

Module 8:

Social media

This module will help you understand:

- Why social media is a vital tool for citizen journalists
- Twitter: why, how and when to tweet
- Facebook: why, what and when to post
- YouTube: why, what and how to post
- The potential of other social media tools



A sex worker gives a drop of blood during her HIV test at a mobile clinic parked outside her work room, Ivory Coast

Using social media to network, inspire and create change

Social media has drastically changed the way we both discover and use news and information. From pictures of your friend's new baby to political upheavals and weather catastrophes on the other side of the globe, you are likely to see breaking news first via social media. It doesn't matter who you are – citizen, blogger, professional journalist – social media is now a vital tool for keeping up to date and engaging with the news agenda.

Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are a few of the most popular social media platforms that allow people to network via online communities, sharing and discussing news, information and ideas. The biggest change they bring is that citizens are no longer passive consumers of news. Now we can engage with stories and even produce our own.

In fact, social media can be used right from the start to research and identify topics and sources for your stories. Melissa Gira Grant is a writer based in New York City who blogs about sex worker issues globally. She uses Twitter to keep on top of topics relevant to the sex worker community around the world. She also uses Storify.com to keep track of what people are saying on Twitter, Facebook and other sites. Once she has enough material and feels like she's got something to say, she'll write a blog post about it. If the blog post gets enough attention, she will write a longer feature article such as:

“US policy and the unjust approach to human trafficking of the international justice mission” rhrefactycheck.org/article/2012/10/02/unjust-approach-international-justice-mission

Which led to an invitation for Melissa to contribute to the Guardian's Comment is free blog:

“The truth about trafficking: it's not just about sexual exploitation” theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/24/truth-about-trafficking-sexual-exploitation#start-of-comments



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Melissa also uses Twitter and her blog to challenge and debate journalists, such as Nick Kristof of the New York Times, whose writing on trafficking focuses on sexual exploitation. See: postwhoreamerica.com/nicholas-kristof-half-the-sky-all-the-credit

As discussed in previous modules, it's important to know who you are trying to reach with your communications and to understand the communication tools your audience is using. If they are using social media, what platforms do they prefer? And how are they using social media? Are they exchanging personal or professional information? What are they interested in and how do they get their news?

Twitter

Twitter is a public network where you are just as likely to communicate with people you've never met as your usual circle of friends. It's a great place to start online professional relationships.

Why use Twitter:

Although social media offers great opportunities to broadcast your message, its real value comes in reaching out and engaging with people in two way dialogue. Twitter is an excellent tool for listening to and engaging with a diverse range of people. If you are writing about an issue or are doing research for advocacy, it allows you to learn who is already talking about the issue and what they have to say about it. This research can help your reporting by showing you where your audience is, what terms they are using, who is an opponent and who is on your side.

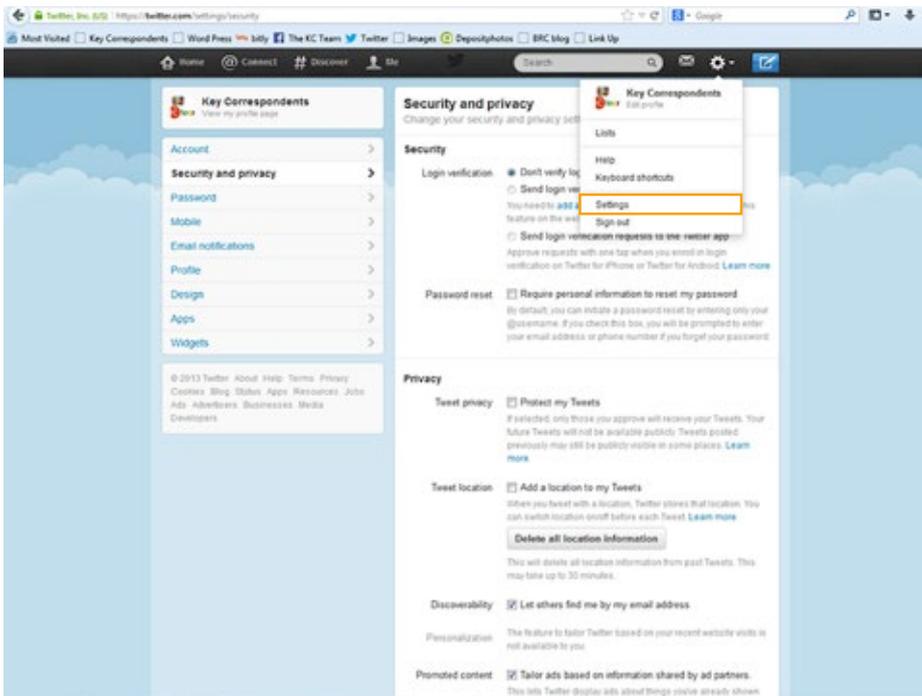
Twitter is very much about being 'of the moment', so most of the posts centre around either 'I just did this' or 'this just happened.' As a result it's very helpful in staying on top of current events, which makes it valuable for keeping your writing up to date. Being able to search for keywords (see hashtags on page 35) means you can get posts about topics as they happen rather than having to follow everyone who might post on the subject.



