

SPEAK UP!

**YOUR GUIDE TO
CHANGING THE WORLD,
ONLINE AND OFF**



The Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge was made possible in part by the Government of Canada through a History Fund Grant.

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.

Ascribed to anthropologist Margaret Mead

YOU CARE DEEPLY ABOUT SOMETHING. You want to spread the word, make a difference, make things better. Thanks to the internet and social media like Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok, it's easier than ever to share your views and encourage others to join you in making change. And, due to research conducted as part of the Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge (DERC), we know a lot about how some Canadians are using digital media to get involved in politics. This guide will help show you the ways you can use social networks to make your voice heard and make a difference.

Because everything on the internet is connected, anyone has the chance to reach a worldwide audience, but not everyone will respond to the same message.

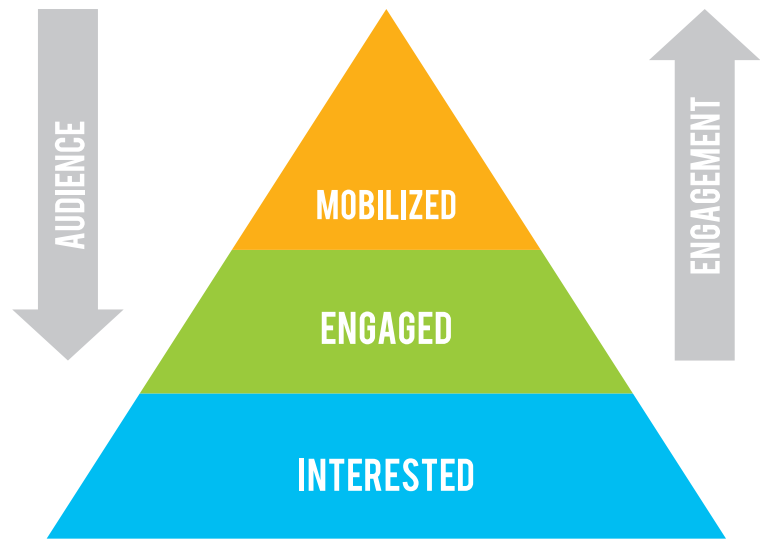
THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH CHALLENGE

The Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge (DERC) studied the impact and uses of digital media in the 2019 federal election. The data that informs this guide was collected from an online panel survey of Canadian citizens 18 years and older, using the web-based survey tool Qualtrics.

The survey was run in French and English. Responses were collected from a subset of 208 respondents from October 4 to 13, 2019, from a full sample of 1,545. In the full sample, there were national quotas for language, region, gender and age to adequately match Canadian census data.

However, the statistics outlined in this guide are taken from a subset of those respondents who expected to vote and access political information related to the election on Instagram. The size of the subset means these figures are not nationally representative but results are useful initial indicators.

THINK OF THE PEOPLE WHO MIGHT SEE WHAT YOU POST AS BEING A PYRAMID. As you go up the pyramid, you reach fewer people, but the people that you reach are more engaged. The bottom of the pyramid – the largest number of people – are people who don't know or care about your issue.



Based on Mobilisation Lab's *Engagement Pyramid*

To promote your cause, you need to make the base of the pyramid bigger by getting more people interested in your cause, and also move people further up the pyramid by getting them more engaged. (It's also important to *keep* them engaged!) This guide gives you eight ways to *interest* a wide audience, *engage* people into getting more involved once you've interested them and *mobilize* those engaged people into advocacy and action.

HOW TO INTEREST A WIDE AUDIENCE

LEARN ABOUT ISSUES. Before you can educate others or advocate for your issue, you need to make sure you understand it. The most common way respondents in the DERC study used Instagram during the 2019 federal election was to become a more informed voter: 7 in 10 of the youngest respondents did this. Educating yourself about issues is one of the best ways to use digital tools.

A lot of people only hear about issues through what's shared on their social media feeds. This can be a good way to get your news, but people who *only* get their news this way generally know less about political issues than people who seek out news and information. You can use hashtags or follow experts on social media, or go to news outlets or reliable sources to find out more.

