

A Globaldev Guide to New Social Media

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Social media is by now an integral part of many development organizations' communications efforts, but it is a fast-evolving field. While some have only just come to grips with more established platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, new and potentially more powerful platforms are already taking off.

The pandemic has made social media more important than ever before, and it has also changed how people engage with it. Microvideo platform TikTok was the most downloaded app in 2020, while live audio app Clubhouse, which is a little over a year old, has already reportedly been valued at \$4 billion.

COVID-19 has created demand for reliable information from trusted sources and high-quality debate on issues around health and equity, offering an opportunity for organizations focused on global development, global health, or humanitarian aid to reach audiences that haven't previously been

engaged in their work. With in-person meetings canceled, some have also experimented with messaging apps such as WhatsApp and chatbots to reach people with their services, or have turned to social media for fundraising efforts.

At the same time, many organizations still only have a small number of staff dedicated to social media, who often say they feel stretched in too many directions. Many continue to grapple with challenges such as trolling and misinformation online, as development leaders become increasingly aware of the need to protect staff exposed to these challenges — not to mention the threat they can pose to an organization's reputation.

Over the past year, we've been following how some global development organizations are evolving their social media work. If you've struggled to keep up with the changing landscape, you're not alone. **Read on to find out what you need to know.**



Jessica Abrahams

Editor, Devex Pro

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Essential tips and trends for social media in 2021

A look at social media trends and tips on what's working for development organizations.

By Emma Smith



*How are development organizations leveraging new platforms and features to rise above the social media noise?
Photo by: cottonbro from Pexels*

Social media use has been on the rise for some time, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent report suggests that more than 3.8 billion people use social media, spending an average of almost 2 1/2 hours per day on these platforms.

Recognizing its importance, many global development organizations have been steadily expanding their expertise in this area. With so many existing platforms, as well as new ones constantly emerging, social media teams increasingly require creative people and a range of different skill sets, said Aleksandra Kuzmanovic, social media manager at the World Health Organization headquarters, who has seen her team grow from two to five people since the start of the pandemic.

So how are development organizations leveraging new platforms and features to rise above the social media noise?

Create platform-specific content

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram are still the main platforms that development organizations use. Who constitutes the target audience — whether policy officials, advocates, or the general public — and where they are based in the world can influence which platform is best for the job.

The priority is ensuring the content is right for the platform “rather than just broadcasting it across

everything," said Louise Arlington, senior social media manager at the ONE Campaign. This means keeping up with the constantly changing algorithms for each channel. Instagram, for example, is now more geared toward saves and shares. With this platform, graphics and GIF-based content with visible information work better, while Twitter and LinkedIn allow for specialized content that encourages users to "click through," she said.

Innovate and experiment, but don't overlook what already works

WHO joined TikTok in the early days of the pandemic in a bid to educate younger populations about health risks. But the United Nations agency's traditional output didn't fit the platform's style, so more resources were required to develop creative and engaging content, Kuzmanovic said.

With social media changing so fast, she said her team is always adapting and learning about new features or platforms. During World Immunization Week at the end of April, for example, the organization kicked off its first Twitter Spaces chat. The platform's new audio feature will make it "easier to actually engage our staff from all over the world [and] from the field so that we can show the impact [that WHO is having] in countries," Kuzmanovic said.

Plan International has found success with Instagram Reels — providing short, TikTok-style videos — according to Social Media Editor Chanun Singh. Her team is steadily starting to use TikTok more, too. "It's becoming more obvious that we need to delve into that world, [since] we're also really trying to talk to and appeal to a Gen Z audience," Singh said.

Hugh Reilly, head of social media news and emergencies at UNICEF, said keeping an eye on trends and experimenting are both important. But knowing which new platforms are worth investing in is difficult, he acknowledged, noting that Facebook and YouTube are still the two most widely used social media channels globally. While their use has declined in some countries, the agency has seen huge growth in its presence on Facebook in markets such as Bangladesh and Egypt, Reilly said.

Arlington's team at the ONE Campaign is also "focused on looking at how [to] better use those



People are more likely to follow individuals and engage with [them], be moved and motivated by what [they] say on social media."

—
**HUGH REILLY, HEAD OF SOCIAL MEDIA
NEWS AND EMERGENCIES, UNICEF**

[established] platforms first and ... making the most of the different tools that we have at our disposal already," she said.

Identify trends

Social media experts have noticed a growing demand for certain types of content. According to Alyssa Kinney, social media officer at the International Rescue Committee, people are turning to digital platforms "to find a sense of community" and feel connected to a larger conversation. Instagram Live, where audiences can tune in and participate in conversations with IRC or its celebrity ambassadors, has performed well for the organization, she said. There has also been a "great surge" of social media activism, with these platforms becoming "a central place for people to voice and raise awareness" about different issues, Kinney added.

Singh's team has found an appetite for "authentic content," including videos and storytelling directly from the girls supported by Plan. "What has done well, and what there's been a little bit of an allowance for, has been less polished [content]. ... More real content has tended to resonate with people," she said.

The experts also identified a growing demand for educational content on topical issues. WHO and



Photo by: Camilo Jimenez, Unsplash.com

UNICEF both noted that posts providing practical guidance for individuals — such as hand-washing techniques or mental health advice — have performed best.

Beyond practical information, Kinney suggested that people are turning to social media to learn what COVAX — the global initiative for equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines — means for low-income countries and how the pandemic has affected responses to gender-based violence, among a number of other topics.

“By looking at data, [we] have realized that there's this hungry young Instagram audience that also is really eager to learn and to just be informed and educate themselves,” she said.

Work with others

Videos and live content have been important in helping organizations build trust and reach new audiences. Kuzmanovic's team “wanted to bring a human face to the content,” and as more of WHO's scientific experts utilize social channels, there is a visible building of trust between them and the agency's followers, she said.

“People are more likely to follow individuals and engage with [them], be moved and motivated by what [they] say on social media,” Reilly said. In addition to UNICEF staff accounts, Reilly's team enlists the support of influencers, celebrities, and goodwill ambassadors to reach new audiences. Other organizations have collaborated with local musicians or put the spotlight on their youth ambassadors' social accounts to expand their reach.

Evolve metrics

When all is said and done, how should impact be measured? Overall engagement — including shares and comments, rather than just likes — is an increasingly important indicator of success for many social media teams.

While likes are still valuable, those “deeper-level engagements of shares and saves is what we're turning an eye towards more and more,” Kinney said.



Fast facts: From Reels to Spaces



TikTok

Microvideo platform launched in 2017. Users create and share 15-60 second videos.

732M users**



Clubhouse

Live audio app launched in 2020. Users take part in audio-only discussions.

10M users***



Instagram Reels

Added to the photo-sharing network in 2020. Competes with TikTok by allowing users to post microvideos.

1.2B users of the Instagram app*



Twitter Spaces

Added to the microblogging platform in 2021. Competes with Clubhouse by allowing users to host live conversations.

353M users*



Facebook Live

Added to the social network in 2015. Allows users to broadcast live video. Similar features available on TikTok, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

2.7B users of Facebook*

Source note: Not all platforms release metrics publicly and figures cited here are estimates.

