

Creating a healthy social media space at NUS Events

Why are we focusing on social media?

We're proud to create spaces for student representatives and activists to come together to debate issues about education, society and the wider world that are relevant to students and students' unions' and to elect or hold to account their national officers for the year ahead.

We want all delegates to have a positive experience - whether your preferred candidates win or lose their election, whether the motions you support pass or fall - the experience should be a good one. And yet, we know too often debating, agreeing and disagreeing is not an easy experience in the student movement, particularly at National Conference, or other democratic events. The Runnymede Review was clear that the culture of our political spaces can mean people do not want to engage because it impacts on their wellbeing

Social media has added a new dimension in recent years. It is overwhelmingly a force for good. But too often it is used in ways that are deeply problematic. Whether that is delegates themselves, or people joining in the debate from afar. When there is tension in the physical space - which is of course to be expected at times - the added heat from social media can make it unbearable for some.

So, just what are the expectations of social media at NUS events?

NUS' Code of Conduct policy sets out the behavioural standards we expect from delegates in order to create safe, accessible and inclusive spaces at our events that are free from discrimination, harassment and prejudice. Social media is huge part of our events and as such anything you post, comment on, retweet or like during the event is part of the overall delegate experience. It's also a 'shop window' for our movement where the world will look in and form a view - our reputation as a movement should inspire others to want to get involved in our amazing work, not put them off for life.

As an event delegate you've all signed to say you will adhere to this policy so make sure you are familiar with it by visiting <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/governance/nus-code-of-conduct>

Some examples of unhealthy social media under this policy could include;

- Making comments that are bullying, harassing or discriminatory against someone;
- Posting remarks which deliberately cause offence and constitute unlawful discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation;
- Posting or uploading inappropriate comments, images, photographs and/or video clips about other delegates, election candidates or NUS staff;
- Publishing defamatory and/or knowingly false material about delegates, election candidates or NUS staff members;
- Engaging in discussions on anything which may contravene NUS' equality and diversity policy;
- Use of offensive, derogatory or intimidating language which may cause offence to others.

To be honest, it's about recognising that it's ok for people to have a different opinion and support a different policy, being respectful in putting forward alternative views and not making anything about any individual person or their identity.

In a nationally [representative survey](#) conducted by the Pew Research Centre, 41% of Americans had experienced harassing behaviour online. In some cases, these experiences are limited to behaviors that can be ignored or shrugged off as a nuisance of online life, such as offensive name-calling or efforts to embarrass someone.

Nearly one-in-five Americans (18%) have been subjected to particularly severe forms of harassment online, such as physical threats, harassment over a sustained period, sexual harassment or stalking.

Frequently these behaviors target a personal or physical characteristic: 14% of Americans say they have been harassed online specifically because of their politics, while roughly one-in-ten have been targeted due to their physical appearance (9%), race or ethnicity (8%) or gender (8%).ⁱ

We need your help to ensure that our social spaces reflect the values of inclusion and diversity.

How can you help?

At our events last year there were over 250,000 tweets on twitter alone using the official event hashtag. Add into the mix alternative hashtags, Facebook posts and other social media sites and it's clear that keeping an eye on social media is a tough job for NUS. Given that most delegates interact with social media throughout our events, we would ask you to report and help create the online culture that we want ourselves and others to see when they look into our virtual space.

If you spot something unhealthy on social media during conference here's what you can do:

If it's from another delegate at the event (or you're not sure who they are) pop over to the InfoPoint desk and report it to us. We'll take it from here by reviewing it and taking appropriate action which could range from feedback to the delegate, a request to remove the content or more formal action under our NUS Code of Conduct policy.

If it's from another person or an anonymous account, use the reporting tools with Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites to report the content as offensive or inappropriate. The providers take reports seriously and will remove offensive content themselves.

Five Top Tips for Delegates

Here are some things to consider to help you use social media in a positive and inclusive way during at NUS events:

1. Ponder before you post

Your response does not need to be immediate. When you see something you don't like on social media, take a step back from your newsfeeds for a moment and consider whether it's really worth responding to. Then, if it is, think what would be the most useful, insightful and positively-impactful response that will either change that person's mind or move the debate forward constructively

2. Remember you're being watched

You may not be in the Big Brother house, but your tweets and posts are definitely being watched. Not just by the members you represent, but also by colleagues, stakeholders, key players in your institution, partnership organisations, the media, friends, family and those you're trying to influence. This isn't about censorship, but about sensibility and being mindful about the impact of your words. We all have opinions, however it's always worth approaching social media with some caution and thinking about how any comments are going to be received, and whether they are fuelling negativity or fostering positivity.

3. Remember what goes online tends to stay online

What you post online can be captured forever and may get shared with lots of other people, for both good and bad reasons.

4. Look after yourself

NUS events don't have to be 24/7 – you are entitled to some downtime too so don't feel you have to be available – on or offline - 24 hours a day. You may even want to make it clear on your Facebook or Twitter profile when you'll be looking at the account and when you won't.

Is arguing online worth your while or are there better things you could be doing off-line? Don't stay up late arguing with people online who have nothing better to do – it's not worth your time and it is what they want you to do. Read a book, watch TV, socialise, chill out, eat, sleep – downtime is important.

5. Don't say it online if you wouldn't say it in person

If in doubt about anything do contact a member of NUS staff as your first point of contact to assist with these issues at the event.

ⁱ <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/>