© Neil Freeman/Alliance

Above left: Members of the Addis Beza youth group using their talent for dance to communicate safe sex messages

Above: The test fourth from the left is a positive HIV test done using rapid testing kits



Setting up your account:

Go to Twitter.com and you'll see a box that says 'New to Twitter,' asking for your full name, email and password. Both your full name and your username can be changed later; however, your email address can't be changed, and that is what is used to verify your identity.

Though your username can be changed, it is the way most people will identify and find you. If you want to build your online presence as a professional and specialist in your chosen area, it makes sense to use your actual name – or a shortened version if it is long! Twitter only allows 140 characters in each message you post, so you want to make it easy for people to include your username in their tweets and still have plenty of space to write their message.

The first thing Twitter will ask you to do is to choose some people to follow. You'll also want to fill out your profile and upload a photo. Both of these items will be important for getting people to follow you. A few security-related things to think about: do you want to limit who can see your tweets? If you do, you may want to 'protect your tweets', which means that only the people you allow to follow you can see your tweets. To activate it, go to the little gear icon at the top of the page > Security and privacy> Protect my Tweets.

If you don't protect your tweets, anyone can see what you tweet. For advocacy purposes and reaching a wide audience it is recommended to make your Twitter account public, but if you choose to do this it's important to always remember that anyone could read your tweets. For your personal security never give away information that could identify the address where you live or work, or specifically where you are at any given time. Also be very careful about what other personal information you choose to share, particularly in relation to children.

In the security and privacy section of Twitter you have the option to add a location from your tweets. For security reasons, it is recommended that you never do this.

One other thing to consider if you have a public account is to never tweet anything that you wouldn't be happy for a future employer to read.

Some people have multiple Twitter accounts, professional and personal. However, you will find it easiest if you set up and maintain one account. Popular Twitter accounts tend to be ones that sound like a person rather than a corporate persona or PR machine. Rather than thinking of your Twitter account as personal or professional, it generally works best to understand that it is public and permanent.

How to tweet:

Twitter, like any network, requires developing, nurturing and maintenance. You need to decide who to follow and who you need to pay attention to. You should tweet about what you're doing or reading or even thinking. But don't overdo it; tweet what you think people will be interested in. Focusing on a particular topic or two can really help.

Until you get more confident with your tweets it can be good to craft them offline first of all – though this doesn't mean spend hours agonising over crafting the perfect tweet.



When you're happy with your tweet – hit the 'compose new tweet' icon in the top right hand corner and away you go!

Short guide to Twitter language:

- RT: The letters RT at the beginning of a tweet signifies 'retweet' and this is a way to show you appreciated a tweet enough to share it with your followers. If someone retweets a post of yours, be sure to thank them! NB: if your tweets are protected, then other users are not able to retweet them.
- MT: This means 'modified tweet' and you use it when you retweet another person's tweet but you change it a bit – usually to make it shorter so that you can add your comment. Be very careful not to change the meaning of the original tweet though.
- Via: means you discovered something via someone else's tweet.
- #: The hashtag symbol is used to help people find tweets on a particular subject. People will add a hashtag such as #worldaidsday or #WAD2013 to their tweets which helps people find tweets on that subject when they put it into the search function in Twitter.

Key Correspondents

@theKCteam

Follow

Fab pics RT @gatesfoundation: In Pictures: 25 years of AIDS campaigning: gates.ly/1bd3wZK

#WorldAIDSDay

3:22 PM - 2 Dec 2013

1 FAVORITE

Key Correspondents

@theKCteam

Follow

MT @HIVBlogger: Addis Beza Great story about dance helping spread message about HIV

wp.me/pugwI-s6 @theaidsalliance @positivelife_ni

5:02 PM - 27 Nov 2013

Key Correspondents

@theKCteam

Follow

Malawian woman living with HIV calls on leaders to protect her rights bit.ly/185TUoX via

@charles_pensulo #WAD2013

12:55 PM - 2 Dec 2013

1 RETWEET



There are lots of tools to help you manage Twitter:

- Favouriting a tweet: shows that you valued the tweet but also bookmarks it for later reference.
- Lists are ways of organising people whom you follow. For example, you can create a list (from the 'me' tab in your Twitter account) and call it, for example, 'my heroes' or 'HIV advocates'. You can then view the list as a feed and you will only see the tweets from those people.
- Tweets can include links to web pages, for example, when you publish a story online you can tweet about it including a link to encourage other people to read it. However, links can be quite long and eat up most of your 140-character limit. A link shortener comes in handy and Twitter has them built in.
- The following link shortening sites are also useful as they make links even shorter than Twitter's automatic shortener and allow you to track how many people have clicked on the links: ow.ly, tinyurl.com, bitly.com
- Applications such as Tweetdeck and Hootsuite are free and can be downloaded to your desktop. They help you organise timelines, keep track of lists, searches, activity and more – all in one place.