Use MediaSmarts' custom search engines to get good information on news and science:

News search: bit.ly/news-search

Science search: bit.ly/science-search

If you're using Wikipedia, make sure to check the Talk page and the History page to see the article's rating and see if there are any big disagreements going on between the people contributing to it.

THE MORE EDUCATED I GOT, THE ANGRIER I BECAME.

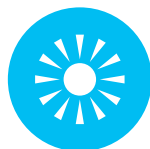
—Shiden Tekle, 18, *antiracist activist*

EDUCATE OTHERS AND RAISE AWARENESS. The best way to widen the base of your pyramid is to let people know more about your issue. Lots of young activists are doing this: more than a third of the DERC respondents who posted political content to Instagram during the 2019 federal election were among the youngest respondents.

Here are a few tips for raising awareness of your issue:



Don't just use facts and figures – **tell a story about a person or group of people directly affected.** For example, even though millions of people have died from smoking-related causes, one of the most effective anti-smoking campaigns featured just one, Barb Tarbox, who spent her last months before dying of lung cancer showing young Canadians the consequences of smoking. In the age of social media, personal stories are a lot more likely to spread than facts and figures.



Don't lecture to people, and don't make your message all about risk or danger. It's important to make sure everyone knows about serious issues, of course, but in general people respond better if you **base your message on achieving something positive** instead of avoiding risks.

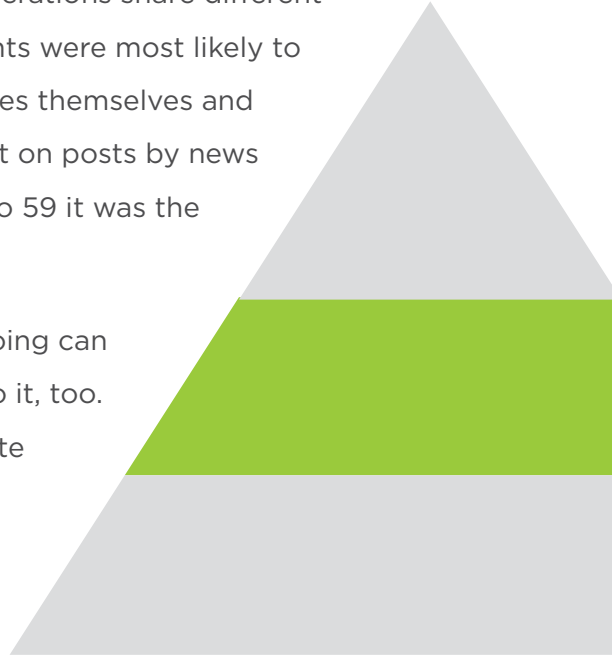


Use images and video. Most social networks rank posts with images and video content higher, and people are more likely to interact with them too (sharing, clicking on links, etc.) Memes are another way of getting your message across in a way that can be funny but also call attention to serious issues.

HOW TO ENGAGE AN INTERESTED AUDIENCE

SHARE WHAT YOU'RE DOING. Sharing is what social media is all about, and it's also one of the best ways to convince people who are interested in your issue to get more involved. Liking, sharing or commenting on posts was the most common way that DERC respondents engaged with the 2019 federal election on Instagram. But different generations share different things: the youngest respondents were most likely to comment on posts by candidates themselves and least likely to share or comment on posts by news outlets, but for those ages 45 to 59 it was the other way around.

Showing people what you're doing can make them feel like *they* can do it, too. The School Strike for the Climate started with a single strike in Stockholm, Sweden in 2018, and grew to as many as four million people the next year partly because people had learned about it through social media, while the 2017 Women's March – the biggest one-day protest in U.S. history – started out as a private event page on Facebook.



“SLACKTIVISM”?

Some people say that getting involved online isn't "real" activism, or that it makes people feel they've made a difference just by clicking "Like." It's true that some people won't do any more than that, but even clicking "Like" can make the base of the pyramid bigger by showing that people support your cause. (Because most social network feeds are filtered before they get to you, clicking "Like" on a post can also make the filtering algorithm show it to more people.) It is important to make sure that you're asking the most engaged people in your audience to do more.

It's also not true that people on social media, or young people in general, don't care about political issues. For example, in the DERC study 19 in 20 of the youngest respondents were somewhat or very interested in politics (slightly more than any other age group) and a quarter had been involved in politics and/or society in some way in the past year.