*As of January 2021, according to Statista

**As of October 2020, according to leaked documents

***As of February 2021, according to Statista

The most popular globaldev organizations on TikTok

Many aid organizations have been slow to catch up with TikTok's popularity, but some have gathered large followings there, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By Jessica Abrahams

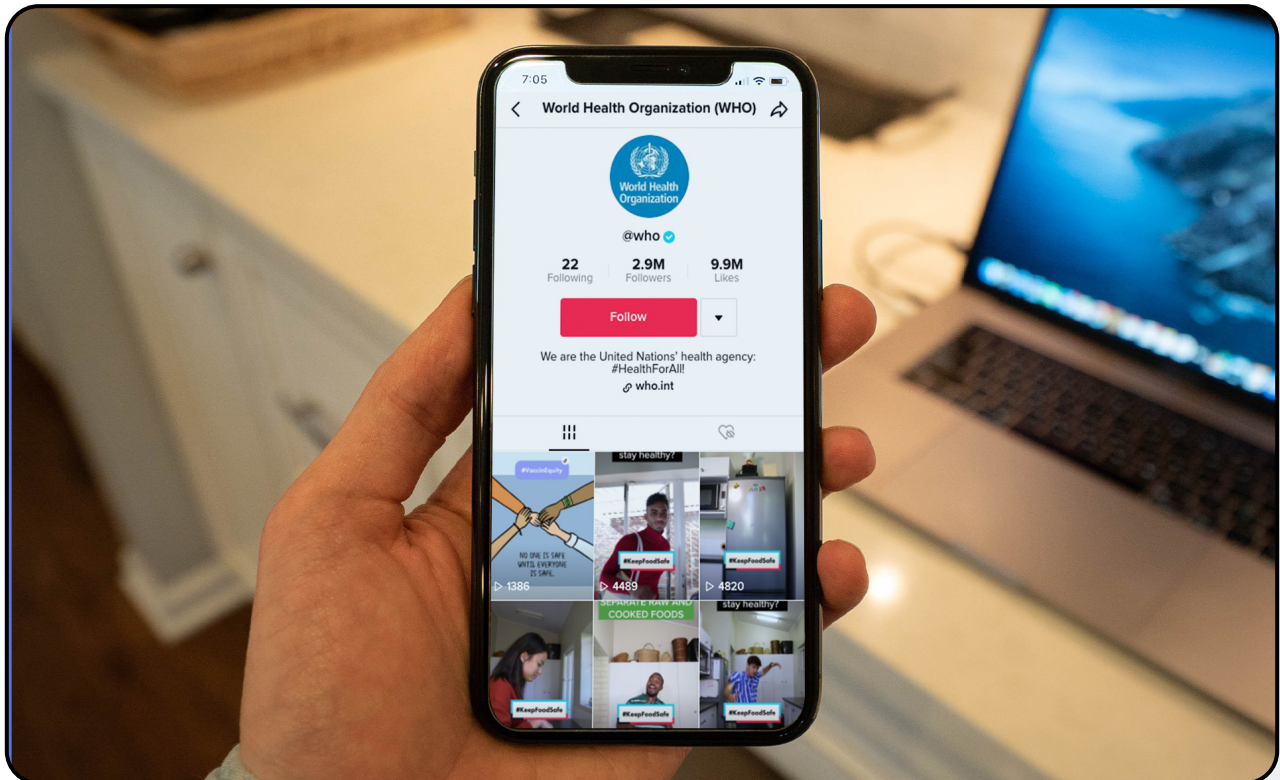


Photo by: Aaron Weiss from unsplash.com

TikTok has frequently been in the headlines over the past year. Sometimes controversial because of safeguarding and data privacy concerns, it has nonetheless become one of the most popular social media platforms globally — especially among young people, although lockdowns have helped attract new audiences. As of October 2020, it had 732 million monthly active users, a rise of more than 200 million in just 10 months.

Many companies and organizations have been slow to recognize the value of TikTok in their social media and digital strategies, but a handful of global development organizations have built a significant following there helping to boost their

communications work, reach potential volunteers and supporters, and in some cases, directly fundraise.

Devex scoured TikTok to find some of the most-followed accounts as of April 2021.

Most of these organizations joined TikTok only a year or two ago. The most popular videos were posted toward the start of the pandemic, typically providing simple and trustworthy information on key issues such as hand-washing and mask-wearing. Some have also found success using promoted videos, at times in partnership with TikTok for Good, the team that helps NGOs and nonprofits make the most of the platform.



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Number of followers: 3.4 million

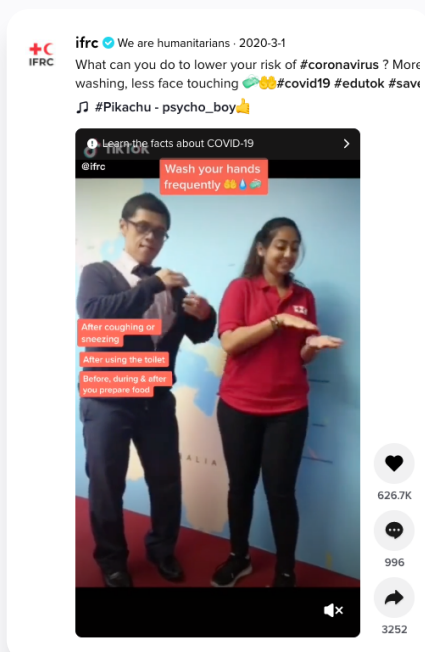
On TikTok since: May 2019

IFRC is by far the most popular major aid organization on TikTok. Its popularity, in part, is a reflection of joining the platform early. It publishes a variety of informational videos, as well as clips of its fieldwork and of volunteers participating in TikTok trends with a humanitarian twist.

In addition to its main English-language account, IFRC has accounts in Arabic and Russian. A number of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are also popular on TikTok, particularly the American Red Cross and British Red Cross, which said in July 2020 it had raised £90,000 through TikTok for its coronavirus response.

Most-watched video: IFRC's most popular video, with 32.5 million views, was posted early on in the pandemic and debunks a myth circulating on social media at the time that hand dryers could kill the coronavirus.

A separate **video** in which two dancing volunteers demonstrate how to wash hands correctly achieved 30.5 million views.



World Health Organization

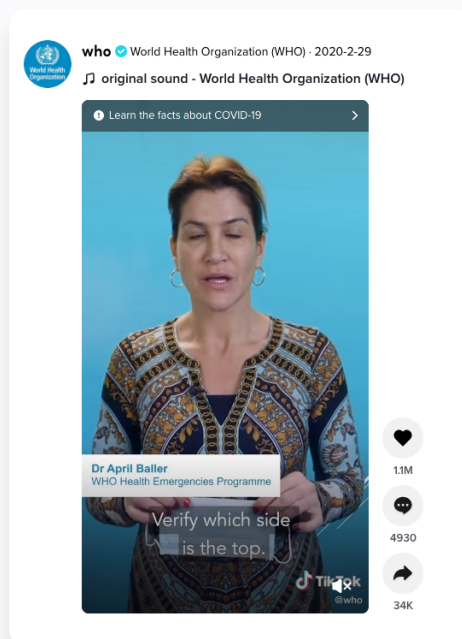
Number of followers: 2.9 million

On TikTok since: February 2020

Many of the most popular aid organizations on TikTok are U.N. organizations, but WHO leads the pack. Having joined the platform at the start of the pandemic, its success comes from posting coronavirus-related content, including clips from press conferences, advocacy for equal access to vaccines, and explainers about key topics such as virus mutations. Other popular U.N. bodies on TikTok are the International Organization for Migration, the UN Refugee Agency, and UNICEF.

