Topic 3.3: Members of Congress' Use of Social Media

[Congress Soars to New Heights on Social Media](#) declared the Pew Research Center in July 2020. Virtually every member of the Senate and the House of Representatives is now active on social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Members of Congress share information with voters, react to events, and take positions on public policy issues, all while seeking to add more followers to their accounts.

The volume of social media content generated by Congress is huge. Scholars from the Pew Research Center noted that "as a collective, the 116th Congress maintains over 2,000 active official, campaign and personal accounts on Facebook and Twitter (not counting institutional accounts that periodically change hands, such as committee chair or leadership accounts) with over a **quarter-billion** total followers between them" ([2020, para. 8](#)). Congressional accounts generated 100,000 tweets and Facebook posts every month, on average, in 2020. Between 2016 and 2020, Democrats posted more often on Twitter while Republicans had greater levels of engagement with others as measured by reactions, shares, favorites, and retweets.

Some members of Congress have become social media "stars" in that they have large numbers of followers and they exert considerable influence on political matters. They are in the news all the time. In 2019, for example, Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass), Ted Cruz (R-Tex), Corey Booker (D-NJ), and Rep Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) were most active on Twitter (For more, see "[Their Public Whatever and Their Twitter World](#)," *The Washington Post Magazine*, August 27, 2019).

The following activities encourage a critical in-depth exploration of how members of congress use social media.

Activity 1: Analyze the Social Media Activity of Members of Congress

In this activity, you will investigate and document the social media presence of at least two members of Congress. You can choose individuals who are in the news, who represent your state or Congressional district, or who come from different regions of the country or from different political parties.

- Analyze the number and type of followers the congressperson has on each of the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.
- Collect text from at least 100 Twitter or Facebook posts and then paste it into the [Databasic.io Word Counter](#) to examine common words and phrases.
- Then, closely examine the content of the posts across the different social media platforms:
  - What issues or policies are most frequently discussed online?
  - What types of visuals are used?
  - What language is used? Is the language use different on each platform?
  - Which types of posts get the most responses (shares, likes, retweets, comments)?
  - How does the congressperson attempt to persuade social media followers (e.g., use of specific visuals or language or calls to action)?
  - How accurate are the posts (collect a randomly selected set of posts and then verify their accuracy)?
  - Do the posts increase or decrease the credibility of the congressperson?

- **Write a respectful response** to a post that you agree or disagree with.
    - Did you receive any response to your post?
- **Design a social media campaign** that includes a series of posts with text and visuals (e.g., memes, videos, gifs, graphics) to showcase, and educate others about, your findings.
    - Here is a [social media campaign example](#) created by Justin Lo, Daniel Mulno, and David Warde and here is a [Twitter campaign example](#) by Sara Shea.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Social Media Response](#)

[Instagram Campaign](#)

[Twitter Campaign](#)

Activity 2: Explore Political Campaigning through Social Media

Political campaigning has evolved over the years. William Henry Harrison was the first candidate to actively campaign for the office of President in 1840 using the slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" (referring to his leadership in a famous 1811 battle between U.S. soldiers and Native American warriors in Indiana; John Tyler was his vice-Presidential candidate who became President when Harrison died suddenly after taking office). But mainly during the19th century, candidates did not campaign out in public, instead they worked behind the scenes to secure support and votes.

Mass media changed has changed political communication between politicians and people. "Eisenhower Answers America" (1952) is considered the first political ad broadcast on television. The first televised political debates happened in 1960 between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Today we follow politicians' every move through social media (e.g., watching AOC assembling her [house furniture](#) or Elizabeth Warren [opening a New Year's beer](#) on Instagram).

- Reflect upon the following questions:
    - How has political campaigning evolved over the years - from the time before TV to an age where we follow politicians' every move through social media?
    - What distinguishes members of Congress from other social media 'influencers'?
    - What is the role of social media in influencing public opinion? For example, how do you think social media posts from members of Congress influence voters' opinions about candidates and important political issues?
    - How does social media impact US elections?
- Then, **design an infographic or [interactive timeline](#)** that presents political campaigning in the past, the present, and future (what you predict it will look like in the future).

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[History of Political Campaigning](#) by Kira Levenson, Lizette Sta. Maria, & Thomas Gruttadauria

Additional Resources

- [The congressional social media landscape](#)
- [Members of the 116th Congress rail against social-media companies but posted to Twitter and Facebook a record 2.2 million times](#)
- Wood, S. C. (1990, Spring). [Television's First Political Spot Ad Campaign: Eisenhower Answers America](#). *Presidential Studies, 20* (2) : 265-283.

Connecting to the eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Congress, the Legislative Branch: House of Representatives and the Senate](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
  - *Describe the respective roles of each the branches of the government* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science)]8.T3.3]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
  - Knowledge Constructor
    - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
    - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data, or other resources.
  - Computational Thinker
    - 5b. Students collect data or identify relevant data sets, use digital tools to analyze them, and represent data in various ways to facilitate problem-solving and decision-making.
  - Creative Communicator
    - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
    - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
  - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
  - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
  - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
  - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9
- [English/Language Arts Common Core Standards](#)
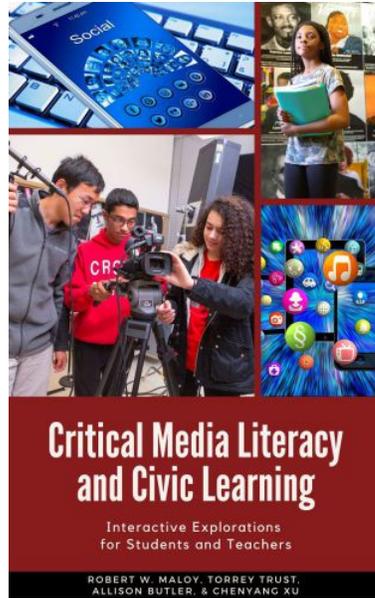
Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. Equity Press. https://equitypress.org/mediaandciviclearning