When to tweet:

There is an art to timing your updates so that the most people will see them and react. Social media is very much about what's going on right now – literally. More people will be online at certain times of the day – like first thing in the morning, at the end of the workday and at weekends. You'll get more people to see your posts if they are on that particular social media network at the moment you post. Again, it's about knowing your audience. When are they online, and when do they check Twitter? If you have something really important, consider tweeting it more than once. Tag it with #ICYMI (in case you missed it) and any other relevant hashtags.

Top Twitter tips:

- Be polite.
- Be entertaining. Humorous and clever tweets are always popular.
- Think before you tweet. Remember – this will be public and permanent.
- Tweets must stand alone – consider how a tweet will read when it's out of context.
- Public officials tend to have Twitter feeds and it's a great place to connect with them.
- Think in terms of headlines. What will grab readers' attention and entice them to want to know more?
- Be aware that some people online can be verbally abusive, insulting or constantly negative. We call them "trolls". Don't engage with them. If someone is being abusive, ignore them.

For more tips visit Twitter's own useful beginners' guide:
support.twitter.com/articles/215585-twitter-101-getting-started-with-twitter#

Above left: Former sex worker Margaret Doe now works as a peer educator, telling sex workers about the importance of using condoms, Ivory Coast

Above: Mark Chilongo from Africa Directions, Lusaka, rehearses a play about stigma with the drama group which they will perform for traditional leaders, Zambia



© Sheikh Rajibul Islam/duckrabbit/International HIV/AIDS Alliance

Facebook

If you are using only one social media platform, in all likelihood it is Facebook, which is generally used as a more personal space. This is important to remember as using a more professional or serious tone can put your friends off, so it's good to adapt your language when posting about your HIV and advocacy work.

As well as personal accounts on Facebook there is an option to set up a Facebook 'page', which is slightly different from a personal account, and they are often used for non-human entities like organisations or companies. Some are set up for specific advocacy campaigns, such as the 'Here I Am' campaign which calls on world leaders to save millions of lives by supporting a fully funded Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria ([facebook.com/HereIAmCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/HereIAmCampaign)).

A Facebook page allows people who are interested in your organisation/campaign content to 'like' the page and get those updates. A Facebook page also provides helpful stats, so you can monitor how many people you are reaching.

Why use Facebook:

Over one billion people like and comment an average of 3.2 billion times on Facebook every day. A strong presence on Facebook helps you engage in the conversations you are interested in and gives you an opportunity to raise the profile of issues you are passionate about. It provides the possibility of the most powerful kind of word-of-mouth marketing – recommendations between friends.

What to post:

People are less likely to 'like' something negative. So instead of talking about how dreadful a situation is, talk about the efforts you and others, including people affected by HIV, are involved in to make things better.

Obviously not everything you want to communicate about HIV will be positive, but it's good to remember that positivity will help you be much more successful at engaging people. Your goal on Facebook is to inspire and excite people so they want to share your posts.

If you are including a link that you want people to click on, think about how you can provide enough information to tempt them to click – but don't disclose everything or they won't bother!

With little or no sex education in schools or at home, the Addis Beza youth club is a safe space to debate issues such as the right age to start having sex

Remember that people love photos on Facebook and using them increases engagement by around 37 per cent. Always try and include a photo with your post, but remember to credit the photographer/organisation if it's not your own photo.

As with all social media, it's not just about posting a statement, more importantly it's about engaging in comments and dialogue with other people.

When to post:

Peak use time on Facebook tends to be on the weekends. But afternoons and early evening during the week are also good times to post.

YouTube

The ability to create and share video is more accessible than ever. If there's something dramatic happening, a video camera never seems far away. Video can effectively complement your writing, particularly if you have a video of an event related to your post.

Why use YouTube:

Twitter will only allow you to post six seconds of video via a third party app called Vine. Facebook will allow you to post longer videos to share with your friends but you can't share the video beyond Facebook. If you have video content that you want to distribute more widely, YouTube is a good place to get it out to a larger audience. You can also embed a video from YouTube directly into your blog post. And you can share your YouTube video on most other social media networks, including Facebook and Twitter.

It's also important to note that a video posted on YouTube will have a much longer life than it would if posted on Facebook or Twitter.