Most-watched video: With 42.6 million views, **WHO's most popular TikTok video** is one of the first it posted. In late February 2020, just as the coronavirus outbreak was beginning to cause lockdowns around the world, it showed Dr. April Baller of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme explaining when and how to correctly wear masks. "This channel is more [useful] with 2 videos than the [entire] mainstream media in the last 2 months," one user commented on the video.

Another popular series of promoted videos campaigned against the tobacco industry under the hashtag **#TobaccoExposed**.





World Economic Forum

Number of followers: 1.4 million

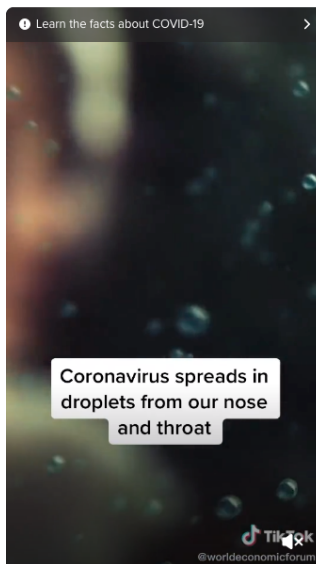
On TikTok since: September 2019

WEF is one of the most prolific global development organizations on TikTok, sometimes publishing several videos per day. Unlike some of its peers, it rarely participates in TikTok trends, but in line with its broader remit as an organization, it typically posts solutions-focused clips highlighting programs or people that are helping to tackle global challenges.

Most-watched video: WEF's most popular videos have also been related to the pandemic. In particular, a **video** published in late February 2020 explaining why hand-washing is important gained nearly 45 million views, while another debunking myths around the coronavirus gained almost 37 million.



worldeconomicforum World Economic Forum · 2020-2-28
Wash your hands to stop coronavirus #covid19 #coronavirus
#coronavirusspreading #flu #health #handwashing #hospital
#soap #clean
original sound - World Economic Forum



UNICEF India

Number of followers: Over 715,000

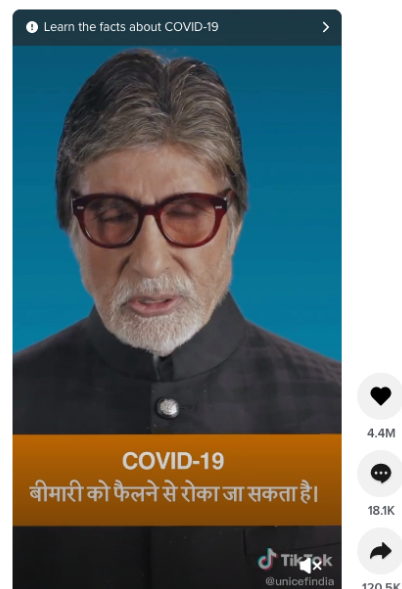
On TikTok since: March 2020, but inactive since June 2020

There are a number of popular TikTok accounts under the UNICEF umbrella, but UNICEF India comes out top — despite being inactive since late June 2020, when TikTok was banned in India. The country was previously TikTok's largest market, which may partially explain how UNICEF India managed to build such a large following in the four months it was active on the platform. It posted simple, accurate information about the coronavirus in a mixture of English and Indian languages — often with help from celebrities and influencers.

Most-watched video: Its most popular upload by far was a promoted **video** posted in late March, featuring actor Amitabh Bachchan explaining how to stay safe during the pandemic. It received over 283 million views.



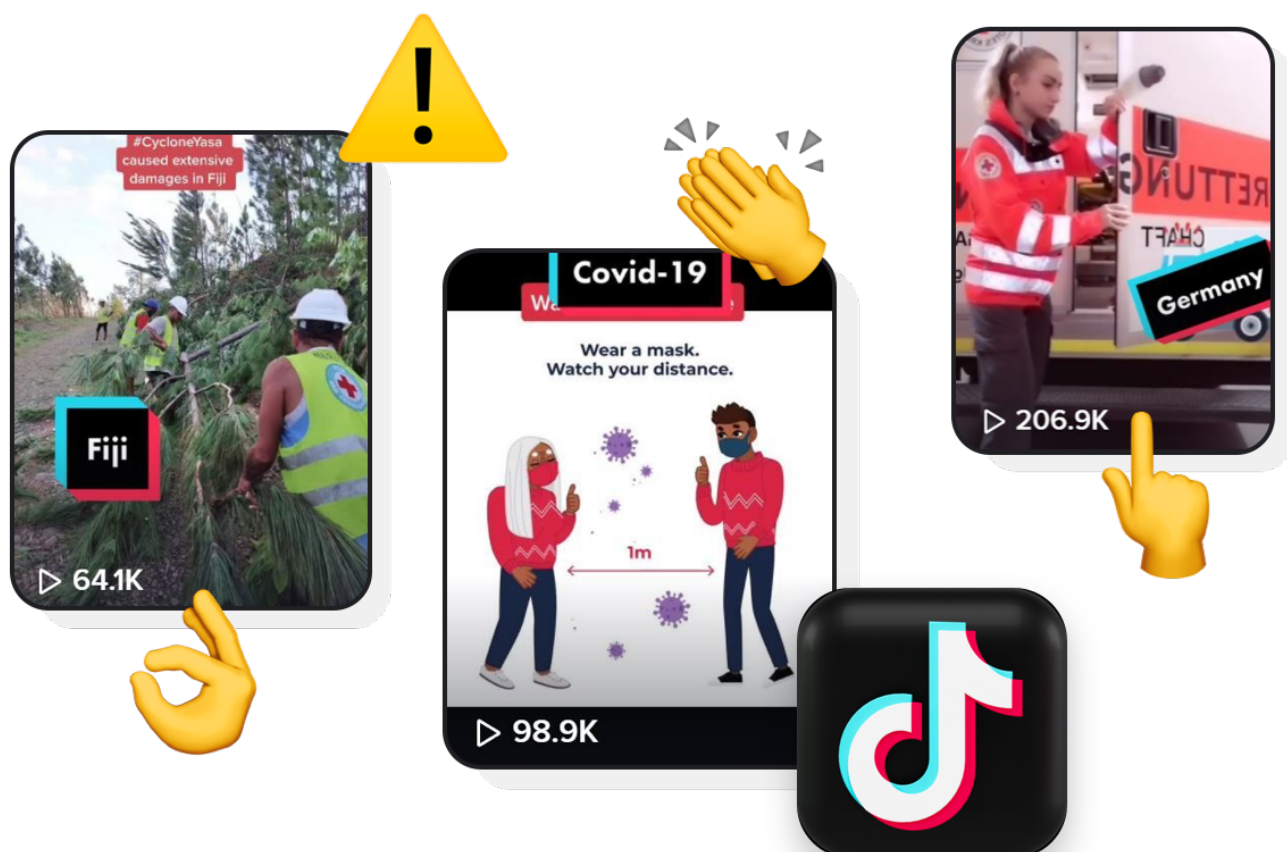
unicefindia UNICEF India · 2020-3-20
आपके लिए अमिताभ बच्चन का एक संदेश। #covid19 #coronavirus
#safehands #coronavirusindia #amitabhbachchan
original sound - UNICEF India



Q&A: How IFRC found fame on TikTok

It took IFRC 10 years to get 200,000 followers on Twitter but less than two to get 3.4 million followers on TikTok. IFRC Senior Social Media Officer Dante Licona discusses how.

