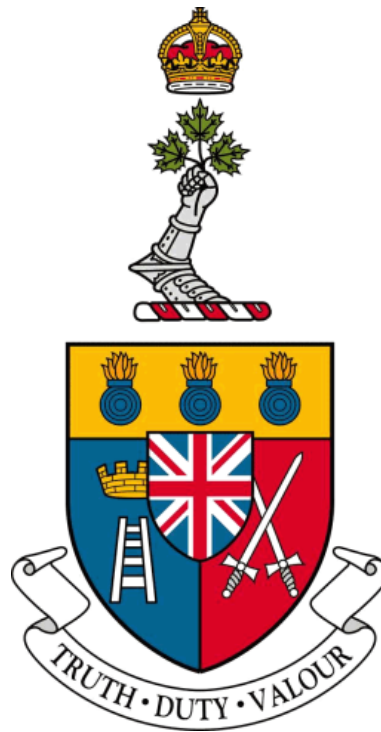


ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE OF CANADA

BROCK SQUADRON



Do it for the 'gram

Transactions on Social Media use in the Canadian Armed Forces

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Abstract

To maintain a positive media presence, the benefits and drawbacks of social media use must be researched by senior staff and policymakers to provide best practices and guidance to newer members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

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1 Introduction**1.1 Document Purpose**

In response to an incident of inappropriate use of social media, this document has been prepared to outline some of the benefits, drawbacks, and challenges related to social media use in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

1.2 Background

Social media has become an increasingly prominent mechanism of communication. To the military, there are many potential benefits. Recruitment purposes and general information can be shared through social media. Currently every branch of the CAF has a social media presence.[1]

Members of the CAF too have social media accounts, much like most members of society.[2] These personally owned accounts [3] are the topic of this paper. Without the formal training of Public Affairs personnel and oversight by the chain of command, it is possible for members to breach security, disclose sensitive information, or discredit the CAF.

The principal finding of this paper is that there is a significant gap between younger personnel who are comfortable with social media, and senior staff who are struggling to understand the implications, both positive and negative, of its widespread use by members of the CAF.

2 Definitions**2.1 Social Media**

A set of web-based tools and services that permit participants with distinct user profiles to create, share and interact with user-generated content, including text, images, videos and audio.[4]

2.2 Digital Natives

For the purposes of this document, any reference to younger personnel or digital natives will not be tied to specific generations, but instead anybody who was raised in a digital, media-saturated, world.[5]

They are more comfortable with social media, 94% of Canadians 18-24 use social media weekly, with 92% visit Facebook once a week, 79% of which visit daily, 82% visiting Instagram, and 78% using Snapchat at least weekly.[2] Between these services and others like Pinterest, Tumblr, Reddit, Youtube, and LinkedIn, a Canadian Youth will spend on average 37 minutes a day consuming social media.

The expectation of privacy and relative comfort with posting status updates to these platforms is significantly lower among those raised with the technology than, generally older, digital immigrants.[5]

3 Benefits

3.1 Increased Awareness

According to a 2018 poll conducted by the DND, “the military is off the radar to most Canadians.” While 42% of Canadians were “somewhat familiar” with the forces, it was obvious that “Awareness of and familiarity with the [CAF] was generally very low; virtually non-existent among those in the younger age group.”[6]

Given that the segment of Canada’s population that is the most connected to this form of media is also the least aware of our CAF, it is possible that increased usage of social media both officially and unofficially could increase awareness of the CAF’s role.

3.2 Increased Loyalty

Harvard Business Review suggests that younger workers have earned a reputation as attention sponges. A sense of purpose is a key factor in job satisfaction, and make strong personal commitments to community service.[7] The CAF members already do activities they are proud of, serve a greater purpose, and are interesting to those outside of the military. Encouraging members to share their stories more may help them feel more fulfilled as an employee and could increase their loyalty to the CAF.[8]

3.3 Reputation Management

While the CAF does not often enter the public light, when it does it is sometimes under unfortunate circumstances. Being able to humanize an organization like the CAF and share the other side of a story is something that can be done if there is a significant and open social media presence.[9] It is not possible to humanize something only with Public Affairs run official accounts, and having members share their own stories is essential to maintaining a positive reputation.

3.4 Recruiting

The CAF has already recognized the importance of using digital tools for recruiting.[10] While creating new smartphone apps shows commitment to “upping our game so that we are going to approach young people just like any other modern company would,” employing existing technologies must also be part of a

cohesive effort to recruit the next generation of CAF members.

3.5 Member-Generated Content

While some Official Social Media Accounts (OSMA) already exist [1], the number of these accounts is limited to ensure cohesiveness and prevent a loss of credibility, trust, and confidence in the DND and CAF.[4]

An increased social media presence is desirable to the CAF, and Official Social Media Accounts are limited. Therefore encouraging member-generated content is a vital part to a Social Media strategy.

Member-generated content can help share the stories of our members. Putting the spotlight on CAF members, who are already generally seen in a positive light by the public,[6] can help humanize the CAF. Encouraging social media ‘influencers’ from within can help put a face to the Forces, and can generate interest and awareness in the work being done.[11]

4 Drawbacks

4.1 Operation & Personnel Security

Seemingly innocent conversation has always been a threat to OpSec and PerSec, however, in a digital age the threat no longer only when something is overheard at a bar, but instead from anywhere in the world, at any time. Talk or pictures from a deployment or mission may be used to identify somebody’s role and location.

