

The Case for AFMC Social Media Analysis

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The Studies and Analyses Division conducts and sponsors studies and research of significant materiel issues. Our goal is to provide analytic solutions for improved business practices. One way we accomplish this is to quantify the relationships between alternative resources and resultant support so that the Air Force Materiel Command can prioritize and justify its investment in various resources.

This report represents the views of the Studies and Analyses Division of the Directorate of Strategic Plans, Programs, Requirements, and Analyses, but not necessarily those of Air Force Materiel Command.

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Table of Contents

1. The Changing Media Landscape	4
1.1. The Internet.....	4
1.2. Social Media.....	4
2. The AFMC Story.....	5
2.1. AFMC Social Media.....	5
3. Proposed Strategies.....	8
3.1. Track Post Types	8
3.2. Learn from Our Peers	8
3.3. Involve the Community	9
4. Recommendation	9

1. The Changing Media Landscape

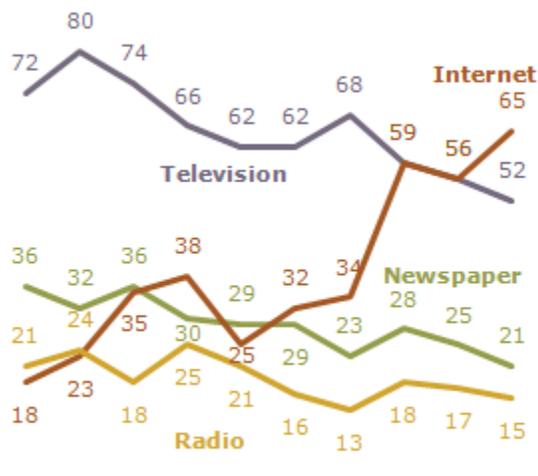
1.1. The Internet

Few will argue with the Internet's role as a [disruptive technology](#), especially in the realm of media. Particularly as pertains to news, a [January 2011 Pew Research study](#) reported that, in surveying Americans' main sources of national and international news, the Internet surpassed radio in 2003, newspaper in 2008, and seems to be continuing its upward trend, while television has been seeing slow declines. [In September 2012](#), they deemed TV news "increasingly vulnerable, as it may be losing its hold on the next generation of news consumers."

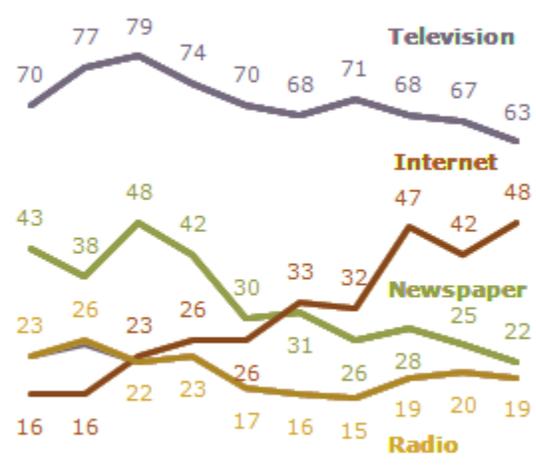
Indeed, the under-30 demographic is already showing a partiality for online sources over TV. [The 2011 study](#) indicated that among Americans 18–29 years old, preference for the Internet as a news source reached the level of television in 2008 and surpassed it in 2010. Even in the 30–49 age group, the Internet looked to be on track to equal or surpass television within the next few years.

Main News Source, By Age

18-29 Year-Olds



30-49 Year-Olds



2001 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 2010

2001 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 2010

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Dec 1-5, 2010. Figures add to more than 100% because respondents could volunteer up to two main sources.

1.2. Social Media

Social media in particular, [defined as](#) "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content," is on the rise as a news platform. Facebook, certainly the most popular and multifaceted social media site, warrants the most initial attention. [A 2015 study](#) placed Facebook's usage among online adults in the U.S. at 72%, while other significant platforms—Pinterest (31%), Instagram

(28%), LinkedIn (25%), and Twitter (23%)—sat much lower. While not included in that particular study, YouTube is actually the second-largest social networking site, [measured in 2014](#) as reaching 63% of American adult Internet users. However, its inherent limitation of only hosting video content decreases its immediate utility for the purposes of this effort.

According to [a 2015 study](#), 63% of adult Facebook users in the country consume news on the site. These encounters with news on Facebook may be largely incidental, as only 25% of users ([40% of Facebook news users](#)) consider the site an important way they get news. The rest don't seem to be too bothered by the appearance of news in their Facebook feeds. The study revealed that 32% of Facebook users post about government and politics, and 43% "like" such posts, both of these figures greater than the earlier 25% who deem Facebook an important news source. Again, the younger generation seems to be ahead of the curve here: [82% of online 18-29-year-olds](#) are on Facebook, [74% of Facebook users aged 18-34](#) consume news on the site, and 36% of the same group ([49% of Facebook news users 18-34](#)) consider it an important source.