By Jessica Abrahams



Many international organizations have shied away from using TikTok as part of their social media strategies — perhaps because it is seen as too much work for communication teams that are already stretched across several platforms, because of controversies that have surrounded it, or because the young audience that dominates TikTok is seen as less relevant to their work.

But some organizations have demonstrated that there is a place for the global development and humanitarian sector on TikTok — and none more so than the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

“It took us 10 years to get half a million followers on Facebook, it took us 10 years to get 200,000 followers on Twitter, and it took us one year and a half to get to 3.4 million followers on TikTok,” said Dante Licona, senior social media officer at IFRC. While follower counts don’t tell the whole story, “we are very excited that so many TikTokers find our account useful,” he said.

Licona spoke to Devex about IFRC’s presence on TikTok and how other organizations in the sector can make use of the platform. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Can you tell me about IFRC's journey with TikTok?

The strategy really started gaining some traction ... in September 2019. During the U.N. secretary-general's climate change summit, we launched a campaign called #ForClimate, and that was our first big collaboration with the TikTok for Good team. Because of that, we managed to get into the mobile phones of users in 115 countries, so it was a really global campaign in 17 languages.

Then coronavirus came, and we were in a unique, privileged position because we not only knew how to create content that is native for the platform, but we were the sole credible international voice on the platform communicating about COVID-19 [at the time]. ... Because of that, TikTok essentially helped surface our content when people started looking for #COVID. ... At some point, we were even managing to create four TikToks per day. That was a big, big shift in our work plans.

One of the key elements [of our TikTok strategy] is we want to continue connecting with the next and current generation of volunteers. We have seen so many Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers on the platform that are creating awesome content. We sometimes reach out to them and ask, "Hey, can we repost your video?" That has worked great for both them and us, so it's a collaboration.

We have also been really lucky that dozens of Red Cross [societies] around the world have embraced the platform and are creating content. So we inspire each other. We have a big network of creators.

You first reached out to TikTok in February 2019, but it was a few months before you launched the account. What was happening during that time?

It was basically a matter of analyzing how we could do it, because nobody in our sector was there. It was a matter of understanding: Is this the right platform for us? Does it make sense? How are we going to do it? Is this sustainable? All the regular digital questions that a responsible team should ask.

We were also doing our due diligence in terms of the concerns that members inside the house but also externally had. ... [As part of that] we discovered that the data is based in Singapore [rather than China], and that helped ... ease a number of concerns internally.



Just because we work in this space doesn't mean that our videos all the time need to be depressing or boring."

—
DANTE LICONA, SENIOR SOCIAL MEDIA OFFICER, IFRC

How would you describe your overall strategy on the platform?

We want to be consistent with our messages. We want to be consistent with our values. But it's allowed to be cool. ... Just because we work in this space doesn't mean that our videos all the time need to be depressing or boring.

That is one of the distinctive approaches that we have for TikTok. ... We encourage creativity, [and] we take a look at the best practices from not only the Red Crossers but everyone on TikTok.

How can you explain IFRC's popularity on TikTok?

I cannot attribute [it to] one single element. [It's] based on the fact we were early adopters, that we had COVID content when [information about] COVID was really extraordinarily in demand. It pays off that we have a global footprint. ... We post stuff in different languages. It pays off that we have 17 million volunteers and some of them are on TikTok.

It's a marathon. ... It requires a lot of initial investment. Collectively, our team spent many hundreds of hours before we got in the rhythm of understanding what we could do, how we could do it.

Do you have any insights for other organizations that might be thinking about whether it's worth putting the resources into?

First, it's a platform that you need to spend time to understand. Second, make an analysis of [whether]



When you are on TikTok, make it feel native, make it feel natural, adapt, and just keep it simple — don't overthink it."

—
**DANTE LICONA, SENIOR SOCIAL
MEDIA OFFICER, IFRC**

it's something that will add value to your cause or organization. Look also at how wide your network of supporters is. Ours is big because we have lots of national Red Crossers [and volunteers] there.

For those that decide to take the plunge, what are your top tips for making it successful?

Understanding that you need to create content for TikTok. This is not like, "Oh, let's just repurpose whatever we have from YouTube." ... That is a very important message. When you are on TikTok, make it feel native, make it feel natural, adapt, and just keep it simple — don't overthink it.



SPOTLIGHT ON TIKTOK FOR GOOD

TikTok says it wants to "inspire and encourage a new generation to have a positive impact on the planet and those around them" — and it has a dedicated team to help organizations do that. The TikTok for Good team supports nonprofits and social impact organizations with guidance on how to manage their accounts, in-depth analytics, and promoted hashtags.

Previous campaigns include #DanceForChange, ran in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which achieved 81 million video views, and IFRC's #ForClimate campaign, which achieved 384 million views.

In some cases, TikTok has offered financial backing for these campaigns, too, by matching funding raised through them or donating a certain amount for every video created.

For its India-based online education campaign #EduTok it also offered an offline mentorship program for social entrepreneurs — although TikTok has since been banned in India, alongside a slate of other Chinese-made apps.

"Everything that you want to know about the platform, they [TikTok for Good] show you how to do it, they show you some best practices, collaborations, ideas," Licona said.

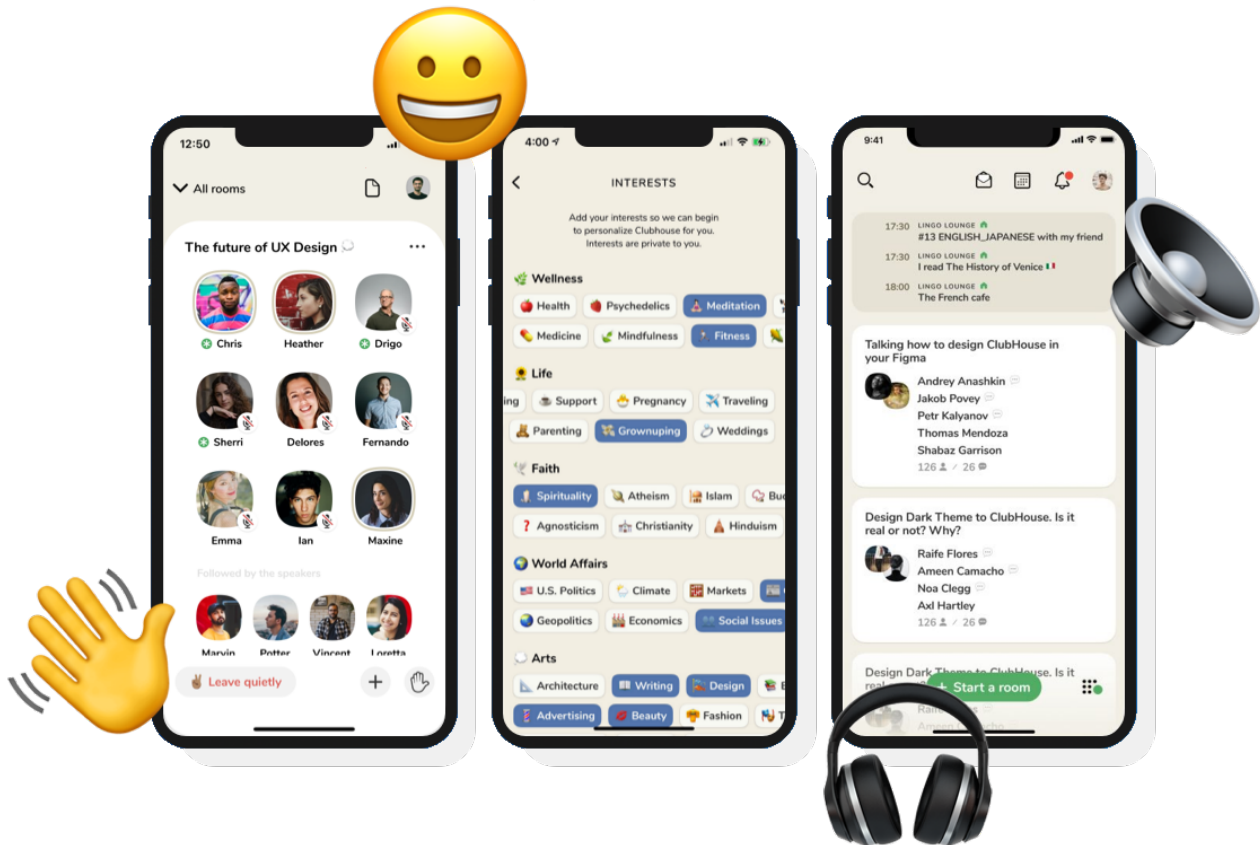
He added: "The TikTok for Good team has been really, really helpful. Unlike other social platforms that sometimes take a long time to respond, every time we brought a concern [to the team], every time we brought an idea ... they were super helpful in addressing many things."



