



The future of community mobilization: Evaluating community reactions to social media efforts for sexual violence prevention

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Social media is an essential tool for mobilizing youth and communities in sexual violence prevention (SVP) efforts. It expands the reach of messaging, builds engagement, and can shape public discourse via real-time conversations about sexual violence. Given the time commitment to organize and implement a social media presence, it is important to evaluate how well these efforts are working and to make improvements. Several social media platforms provide analytics to users, but these produce mountains of data that can be difficult to navigate and use in meaningful ways. Through our work evaluating Michigan's Sexual Violence Prevention Program, we created a four-step, user-friendly approach to evaluating and monitoring SVP social media efforts:

1. Set goals and develop objectives
2. Pick indicators
3. Track indicators
4. Interpret and use findings

“Social media is an essential tool for mobilizing youth and communities in sexual violence prevention efforts.”

STEP 1: SET GOALS AND DEVELOP OBJECTIVES

To begin your evaluation, start with your goals. Examples of social media goals you might be pursuing include increasing SVP knowledge among a youth audience, recruiting volunteers, or getting people to take an SVP-related pledge.

Next, you will develop certain objectives you want to accomplish to reach these goals. When developing your objectives, make sure that they fit the SMART acronym: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Based.

One SMART objective might be “recruit five high school youth to volunteer via Facebook by the end of the Fiscal Year.” For each objective, decide what activities you will do to meet your objective, such as making a certain number of posts per week, tailoring content to a particular age range, or partnering with other organizations to share your posts with Fans of their page.



STEP 2: PICK INDICATORS

The next step is to decide how you will measure how well your social media efforts are working. After an extensive literature review of social media evaluation, we developed an indicator framework (see Figure 1) that supports an effective evaluation of social media initiatives. Select indicators that will allow you to monitor progress on your objectives and activities. The indicators available will depend on the social media platform you are using. For example, Facebook Insights is a free

social media analytics tool available to anyone who has a Facebook Page with at least 30 page likes, and it offers an array of indicators. The indicators used in the examples below are from Facebook Insights, but the concepts can be applied to other social media sites.

Activity indicators tell what you actually did on your page. These include things like the number of posts made during a specified timeframe, number of events created, or number of “boosted” posts on Facebook.

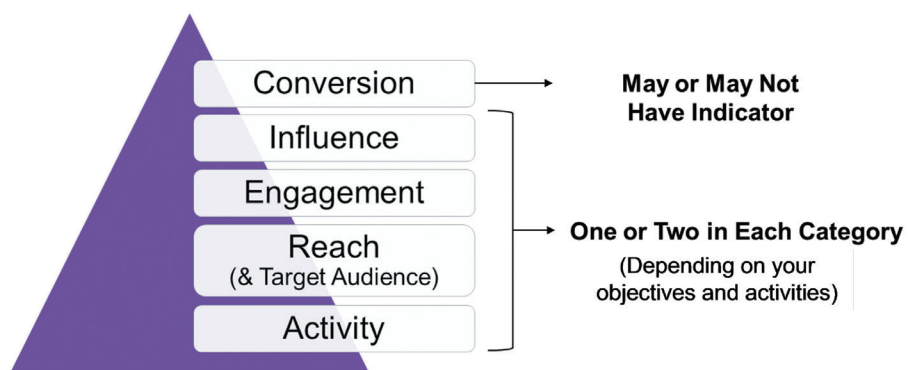


Figure 1. Framework for selecting indicators for social media evaluation



Reach indicators generally show the number of people who are seeing your page and/or posts. For example, Facebook provides Page Fans (also known as “page likes”) and the number of people who saw your post in their news feed.

Engagement indicators measure the degree to which people have interacted with your content. This includes things like “reacting to” a post by liking it, sharing it, commenting on it, etc. It may be helpful to think about interactions as reflections of low engagement, mid-level engagement, or high engagement.