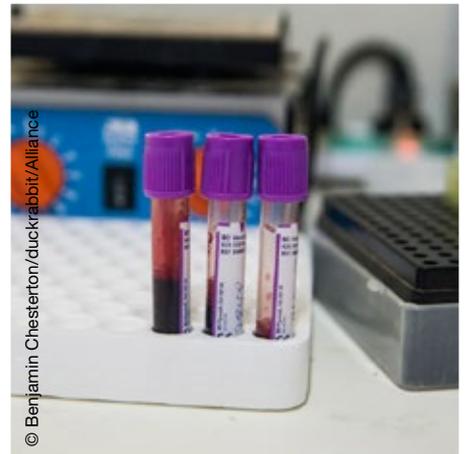
What to post:

Generally short videos (1-3 minutes) do much better than longer videos. Most importantly, videos do well when they are entertaining – content which is humorous, dramatic, quirky or shocking have more potential to be shared and reach a wide audience.

Also, YouTube is the second largest search engine after Google. It can be an excellent source for finding background on subjects for your writing. There is an enormous wealth of knowledge on YouTube as people have developed step by step DIY (do it yourself) videos on many subjects. So if you want to know how to do something, just search YouTube – there's bound to be a video to teach you what you need to know!

How to post:

Instead of finding video via a news feed (the way you find content on Twitter and Facebook), most people find videos via searching. So it's critical to use a short catchy title and a good description of your video when you upload it. You also need to appropriately categorise it and make use of tags (topics that it might fall under).



Blods being tested for CD4 cells, a type of white blood cell that fights infection and their count indicates the stage of HIV or AIDS in a patient



Aged between 16 and 18, the Addis Beza dancers belong to the first generation that has never known a world without AIDS

Other social media tools: deciding what's useful

While Facebook, Twitter and YouTube get most of the attention, they aren't the only social media tools that you should use. It's vitally important to pay attention to what people are using and what they also find valuable. Use your own judgement as to where you invest your time according to your goals and what the platform can do for you.

Here's a list of popular social media tools:

- LinkedIn: A professional network. Mostly people promoting their jobs or looking for new ones. Great to find professional sources for stories. Also helpful to see how people are connected to you.
- Flickr: A photo-sharing site. Great for finding images – just remember to check for permission for re-use.
- Google+: Initially started out as a Facebook competitor but has evolved into a social media platform for people using Google services. Mostly professional interactions.
- Pinterest: Works by allowing you to 'pin' images and videos and organising them into 'boards' that focus on topics.
- Tumblr: Another microblogging service that is a bit of a cross between Twitter and Pinterest.
- Instagram: Another way for people to share photos, short video clips and comments. Users can choose from a range of filters to apply to their photos, which enhance them and give a more professional feel.

It's quite easy to link social media services and automatically cross post (publish the same stories/links/updates on the different sites). However, use these features with caution as it is easy to forget and accidentally cross post something you didn't intend for a wider audience.

Social media listening tools

Here are some tools that can help you monitor and organise social networking activity:

- Storify: Allows you to aggregate and save posts from a variety of social media platforms. You can organise posts into narratives and publish them on the web.
- Netvibes: Allows you to set up widgets to monitor a variety of different activity on social media and the web.
- Commun.it: Monitors Twitter activity and will let you know who your key followers and supporters are.

Remember that social media is about an exchange of ideas. It's great to post your stories, but it's also vital to participate in discussions. If you start a discussion, keep it going. If someone engages you through social media, respond.

Exercise one

If you don't already have a Twitter account:

Set up a Twitter account and find at least 50 people to follow who are talking about HIV issues. You can start with:

@theKCteam

@theaidsalliance

@UNAIDS

You can look at who the above Twitter accounts are following for ideas on who you might want to follow.

Send a tweet to @theKCteam to let us know you have joined Twitter.

If you already have a Twitter account:

Do a search for #HIV.

Find 50 new people who have interesting things to say about HIV.

Find a conversation you are interested in and think about what you have to say to contribute – then join in. Happy tweeting!

Exercise two

Presumably, you have already given thought to who your audiences are for your writing. So now write a list of people you personally know who you would identify as your audience and talk to them about what social media they use and how they use those networks.

Also think about individuals that represent your audience who you don't know. See if you can find them on social media networks. What are they posting about? Are they making comments about your issues. Make note of the language they are using and key terms about your issue.

Document and use your research to help you connect with people and build relationships. Make sure you reach out to them directly when you have content that you think will interest them.

Further reading

- Using social media for big listening: bethkanter.org/upwell-campaign/
- Want more Facebook activity? Surprise them: mobilisationlab.org/want-more-Facebook-activity-surprise-them-and-make-em-happy/
- How to deal with trolls: theguardian.com/media/2012/jun/12/how-to-deal-with-trolls
- Social Media for Social Good – Mansfield, 2012