Another way of engaging people in a cause is to show them that other people believe in it. Most of us base our beliefs, at least partly, on what we think most other people believe, and social media can create a “majority illusion” that makes it look like the loudest voices are the majority. If your audience sees that *lots* of people care about your issue, it will make them a lot more likely to get involved.



CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THE SAME THINGS. Social media is also about making connections, and it can be a great way to find other people who care about the same issues as you: six in 10 of the youngest DERC respondents used Instagram to engage with others who shared their political views during the 2019 federal election. You can do things like search hashtags or see who other people are following to find allies you didn't know you had.

Connecting can be a way for you to *be* an ally, too, and support people who need your help with their activism. For example, many Québécois who were opposed to a law against wearing face coverings (such as the niqab, worn by some Muslim women) while accessing government services, posted photos of themselves riding the subway while wearing things like ski masks to demonstrate their support.

PART OF [WHAT I DO] IS ... GIVE OTHERS A PLATFORM. I AM VERY AWARE OF THE FACT THAT I AM WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS AND ABLE-BODIED, AND THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS I FEEL I CAN'T SPEAK TO.

—Ellen Jones, LGBTQ+ activist



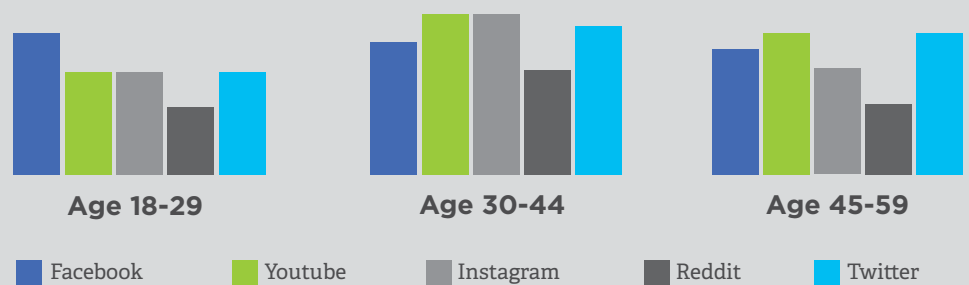
AMPLIFY OTHER PEOPLE’S VOICES. Don’t just use social media to promote your own voice: once you have a platform, you can use it to help other people be heard as well. You can do this through a hashtag that invites other people to speak out, like #MeToo, but you can also make a point of inviting and sharing voices that might otherwise not be heard. That’s extra important when there are people who might have a different perspective or are more directly affected by your issue than you are.

KNOW YOUR PLATFORM

Different strategies work for different sites. For example, on Facebook, friends automatically see each others’ status updates, while on Twitter you can follow people who don’t follow you back. That means it can be harder to reach people on Twitter, but if one of your posts is shared by someone with a large number of followers you could reach a much bigger audience. On some platforms like TikTok, it can be easier to reach people by getting in on a popular meme or challenge.

Different platforms also reach different audiences. If you mostly want to reach other young people, for example, you’ll choose a different platform than if you’re aiming at older people. The graphic above shows the different platforms that DERC respondents in different age groups (who read or watched

Platforms most used to engage politically



news about politics and public affairs on any social platform in the previous week) used to engage politically in the 2019 federal election almost every day or more.

Remember, you don’t have to stick to just one platform, and any platform can be used

for activism! Since so many people turn to Wikipedia for information, for example, it’s important to help make sure articles on your issue stay accurate. People have even used Tinder to spread awareness about climate change by talking about it in their profiles!

HOW TO MOBILIZE AN ENGAGED AUDIENCE

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR ISSUE. There's no shortage of ways that you can use social media to advocate for your issue. Because most politicians, corporations and government agencies have a social media presence, you can connect directly with them. You can also get their attention indirectly by tagging them or using hashtags.

Once your campaign is off the ground, you might be able to get news outlets to cover it, so make sure to find reporters who cover the right “beat” (the topics they write about – for example, most news outlets have different beats for science, education, health, etc.) and either tag them or contact them directly.

Depending on your issue, you may also get results by contacting advertisers. For example, health advocates got platforms like YouTube and Facebook to take action against anti-vaccination groups by telling big companies that their ads were appearing next to dangerously misleading videos.



THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE
TWENTY YEARS AGO WOULD
HAVE PREVENTED...THE
MOVEMENT FOR BLACK
LIVES TODAY FROM
BREAKING THROUGH.

—James Rucker, *founder of ColorOfChange.org*

ORGANIZE FOR ONLINE AND OFFLINE ACTION. Whether you're trying to change people's minds, change the world, or both, you have a lot more impact when you're not doing it alone. Social media can let you work together with people from around the world who care about your issue, and sometimes it can be the best way to organize people in your own neighbourhood.

Some platforms, like Change.org, Dosomething.org and Ushaidi.com, were made for activism, but you can use the platforms that you and your audience are already on too.

A big part of effective organizing is getting people to take that big step between supporting your cause and actually doing something about it. Tony Foleno, Director of Research at the Ad Council, says it's best when your appeal is:



EASY: Not everything you do is going to be easy, but it helps to give an easy *first* step – like sharing an article or signing a petition – to nudge people up the engagement pyramid.



ATTRACTIVE: It's a lot harder to get people to do something if it seems unpleasant! It can be extra effective to use words and images that will make people feel better about themselves if they help out.



SOCIAL: People are social animals, and we're a lot more likely to do something if we think other people are doing it. We're also more likely to do something that has a social aspect, like joining a march or a protest.



TIMELY: Timing is a big part of organizing effectively. If a recent event or news story has made people more aware or concerned about your issue, take advantage of that.

The Ice Bucket Challenge, a campaign to raise awareness of ALS, is a good example of these qualities. It asked people to do something that was pretty *easy* – dumping a bucket of ice water on their head – and it was *attractive* because people felt like they were doing something important and the videos often got a lot of attention and likes. It was *social* because people felt they were taking part in a group activity (some videos were even made as replies or parodies of other videos) and it was *timely* in an unusual way because people were expected to make their video within 24 hours of being challenged.



DEALING WITH DIALOGUE

Social networks don't just connect you with people who are on your side. That's not always a bad thing: almost half of the youngest DERC respondents used Instagram to engage with other people who did *not* share their political views during the 2019 federal election.

When you get negative or critical comments you can either engage with them, ignore them or block them. You should be willing to listen to honest disagreements or criticism, but don't waste your time on trolls. Before you engage with someone, ask yourself:

- Are they arguing in good faith, or just trying to get a rise out of you?
- Is there any chance you might really change their mind?
- Is there a larger audience that might listen to them if you don't respond?

Remember that if you're in charge of a community – whether it's a Facebook page with ten thousand members or an Instagram post your friends are commenting on – you have a responsibility to moderate it so that people feel safe and everyone's voice is heard. Sometimes that means dealing with people whose voices are drowning other people out or scaring people into silence. If that happens, quickly and firmly tell that person that what they're doing isn't allowed in your space. If they keep it up, don't be afraid to delete their comments or block them.

If you're a member of a community and you see this happening, don't be afraid to push back. See our tip sheet [How to push back against hate online](https://bit.ly/pushbackhate) (bit.ly/pushbackhate) for tips on how.

Don't forget that if you're going to speak up, you need to keep yourself safe too. Check out [Crash Override](https://crashoverridenetwork.com) (crashoverridenetwork.com) for ways to prevent online harassment and to deal with it if it happens.



ENERGIZE YOURSELF AND OTHERS. Like everything else, the engagement pyramid obeys the law of gravity. It can be hard to keep from getting discouraged, and even the most committed people in your movement can get burned out and drift away. You can keep them (and yourself) engaged by sharing your successes, and your frustrations too. Have fun and make it social by sharing funny memes and videos as well as more serious stuff. But remember that to keep your audience you must always be respectful – campaigns and their followers can quickly be lost by unkind or unfair content.

A FINAL NOTE...

“If you start to feel inspired or passionate about something no matter the topic, join a cause, get your friends together for coffee and talk about certain issues, or try to start something at your school. Just talking to people will make a difference because it makes that person think about the topic. So don’t hold back! You can change something for the better if you just go for it!”

—Jordyn Monnin, *founder of anti-slut-shaming movement*

Abash the Past