Indicators of low-level engagement might include individual or summative measures of “reactions” to posts, such as Facebook’s Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, and Angry. Mid-level engagement involves people engaging with posts to learn more (e.g. clicks on posts to watch a video or follow a link), commenting

on a post to voice their opinion, or sharing the posts so their friends can see it. High-level engagement activities indicate interest in moving toward more real-world participation such as committing to taking part in an activity by responding to a Facebook event invitation.

Influence indicators tell how your posts are being received by others. This is a measure that builds on reach and engagement by examining things like comments on posts. One influence indicator we have found helpful is comment polarity (the degree to which a comment supports the content of your message). This approach works well when your post states a particular stance or argument. To use this approach, assign a negative (disagrees with argument), positive (agrees with argument), or neutral polarity to each comment on a post or group of posts.

Figure 2. Examples of indicators for selected objectives and activities

Activities	Potential Indicators
Post 2 pictures and articles with teens contributing to SV prevention per week	<i>Activity Indicator:</i> Total number of posts with teens contributing to SV prevention
Encourage students to “Like” our page when we give presentations in high schools	<i>Reach Indicator:</i> Number of new fans ages 13-17
Request that schools, student organization pages, and fans share our recruitment-specific posts	<i>Engagement Indicator:</i> Number of shares of our recruitment-specific posts
Objective	Potential Indicator
Recruit 5 high school youth to volunteer via Facebook by the end of the Fiscal Year	<i>Conversion Indicator:</i> # new high school volunteers who say they heard about us on Facebook

Figure 3. Example of tracking indicators

Indicators	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Activity						
# posts with teens doing SV Prevention	2	2	0	1	3	2
Reach (Target Audience)						
# new fans of our page who are ages 13-17	10	16	2	21	33	5
Engagement						
# shares of recruitment-specific posts	0	1	0	0	2	0
Conversion						
# new high school volunteers who say they heard about us on Facebook	0	0	1	0	3	0

Conversion indicators measure the degree to which users are “converting” more casual activities that take place online into real-world participation in activities that support your prevention goals and objectives. Examples include requests for information from your help line, donations, participation in events, or invitations to give talks. It is important to note that not every goal will have a conversion measure — sometimes the goal is really just to raise community awareness.

Some examples of indicators, matched to an objective and activities, can be found in Figure 2.

STEP 3: TRACK INDICATORS

The next step is systematically tracking your selected indicators over time to monitor your progress. This can be done with something as simple as a table with each of your indicators as rows and a number of weeks as columns. For example, you could track the number of posts (activity), views (reach), shares

(engagement), and new volunteers who say they heard about you on Facebook (conversion) each week for six weeks (see Figure 3).

STEP 4: INTERPRET & USE FINDINGS

It is great to collect this information but even better to use it. The first step is interpreting what you have collected. These questions can help you understand and use your data.

- **How does each indicator change over time?** In other words, what patterns do I see when I walk through indicators row by row? Which indicators went up, went down, stayed the same, or fluctuated? Did they change in the ways I expected?
- **How did each week differ?** What patterns do I see when I look at each week’s column? When did things go well, and when did things go poorly? Were other events happening in the community at this time that might have



impacted our results? How might changes in one indicator be tied to changes in another (e.g. when one goes up, the other usually goes up too)?

- **Did I reach my goal for each of my indicators?** What might have contributed to meeting or not meeting my goals? What additional data do I need to understand what I am seeing?

Remember that while patterns can help track how things are going, a pattern does not always indicate a direct relationship. Keep tracking as you try new things to figure out what works best for reaching your goals.

Once you have interpreted your data, think through what these data suggest that the organization should do. Consider asking:

- **What worked?** What strategies should I keep? Do these data suggest I try any new strategies to build on my wins?
- **What did not work?** Are there strategies that I should add, change, or drop to improve my performance?
- **What else do I want to track to help understand my data better in the future?** Are there any indicators that I might want to add, change, or drop?

Evaluation can help you better understand how your social media efforts are working. By consistently tracking, interpreting, and putting your data to use, you can ensure that you are getting the most out of the time you invest into online campaigns. The approach and indicators presented here represent only an initial sampling



of evaluation possibilities. A wide world of options is out there for you to explore. Are you ready to jump in? ■

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