On a related note, [data from a 2014 survey](#) identified Facebook as Millennials' top source for news about politics and government by a wide margin (61% reporting having seen such news on Facebook, compared to the next highest source, CNN, at 44%). Interestingly, Facebook was also the top source for Generation X.

2. The AFMC Story

AFMC Public Affairs is charged with the task of "telling the story of equipping the Air Force for world-dominant airpower." AFMC is unique amongst the rest of the Air Force, given its support role, emphasis on science and technology, greater proportion of civilian employees, and other factors, making this a distinct story worth telling.

2.1. AFMC Social Media

Given AFMC/PA's mission, social media has a great potential to be an amplifier of that story, especially as concerns younger audiences. [AFMC has a blog](#) with some limited social elements (a simple comment system and a generic share button), but it doesn't appear to be generating much activity. Page view and RSS subscriber numbers are not apparent, but as of 4 November 2015, of the 30 articles listed on the main page under "Latest Stories" (which goes back almost a month), only one has received a single comment.

Following [numerous other Air Force examples](#), creating a Facebook page ought to be a superb way to grow this story's audience. However, [AFMC's page](#) hasn't taken off like most other Air Force pages. Comparing it to the Facebook pages of other MAJCOMs, as well as to the pages of AFMC host bases, yields the following (with some relevant demographic data included for further comparison):

MAJCOM	FB page likes ¹	page age (yrs)	total workforce	under 30 yrs old	% under 30
AFMC	2,238	6.1	76,390	12,259	16%
AETC	7,008	6.4	68,931	33,741	49%
AFGSC	9,487	5.3	30,226	18,636	62%
AMC	11,627	3.1	84,618	36,190	43%
USAFE-AFAFRICA	15,806	6.4	27,787	13,253	48%
ACC	20,253	6.9	113,083	49,686	44%
PACAF	25,073	5.8	40,697	18,277	45%
AFSPC	28,274	6.5	25,760	8,391	33%
AFRC	145,360	5.6	72,461	22,575	31%
AFSOC	407,703	5.7	18,635	8,907	48%

AFMC Host Base	FB page likes ¹	page age (yrs)	total workforce	under 30 yrs old	% under 30
Arnold AFB	1,093	4.4	350	56	16%
Hanscom AFB	3,215	4.0	2,651	666	25%
Kirtland AFB	4,203	5.4	5,116	1,887	37%
Hill AFB	7,419	5.5	14,743	2,854	19%
Robins AFB	11,590	4.3	16,028	2,680	17%
Eglin AFB	12,132	3.8	9,151	2,799	31%
Edwards AFB	12,386	5.0	5,316	1,185	22%
Tinker AFB	20,633	5.8	18,121	3,928	22%
Wright-Patterson AFB	24,027	5.9	17,730	3,649	21%

Incidentally, the [U.S. Air Force Facebook page](#) has over two million likes.

So what does this mean for AFMC? The most glaring difference in the first table is that only 16% of AFMC personnel are under 30 years old, with the rest pretty well clustered in the 40–50% range. Does this indicate that AFMC’s mission is less interesting to the under-30 demographic, or is it a simple consequence of AFMC’s greater civilian proportion, as the civilian population tends to skew older than active duty? And comparing absolute numbers of personnel under 30 years old, AFSPC and AFSOC (both of which AFMC exceeds in that respect) have far more Facebook page likes. In fact, page likes for MAJCOMs doesn’t seem to correlate with any variable on the table, no matter what outliers you remove.

Correlation of FB page likes with:	MAJCOMs	MAJCOMs minus AFRC & AFSOC	MAJCOMs minus AFMC	MAJCOMs minus AFMC, AFRC, AFSOC	Bases
page age (yrs)	-0.022	0.255	-0.005	0.369	0.544
total workforce	-0.363	-0.293	-0.336	-0.205	0.804
under 30 yrs old	-0.339	-0.085	-0.405	-0.345	0.822
% under 30	0.076	0.099	-0.081	-0.711	-0.163

Conversely, there is a high correlation between AFMC host base Facebook page likes and personnel numbers. Thus the relative “popularity” of a base may be more determined by its size, since all bases serve approximately the same purpose. It would make sense that the

¹ As of 4 November 2015.

general public would be more aware of a base’s existence than a MAJCOM’s. One may wonder, should the general public care about MAJCOMs, or would it be enough for them to hear of the Air Force’s activities at the base level? However, for those individuals who would like to follow a specific function or aspect of the Air Force without limiting to geography, the MAJCOM Facebook pages would present that unique message.

