are already active on Social Media – they can be trusted sources and influencers who will help you to implement your strategy.



Factsheet

See [Factsheet 8](#) to learn more about influencers.



Step 6: Monitor implementation

Monitoring should be part of the action plan and advocacy initiatives should be reviewed and adjusted in the light of their impact and effectiveness. Define what you want to measure and make sure you have analytics and key performance indicators that will allow you to see the impact over time. Use both real-time and periodical monitoring systems and adjust the strategy in real time, if needed and as feasible. If your ads have links to pages, implement all necessary tracking codes and parameters to make the best use of data across Analytics platforms.



Messaging Apps

Few Messaging Apps have embedded mechanisms to analyze the data on your channel. For this reason, data analytics is normally done via third-party apps or by hiring a dedicated private company to do it.

On Messaging Apps, as for Social Media in general, numerical analysis of data is relatively easy but the real wealth of information lies in the data that emerges from conversations.

Often though, monitoring and analyzing data from live chats requires more time and needs to be contextualized. The purpose of your protection activity should guide your decisions about what resources to invest in this, and how.

Doing outreach or advocacy via Messaging Apps takes more resources than doing it via Social Media networking platforms. This is because the individual nature of the apps and the customization of the content allow you to reach more but smaller groups. Content has to be tailored for more “intimate” conversations and intense engagement.

Messaging Apps are most effective for advocacy and outreach when tightly linked to offline activities. Community meetings, youth committees, women’s groups -- all of these on-the-ground structures can be better connected with Messaging Apps. Protection desks and other UNHCR or protection services can use Messaging Apps to connect with their “customers”, promptly reporting changes in service or enabling real-time troubleshooting of delivery problems.

A caveat: Sending bulk messages to a large number of users using uniform content rarely produces the desired outcome. Targeted, customized and smaller-group interactions are more manageable and effective, especially if the topic is sensitive or you foresee that disagreement or tension might arise from the discussion.



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Resourcing

Your advocacy budget will depend on the scale of your Social Media strategy (local or national campaign); the profile and size of the audience (host communities, local partners, PoCs, host communities, people on the move (i.e., mixed movements), etc.)); and the method to share the information (e.g, Social Media, e-mail, video documentary).

If you are planning to manage your Advocacy campaign online, you are likely to need the following resources:

- Staff time to collect and check information, prepare advocacy materials, implement initiatives and follow up (in cooperation with partners);
- Information management staff and technical resources to make the most of your Social Media tools and provide technical support on data-related issues;
- An advertising budget;
- Resources to create multimedia content.

The following tips can help you minimize costs and organize an effective advocacy campaign within your means:

- Work with existing online advocacy groups and online communities in the country to identify challenges facing Persons of Concern that require advocacy. Develop an advocacy strategy and set priorities. Decide how best to share information and how to enable people interact with you. Identify the roles and responsibilities of all relevant actors;
- Collect and check evidence continuously. Use the Social Media Analytics discussed above to monitor the situation and collect information. Link the information you gather to programming as well as advocacy. Fill any gaps in evidence using existing information sources. This will allow you to focus your resources on the action/issue you want people to know about;
- Involve partners, Persons of Concern and others in drafting your advocacy strategy and delivering it. Advocacy is often more effective when a variety of partners reinforce the message, especially on Social Media. Remember that Persons of Concern, including children and young people, are often the best advocates for their own protection, and they may be very active on Social Media. In some settings, it can be effective to convene virtual meetings during which minority groups can talk directly to local authorities;
- Share information in accordance with agreed methods, using a range of formats and media. Think about creating a hash tag, or a challenge, making your supporters your advocates. Make the most of low-cost tools like videos or photos taken on mobile phones, podcasts and audio files;
- Always connect with local media and offline feedback systems like call centers to reinforce your message and make your advocacy more interactive.



Do's

DO provide clear gateways to human operators, if you are using an automated system.

DO consistently revise your advocacy, outreach and ads strategies, based on the data collected via Social Media.

DO be clear about your key messages. What is the purpose of your advocacy/outreach? Establish relevant indicators to measure progress on those purposes.

DO incorporate your Social Media advocacy/outreach activities into your overall protection strategy and when possible, connect it with offline activities.

DO adjust your Social Media strategy to your objectives.

DO consult extensively and cooperate with others. Seek a goal that is complementary.

DO proactively identify, assess and manage online risks to avoid surprises. Consider the impact your advocacy could have on POCs and host communities, the humanitarian response and UNHCR's ability to carry out its mandate.

DO make sure all advocacy and outreach communications are informed by evidence and fact-checked.



Don'ts

DO NOT rely on automated systems for sensitive or confidential communication.

DO NOT invest in blanket communication strategies that treat your audience as if they were one.

DO NOT use the number of "likes" or "followers" as the main indicator of the success of your Social Media strategy. It is not about the numbers but the quality of engagement.

DO NOT create Social Media strategies based on one-way communication. Without engagement, they will die off.

DO NOT replicate the same advocacy/outreach strategy over time or across multiple contexts, but rather customize it to the local audience.

DO NOT create competitive advocacy or outreach strategies that could undermine the credibility or trust already gained by local actors.

DO NOT run away from negative conversations or reactions to your strategy. Learn how to talk to people who disagree. Create a neutral platform for an open and respectful exchange of views.

DO NOT use jargon. If it is unavoidable, at least explain it.



Check List

- Does your Social Media platform have the function to create ads? If so, how does it work? ☐
- Have you engaged stakeholders, including communities, in defining your outreach/ advocacy strategies? Who will be the audience? ☐
- Have you identified local actors and communities already working on the same outreach/ advocacy topics and determined how best to involve them in your strategy, or to join efforts? ☐
- Have you consulted UNHCR experts at the country, regional and/or global level (if appropriate) and involved them in your Social Media advocacy/outreach? ☐
- Have you drafted clear advocacy statements and proposed initiatives, discussing them with UNHCR internally, PoCs, host communities and the government (as appropriate)? ☐
- Have you created systems to revise your advocacy/outreach strategy as required, taking account of feedback, impact and possible changes on the ground? ☐
- Have you identified clear and solid processes and systems to engage with your audience and handle sensitive issues or political conversations that may arise from your outreach/advocacy activities? ☐



Case Studies

[McPherson, E., Social Media and Human Rights Advocacy' in the The Routledge Companion to Media and Human Rights, 2017](#)

[Yang, Aimei & Saffer, Adam, NGOs Humanitarian Advocacy in the 2015 Refugee Crisis: A Study of Agenda Building in the Digital Age, American Behavioral Scientist, 2018](#)