What aid organizations need to know about Clubhouse

The new social media craze could be useful for outreach, partnerships, and even fundraising, experts say.

By Jessica Abrahams



Clubhouse: The new social media craze that's garnered millions of fans and was most recently valued at a reported \$4 billion after little more than a year in existence.

If you're not using it already, you've almost certainly heard of it — but what does it mean for global development?

First, the basics

Forget the text, pictures, and videos that form the basis of other social media platforms. This audio-only app allows users to host live conversations and panel debates. Hosts can invite participants to the

“stage” to speak, while up to 5,000 others can listen in or raise their hand if they have something to say.

The conversations are intended to be open, informal, and ephemeral. Users hop in and out at their convenience, and conversations aren't recorded for latecomers. In most cases, you'll need to be there live to listen.

Some users say this informality, in combination with the lack of video, helps people to open up and have “real” conversations.

“It feels very kind of cozy ... very intimate, if you like. You really have a profound connection with the colleagues that are in the same [virtual] room,

so you can actually open up and have serious conversations ... [with] people that share ... the same interests," said Dante Licona, senior social media officer at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Some analysts believe this model could be the next big thing in social media, with "Zoom fatigue" driving the popularity of audio-only options. Twitter has just rolled out a similar feature called Spaces, and Facebook and LinkedIn are working on their own versions.

So while the Clubhouse craze may pass — downloads have already dropped a lot since the February peak — some see it as important to get familiar with the format for communicating with supporters, aid recipients, partners, and even funders.

Who's on it?

Clubhouse began as an app for the Silicon Valley clique but has grown exponentially, with around 10 million users as of February 2021, according to Statista.

Until very recently, it was only available on iOS, making accessibility its biggest early challenge. However, an Android version was released in beta in early May, and you still need an invitation from an existing user to join.

As its popularity began to boom, one of the first groups it attracted was dissidents and rights activists living under authoritarian regimes, who were able to organize and hold open conversations using the app before regulations caught up with it. That window is already closing; some countries such as China, Jordan, and Oman have blocked it.

Although it is not possible to record conversations within the app, there have still been reports of people taking screenshots and recordings in order to target activists. It's important to bear that in mind when hosting conversations.

Major names in the global development and humanitarian space who have accounts include Ulrika Modeer, assistant secretary-general of the United Nations, Avril Benoît, executive director at Doctors Without Borders USA, and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of UN Women. Bill Gates has also taken part in at least one conversation.

When it comes to organizational accounts, it's a little more complex. At the moment, Clubhouse wants all user accounts to be linked to individuals, with organizations instead encouraged to create "clubs" — essentially, communities of users who regularly meet to talk about a particular theme or shared interest.

But there are many such clubs that may be of interest to development professionals, and organizations using the platform include the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Refugee Agency, IFRC, and Médecins Sans Frontières.

What's it useful for?

One of the app's key selling points is that it enables free-flowing debates and conversations in a way that can be difficult on other platforms. Users say it already appears to be highly international and can be useful for connecting across borders.

For IFRC, which as an organization has been on Clubhouse since February, Licona said the goal is to use it as a space where it can make its experts available for discussions and convene conversations with community members, supporters, volunteers, and staffers.

While some users note a risk of getting caught in a bubble on Clubhouse, Licona said it can help organizations reach new audiences by tapping quickly into other networks. For example, if someone joins one of your conversations, all their followers get a notification, so it can be worth trying to attract influential speakers from outside your usual network.

During a session at the Resource Alliance's Fundraising Online conference in April, South Africa-based fundraising specialist Kelvin Glen said he hoped Clubhouse could foster more collaboration between people and organizations in the nonprofit space. He's also exploring the possibility of using it to connect donors with aid recipients.

"We find it so difficult, when you're raising money abroad, for your donors to actually engage and have conversations with the people that are benefiting from their funding, so I want to play with it that way," he said, noting that the lack of video can help to protect aid recipients' privacy.



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—
**KELVIN GLEN, SOUTH AFRICA-BASED
FUNDRAISING SPECIALIST**

"I also think it's a great learning platform where we can have good conversations, we can argue, we can talk, we can share ideas. ... It's a wonderful, human [form of] networking, unlike [something like Twitter] where it's all text. I think this is a lot more personal," he said.

While Clubhouse's utility is still being explored by nonprofits, "if fundraisers don't get on board, you are going to be left behind," Glen said.

Miriam Wagner Long, CEO at German fundraising agency Agentur Zielgenau GmbH, described a Clubhouse session she attended where a United Nations program staff reported on its work from the Syrian border and took questions from listeners. "For me that was such a tremendous opportunity because ... I see the pictures on the news but I would have never felt the same way that I did while listening. ... It actually felt [like] I was right there experiencing and learning [about] what's happening with my donation," she said.

Clubhouse is also working to roll out a payment button that would allow users to send money to their favorite "creators." That could be a direct way for nonprofits to use the app for fundraising.

Are there any other issues?

Something to be aware of, especially when using the app for professional purposes, is that there's currently no process for identifying official accounts or clubs, such as an equivalent to Twitter's blue tick.

While it's possible to tell something about an account from its profile — including who invited the user and other social media accounts that it's linked to — there have been some reports of imposters.

In a statement to Devex, Clubhouse said: "users must use a real name and identity. If we receive a complaint about a potential fake name, we may require users to provide identity verification."

Organizations joining the platform late may also find there are already communities established in their name. For example, clubs that center around discussions of the U.N. may have no affiliation with it.

As with all social media platforms, there have also been problems with trolling. That includes during conversations on sensitive topics, which can attract "polarizing voices that might try to find a public forum for active confrontation," Licona said.