4.2 Geotagging

Many social media platforms involve Location-based information. Snapchat will display a ‘bitmoji’ character of a person in their current location, usually accurate to a few meters in a feature called the ‘snapmap’ which be viewed from any browser.[12] Heatmaps from fitness trackers like Strava have revealed precise maps of US Military installations in classified areas.[13] Unassuming apps like Pokemon GO, Waze, and most weather apps reveal a significant amount of information about the location and habits of users. Geotags are added to most photographs, videos, and posts made on most apps. They are the equivalent of adding a 10-digit grid coordinate to everything posted.[14]

4.3 Discipline and Good Order

Members of the CAF are held to the standards of the Code of Service Discipline when using social me-

dia. Commenting, posting, and linking to material that does not respect the principles of professionalism, transparency, inclusiveness, respectfulness and accountability can lead to a loss of trust and confidence in the CAF that is expected by Canadians.[4]

4.4 Rumours and Bullying

Social media can cause anxiety and stress for military personnel and their families; for instance, research uncovered examples of rumour-mongering and bullying in the British Army on social media.[15]

This can be damaging to personal mental health, unit cohesion, and unit morale.

5 Challenges

5.1 Generation Gap

There is a significant gap in the comfort posting many things between a Digital Native and most of the senior leadership of the CAF. This has resulted in a disconnect between military policy and observable social media use.

The Department of National Defence (DND) has a limited understanding of the role of social media for Armed Forces members. Policymakers overlook its importance to younger members, and its emerging role in operational practice.

For those concerned, a fear of disciplinary measures results in them totally withdrawing from social media use. Stifling does not allow for the benefits: increased awareness, strengthened relationship between Canadians and the CAF, promoting a positive brand experience, and driving user traffic to CAF web content.

For the majority who are apathetic, it results in totally unfiltered social media use that could be potentially damaging. Posting of operationally or personally sensitive data publicly, broadcasting opinions or thoughts that are not in line with the principles of professionalism and respectfulness expected of the CAF, and for those with the most extreme views, driving them underground resulting in a still vacant image of the CAF on most of Social Media.

A strategy that respects the level of comfort that younger Canadians have with social media, empowers members to share content that can increase interest, awareness, and public perception of the CAF, while ensuring operational or personnel security is not violated must be created.

5.2 Disciplinary Policy

Disciplinary policy regarding misuse or careless use of social media is inadequate considering the potential risks to personal safety or loss of sensitive information.

Currently very little Social Media specific policy exists, and instead broad catch-alls that sometimes feel inappropriate or out of touch are employed to maintain a positive social media presence.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Closing the Gap

Encouraging the use of social media which increases the awareness of DND and CAF priorities, provides timely and accurate content during emerging issues and crises, and maintains a strong and dynamic presence will strengthen the relationship between Canadians and the CAF. It will also attract new audiences to various careers, helping inform both the largest pool of potential new members and the least informed segment of the Canadian population.

This may require allowing social media use in environments where superiors were previously uncomfortable with its use. Encouraging responsible use and reaching out for clarification instead of attempting to stifle social media use will be better received by those already comfortable with it.

6.2 Responsible Use

Teaching responsible social media use will be vital to ensuring that the negative aspects of social media do not undermine CAF priorities.

CAF Members must keep interactions authentic, objective, and impartial. As long as posts fit these generous guidelines, they should be encouraged.

Having a concise and widely accessible social media post assessment chart may help CAF members post responsibly with confidence. This chart could also inform decisions about inappropriate social media usage and appropriate disciplinary responses.

6.3 Operational Security

An application which checks basic settings, like GPS and Networking enabled, could be created and its use required when entering operationally secure environments. This could help keep members informed of when their devices may be capable of sharing sensitive information, and could be used to prevent access of cellphones to secure or operational areas.

6.4 Disciplinary Action

Reasonable disciplinary action must be standardized to ensure that social media use is not discouraged, but can be reasonably moderated.

Ordering members violating policies laid out for responsible use to complete training or professional development can help increase awareness in the importance of proper social media use.

Monitoring of social media by one-ups may also be necessary to ensure content posted is responsible.

For usage that violates laws, codes of conduct, and other DND or CAF policies, continue to use administrative or disciplinary action.

7 Conclusion

Social media has become extremely prominent both outside and inside the CAF. The CAF should embrace social media for its many benefits, while being aware and prepared to deal with its drawbacks.

Most of the CAFs newest members are Digital Natives, and have a significantly higher comfort using social media than current senior staff and policymakers. When the CAF embraces social media use it can increase awareness, loyalty, maintain a positive reputation, and assist recruiting efforts.

Lack of clear guidance can result in violations of OpSec and PerSec, sharing of location information carelessly, can degrade the discipline and good order of the CAF, and can fuel rumours and bullying.

Closing the gap that currently exists between newer members and unclear policy will help the CAF get the most out of social media while protecting its members from the drawbacks.

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