The “popularity” of a MAJCOM may be more affected by the perceived prestige of its mission. Looking at the top three MAJCOMs in terms of Facebook audience size, special operations and space certainly exhibit a “cool factor,” and the Reserves have a more recognizable function than other Commands. There may also be an unseen marketing element at play in this Facebook sphere—between two recent Facebook data collections, 7 Oct 15 and 27 Oct 15, AFSPC increased their page likes from 12,833 to 24,738, and PACAF increased theirs from 14,590 to 22,665. It would be worth asking their social media managers if/how their Facebook strategy changed during that time, or if they have any insights into what drove the sudden increase.

Additionally, one caveat concerning the number of AFMC page likes must be noted. The original creator of the page named it “AFMC_Now” when setting it up in 2009. This brought about the unintentional consequence of many people in India confusing it with their [Armed Forces Medical College](#). Thankfully, the page name was recently changed to “Air Force Materiel Command,” so the page is no longer receiving frequent messages asking about admission forms or medical entrance exams. Still, 1,175 of the page likes come from India, according to Facebook Insights (the site’s built-in analytics). Another 41 are from Bangladesh, the third-highest on the list. Removing those two countries from consideration, and assuming that all of the United States audience is valid, means that only between 619 and 1,022 people actually found the AFMC they were looking for.

Country	AFMC Facebook fans
India	1,175
United States	619
Bangladesh	41
<i>other</i> ²	403

Given all this, especially AFSPC’s and PACAF’s recent performance, there appears to be a large opportunity for growth for AFMC’s page. The next section discusses potential strategies for developing AFMC’s Facebook audience.

² Egypt (21), Philippines (20), Pakistan (17), Thailand (16), United Kingdom (16), Brazil (14), Taiwan (13), Indonesia (12), Germany (11), Italy (11), Australia (10), Iraq (10), and others with less than 10 fans each.

3. Proposed Strategies

3.1. Track Post Types

Facebook posts can be categorized in terms of whether or not they include an image, a video, a link, or just text. Other factors include what time of day a post was published, how often one posts, the general subject of the post, or the composition of the post (e.g., whether or not the post includes a question posed to the reader/viewer).

Once these posts are categorized in one or more dimensions, they can be tracked over time to determine which variables tend to produce the greatest engagement in the following terms:

- Likes and comments (which will make a post more likely to show up in other followers' news feeds)
- General sentiment of comments (an understanding of which will open lines of back-and-forth communication—a key component of social media—between AFMC and the public)
- Shares (which will expand the potential audience of individual posts to many who do not specifically follow AFMC's page)
- Link clicks (which indicate further interest in the subject matter)
- New page likes (which will expand the default audience of AFMC's posts)

Given that a fair amount of research has already been done in the arena of social media strategy, a [quick Google search](#) can help to establish a good starting point. A few examples:

- Making generous use of photos, even when posting links, to capture people's attention
- Uploading videos directly to Facebook rather than linking to or embedding external videos, as native Facebook videos play automatically on users' screens
- Using a conversational tone and being genuine, as Facebook is a people-driven platform
- Asking questions in posts and replying to commenters' questions, as this will build trust (and increase engagement)
- Posting consistently
- Integrating posts with upcoming events and holidays

3.2. Learn from Our Peers

There's no reason we need to do all this testing on our own. The other Major Commands, likely in similar social situations to AFMC, may be able to offer a good deal of insight from their experiences. Of particular interest are AFSPC and PACAF due to the recent rapid increase in their Facebook audiences, discussed earlier. Facebook Insights offers bulk export of page and post data for specified date ranges as Excel files. If MAJCOMs are willing to share a year or more of this data with AFMC, it would be a significant analytic resource.

3.3. Involve the Community

Whenever AFMC posts photos or videos and identifies Airmen appearing in them, it would be beneficial to email those Airmen with a link to the post and encourage them to tag themselves in the photo or video. This way, the post will be shared further into their own social networks.

As many of AFMC's individual Facebook posts would likely pertain to one of our host bases, Centers, or other units, another method for increasing awareness of AFMC's Facebook presence and the greater AFMC story would be to tag the pages of any bases/units involved within the text of each post. That will notify those pages of AFMC's post, making them likely to share the post with their own audiences.

Another method would be to create a list in Facebook of related Air Force pages in order to browse through their posts every so often to see what would be worthwhile for AFMC to share. Sharing such posts would notify those pages of our action, making them more likely to share some of AFMC's content.

4. Recommendation

AFMC/A9 recommends AFMC/PA:

1. Collect contact information for other MAJCOM social media managers so A9 can request Facebook Insights data from them to analyze
2. Begin implementing various Facebook best practices so A9 can collect and analyze AFMC Facebook data to track effectiveness