While there are robust reporting mechanisms — including the ability to ban a user from your club if they breach the rules — moderation is key. A host can choose moderators who are then responsible for helping the conversation flow and deciding who gets to speak.

"It's so important to keep ... an emphasis on good moderators that can facilitate both the conversation but can also do it in a safe way for everybody involved," Licona said.



How to leverage messaging apps during COVID-19

A growing number of NGOs are building chatbots in response to COVID-19. Devex caught up with some of them to gather emerging best practices.

By Catherine Cheney



A scene from an event by Sesame Workshop at a UNICEF shelter in Escuintla, Guatemala. Photo by: US Embassy Guatemala / CC BY-NC-ND

Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit behind “Sesame Street,” has been hard at work bringing the beloved Muppets characters from television screens to cellphones. In Latin America, the organization is integrating content from “Sésamo,” the Spanish-language version of “Sesame Street,” into an automated chat response system.

Like other NGOs trying to adapt their services to the circumstances of the pandemic, Sesame Workshop says it hopes its efforts to turn Muppets into bots will benefit children and their parents seeking out educational content during lockdowns.

Many NGOs that invested in chatbots before the pandemic are now finding messaging at the center of what they do, while those without programs in place are working to catch up.

Devex spoke with organizations that already utilize messaging platforms about emerging best practices.

Navigating access challenges

The pandemic led Bridge International Academies, a network of private schools that focuses on

students in low- and middle-income countries, to refine its at-home learning program.

The program uses WhatsApp, which is the preferred messaging app among those it is trying to reach, for mobile interactive quizzes and virtual classrooms. While the needs of these students are at the center of the design process, Bridge must also take other family members into account, since many share a smartphone.

For example, one chatbot personality might bring a parent or guardian into the application and allow them to set up the experience, while another personality might come online once a child is engaging, said Kent McNeill, chief technology officer at Bridge.

While smartphone ownership is growing rapidly around the world, access remains a challenge. Many families lack smartphones or can't afford the additional data costs that come with using them for learning.

The Bridge team is dealing with this in a number of ways — for example, by offering quizzes through text messaging, working with telecom companies to exempt learning materials from data charges, and utilizing multiple channels to reach parents and children.

Meeting people where they are

When WHO was looking at how to get COVID-19 information to as many people as possible, WhatsApp emerged as the best option.

Most people only use a few of the apps on their phone, so WHO wants to make its information available there, said Andy Pattison, manager of digital solutions in the agency's department of communications.

The UN Refugee Agency is also increasingly finding that messaging apps, and WhatsApp in particular, are the preferred and trusted channels of the people it aims to reach. But while WhatsApp messages are encrypted, the platform does share some information with Facebook.

None of these digital channels is completely secure, and there are always risks, but UNHCR has a comprehensive data protection policy and aims to

capture as little data as possible while also limiting third-party access, said John Warnes, innovation officer at the agency.

His advice for organizations just getting started with messaging apps and chatbots is to understand the needs of the communities they aim to serve, both in terms of communication channels and the type of information and services they're looking for.

"It's not about spamming communities or bringing them into a behavior change tunnel but rather creating meaningful transactions that build trust over time," he wrote to Devex.

He added that these interactions should not be seen as a one-off, but rather as an ongoing strategy to continually build and improve services based on feedback from communities.

Raising awareness of the service

Sesame Workshop is tailoring much of its educational content on WhatsApp to meet the needs of displaced children from Venezuela who are on the move or in temporary forms of housing, using surveys and pilots to gather data and iterate.

"Chat requires a different approach than other digital channels and a deeper engagement with and understanding of the needs and behaviors of end-users," Lewis Kofsky, vice president and general manager of Latin America at Sesame Workshop, wrote to Devex. "It's not enough to simply push content."

**Many NGOs that
invested in chatbots
before the pandemic
are now finding
messaging at the center
of what they do, while
those without programs
in place are working to
catch up.**

To drive awareness of its WhatsApp chat service, Sesame Workshop included its chat number on episodes of "Sésamo" airing across Latin America. With the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, the organization is offering 525 episodes of "Sésamo" in Spanish and Portuguese to public television channels and ministries of education across Latin America and the Caribbean. Each episode features pop-ups with the WhatsApp number and a unique code that allows users to request content related to that episode.

One of the challenges posed by WhatsApp is that, unlike broadcast media or other forms of digital media, messaging must be initiated by the end user. Users receive a simple menu of options and then opt in, at which point organizations can customize responses based on their behaviors and expressed needs. WhatsApp was designed to be a personal service, but the company has released features that allow NGOs to more effectively leverage the platform, while still working to ensure that inboxes are not overloaded with spam.

"It provides the potential for a very powerful personalized support tool in direct service interventions," Kofsky said.

Dost Education, a nonprofit that helps parents in India improve their child's school readiness, has always leveraged phones as the primary way to reach parents. As a result, the organization was in a position to scale during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Identify the goal or use case of what can be achieved on WhatsApp and go from there," said Sindhuja Jeyabal, co-founder and chief of

**“
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—
**SINDHUJA JEYABAL, CO-
FOUNDER AND CHIEF OF
TECHNOLOGY, DOST EDUCATION**

technology at Dost Education. "What percentage of your original theory of change can you implement on WhatsApp?"

While social distancing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have hindered many organizations working in global health and international development from carrying out their work, not all programs lend themselves to chat services, she said.



How WhatsApp became the tool of choice for WHO's COVID-19 messaging

Because of its massive user base and end-to-end encryption, WhatsApp emerged as the best option for WHO to broadcast COVID-19 information — but a number of challenges stand in the way of it being the perfect solution to keep people informed.

By Catherine Cheney



The World Health Organization launched its WHO Health Alert service on WhatsApp. Photo by: Mika Baumeister on Unsplash

WHO launched its WHO Health Alert service on WhatsApp as a way to reach people where they are, with up-to-date information on COVID-19.

Many organizations try to share content by drawing people into their channels, said Andy Pattison, manager of digital solutions at WHO. Pattison's strategy, meanwhile, is to get WHO content onto platforms people are already using.

This is part of the reason WHO turned to WhatsApp, which has 2 billion active users. Users can text "hi"

in a range of languages to +41 79 893 1892, and the chatbot replies with a menu of options, including the latest numbers of new cases and deaths, myths versus facts, where to donate, and more.

WHO is one of a growing number of bodies using Facebook-owned WhatsApp as a way to automate one-on-one interactions at scale. Benefits include its massive user base and end-to-end encryption, but a number of challenges stand in the way of it being the perfect solution to keep people informed.

WhatsApp for social impact

"WhatsApp was really created for personal use, to chat with family and friends," said Nmachi Jidenma, former global strategy and business development lead at WhatsApp, who was the main point of contact for the platform's relationships with NGOs during the first part of the pandemic.

But when the WhatsApp team saw that businesses, NGOs, and governments were using the platform, it decided to "create custom tools to facilitate that work," Jidenma said.

In August 2018, WhatsApp launched a beta version of its Business API tools, which was developed for organizations "who want to communicate with people at scale," she said.

One of the early investments WhatsApp made in exploring the role it could play in the social impact space was a partnership with Praekelt.org, the organization behind a maternal health platform called MomConnect, in South Africa.

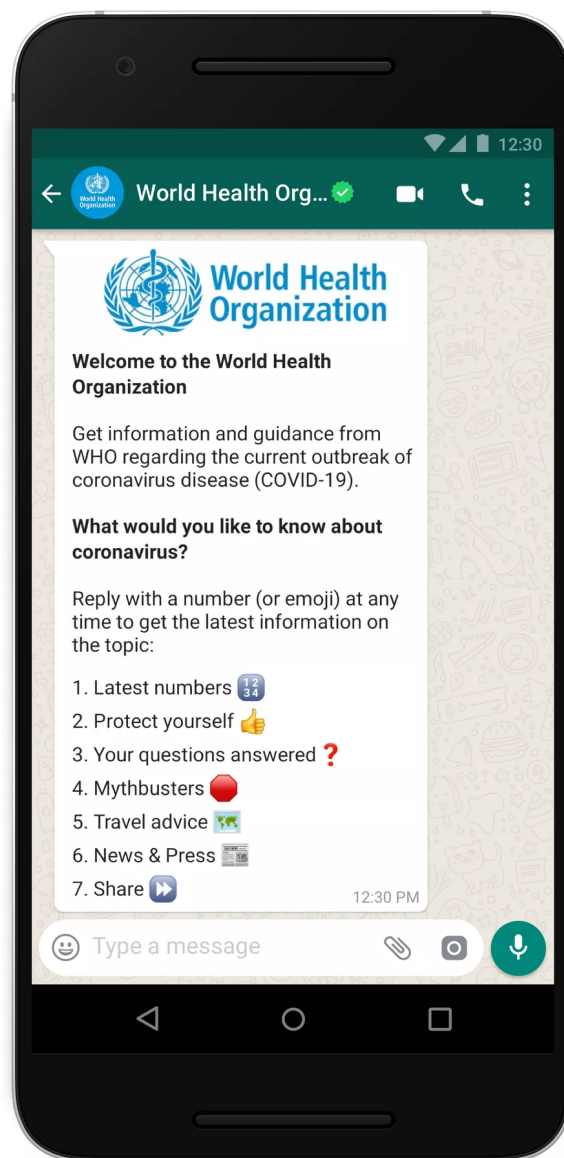
When COVID-19 hit, Praekelt.org — and its software-as-a-service company Turn.io — worked with the South African government to develop its COVID-19 WhatsApp helpline. WhatsApp suggested to WHO that Turn.io could also provide the machine-learning technology that powers the WHO Health Alert service.

Organizations that are interested in leveraging WhatsApp to advance their mission need to go beyond building a bot, making sure they have a strategy to connect with their audience members, get them to take some kind of action, and measure whether they did, said Gustav Praekelt, founder of Praekelt.org.

"If you're getting somebody to read something, has it changed real world behavior?" he said.

For MomConnect, for example, success is determined not just by how many pregnant mothers opt in to the service, but whether that two-way dialogue improves the health of mothers and their infants.

"There are no shortcuts. What WhatsApp and chat allows is for you to build these frameworks and get to scale much faster. But you can scale failure," Praekelt said.



'A critical part of people's lives'

It was Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg who proposed that WHO use WhatsApp as a platform for COVID-19 information. But considering the platform's limitations, other tech and health groups would like to see WHO look beyond Big Tech for potential solutions.

When WHO gives a technology its seal of approval, "it has significant weight on how other groups and ministries of health decide what to use and support," said Barry Finette, founder of THINKMD, a mobile health diagnostic company.

He said there is no clear process for proposing how other technology solutions might be considered alongside WhatsApp and Turn.io.

"Should leaders of powerful technology companies ... have a major influence in the health technology response to a global pandemic?" he asked.

"Unfortunately when such decisions are made in this manner, it creates a new standard for decision processes that may have unforeseen consequences and prevent the utilization of other technology options that could have significant value."

For now, WHO Health Alert uses Turn.io's machine-learning technology to provide automated responses via WhatsApp on COVID-19 information, from common symptoms to advice for ways that users can protect themselves.

One major challenge has been keeping up with the changing nature of COVID-19 information.

"This is a disease where every month we learn more, so our guidance changes," Pattison said. "How do we make sure that when the guidance changes, it gets out on all of our bots as soon as possible, and accurately, and that we translate it to all these languages immediately? You suddenly end up with this logistical problem. Harder than launching it is keeping it alive and current and exact."

Another challenge is engagement. On WhatsApp, users have to engage for the conversation to

continue. If they do not keep asking questions or checking in beyond the initial conversation, there will be no further follow-up by WHO.

"They use it for the first day," Pattison said. "And then you see them drop off completely. There's nothing there to remind them to come back."

WHO is in conversation with WhatsApp about whether it will allow WHO to send push notifications as new COVID-19 information is available, but WhatsApp wants to avoid a scenario where inboxes are flooded with impersonal messages.

"One of the reasons WhatsApp is so successful is we always put the user first," Jidenma said.

She said WhatsApp is moving "deliberately and carefully" as it expands its work with governments, NGOs, and multilaterals and is constantly evaluating its policies to determine what makes sense.

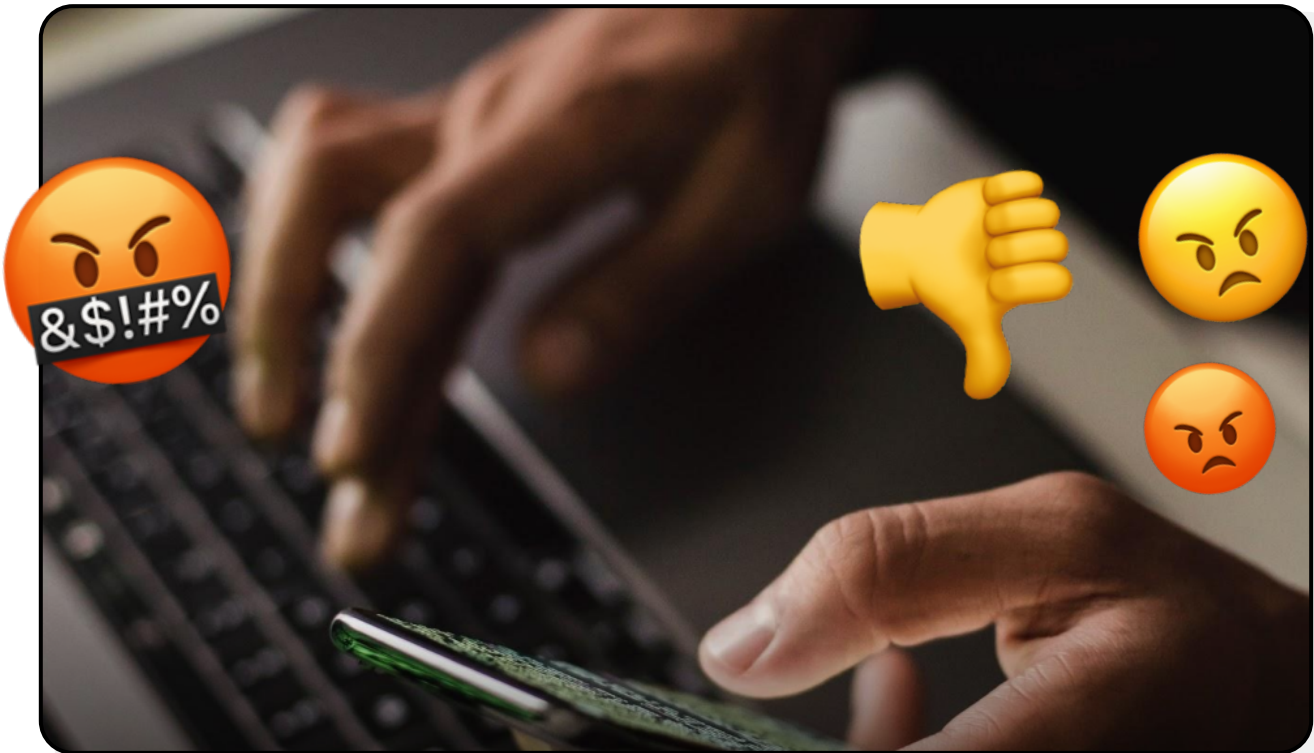
"How do we make sure we're a critical part of people's lives in a high-value way that's driving impact in their day-to-day activities and keeping them delighted?" Jidenma said.



How charities should handle online abuse

Keep your cool: Social media is crucial for most NGOs — but abuse and trolling often come with the territory. Experts explain how organizations can respond.

By Jessica Abrahams



Experts weigh in on how organizations can respond to online abuse and trolling. Photo by: Sora Shimazaki from Pexels

HOW SHOULD CHARITIES RESPOND WHEN THEY ARE ON THE RECEIVING END OF ONLINE ABUSE?

1. Keep your cool
2. Personalize your responses
3. Know when to engage
4. Prepare for it
5. Protect your staff
6. Learn from it

Having a strong social media presence is crucial for most NGOs and charities — but even though these groups may have a positive mission, abuse and trolling often comes with the territory of online advocacy and campaigns.

In a small survey of charity professionals in 2020, 61% said they had experienced online hate while working with their current organization, yet the vast majority said they had not received any training to help them deal with this.

While the Charities Against Hate coalition is calling on social media companies to do more to tackle the issue, in the meantime organizations must figure out how to respond.

So how should charities — and particularly the communications staffers who are on the front line of the problem — respond when they are on the receiving end of online abuse? A panel of experts at Charity Digital's #BeMoreDigital Conference weighed in.

A small-scale survey of 57 charity professionals found:

61%

experienced online hate while working with their current org

21%

received personal threats

77%

had not received training to deal with online hate

Source: 2020 survey by Charities Against Hate

1. Keep your cool

Nana Crawford, social media manager at the British Red Cross, said trolls often target the organization for its work to support refugees, sending messages that can be upsetting to read.

But the first thing to remember if you are receiving or moderating abusive comments is that “you’re speaking on behalf of your organization,” she said.

“Sometimes you see a comment and you really want to go in on someone but you have to think, ‘No, take a step back’. ... Before you respond to a comment, breathe,” she said.

She noted that the charity’s supporters often mobilize to defend the organization in ways it cannot do itself. “The more we’ve talked about refugees [on social media], the more we’ve actually had people in support of our work counteracting those [negative] comments and actually hitting back at people ... and being able to say the things that maybe sometimes we can’t say.”

2. Personalize your responses

All the speakers emphasized that personalizing your responses — so that the troll recognizes they are speaking to a person and not a faceless organization — can be really effective.

“Whenever we have comments like that, we’ll always take them into our DMs [direct messages]

and just talk to them and say: ‘Look I’m going to try and help you. ... I’m Nana,’ and just bring that human voice into it,” Crawford said. “Some people are really angry when they post, but as soon as ... you pull them to the side ... they flip immediately and they actually start apologizing.”

Hannah Graham, head of digital at Tearfund, said that offering personal voices and stories instead of “corporate speak” can also help.

Think about “amplifying the voices of the people you’re supporting” on your channels, she said. “People will be a lot slower to criticize somebody who’s saying, ‘I was struggling, and they helped me’ rather than you as a charity saying, ‘Look at what we’re doing.’”

3. Know when to engage — and when to block or report

On some platforms, it’s possible for organizations to delete abusive comments posted on their pages, while on others they can block or report trolls. But knowing when to do this can be difficult.

Alex Hodges, head of corporate communications and public affairs at Help for Heroes, said: “You’ve got a duty to protect your community. It’s your space, it’s your audience. ... So the bottom line is, if [a comment is] harmful to members of your community, if it’s individual and direct, [it’s] definitely better to get rid of it.”

However, she said, “if it’s a society issue that you can actually play a role as a charity, as a brand, in addressing, then we would favor engaging with it and trying to have a meaningful conversation, trying to educate.”

Charities should always report abusive comments, she said, but you can do that at the same time as engaging with the user.

“Have really clear guidelines for your community and your pages and if they’re violated then make that clear. But wherever you can, even if you are hiding content, try and engage with the user anyway via direct message, and try and unpick the issues and tackle myths and stereotypes so that we are all contributing to improving the issue.”

4. Prepare for it

Experts stressed the need to anticipate potential flashpoints and have plans in place to deal with them.

"With any campaign that we put out, we always try and make sure that we have our Q&As ready, and we try and think about the types of stuff that people are likely to troll us for or question us about," Crawford said. Hodges agreed that "preparation is key." That includes "having as many planned scenarios in place [as possible], FAQs. ... Identify what the potential issues could be ... and plan some responses," she said.

When you're working with external partners, also brief them about these issues in advance so that they're prepared if anything happens, Crawford said.

5. Protect your staff

Dealing with a barrage of abusive comments can have a serious impact on an employee's mental health. Communications professionals need to know their limits and what works for them in terms of winding down, but organizations also need to enable this.

At Tearfund, the fact that the social media team is exposed to abuse is explicitly identified within its risk assessment, Graham said. "That means that every quarter we're reviewing it and trying to mitigate it. ... It's just simple [things]. Are we having well-being check-ins with the team on a regular basis? ... Are we identifying trigger points that certain people find harder to deal with?

"One thing that's really hard with social is that it follows us everywhere. It's really hard to switch off from it," Graham noted. As a result, the organization has a clear out-of-hours schedule so people "don't have to feel like they're on call all the time" and ensures that social media managers have separate work profiles on their phones.

It's also important to consider when moderators or community managers might be particularly

affected by an issue. For example, when the British Red Cross was communicating in support of Black Lives Matter, Crawford decided to take a step back from managing the comments.

"We did get really personal comments and, for me ... I would feel personally attacked," she explained. On the days that the posts were being published, "I brought other people from the team to community manage those comments. ... I think it's always really important to look at having backup support for your team so that you're not always relying on one individual," she said.

6. Learn from it

For some of the speakers, abusive comments had provided a learning opportunity for their organization, in terms of understanding potential flashpoints.

"I think social media is often the quickest feedback loop that we have in our charities — we're getting instant replies when we put messages out there," Graham said. "And so actually we can also then be informing the rest of the organization ... saying to our media team, 'This is what people are asking,' or saying to our supporter care team, 'You might get phone calls about this'. ... We can really support the rest of the organization and come together and look at the messaging around specific topics because of that," she said.

The communications team at the British Red Cross has thought about "how we can take some of the ... perceptions that people [have] about refugees and actually introduce education so ... putting out content before we talk about a particular refugee story that helps people [understand that] this is the current situation," Crawford said.

"Through looking at the comments, through replying to those comments, we've been able to kind of put together a strategy around our refugee work, especially for our online community management."



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