

October 8, 2015

# Linking with Constituents: Presentation of Social Media on Member of Congress Websites

Since Members of Congress first adopted social media, the number of services to choose from has increased. Early adoption was mostly on Twitter. Initial studies showed that as Members became more comfortable with social media and constituents came to expect that Members would be using the technology, the number of Members on Twitter, as well as other sites, increased. For example, in August 2009, 29% of Members had adopted Twitter as a way to communicate with constituents. By January 2013, 100% of Senators and 90% of Representatives had adopted Twitter.

As a communications tool, social media provides Members with the ability to communicate directly with constituents in a virtually instantaneous manner. In order for constituents to find Member social media accounts, however, they may need to either search for them using a general internet search engine or find the Member on a specific social media application. In either case, searching for a Member of Congress could be time consuming, might result in a list of accounts that the Member is not actively using, and could result in false returns (i.e., accounts for individuals with similar names or a campaign account). Instead, an alternate method exists for Members to promote their social media accounts: providing a link from their official homepage to the social media account.

Each Member of Congress has an official webpage on the [house.gov](http://house.gov) or [senate.gov](http://senate.gov) domain. On this webpage, Members promote material that is germane to the Member's official and representational duties. As such, many Members, in addition to information on policy positions and available constituent services, include links to their official social media accounts. Examining the links from Member webpages to social media accounts provides a glimpse into the type of social media Members are adopting and using, as it is likely that Members will only link to social media services that they are actively using to engage with constituents.

## Methodology

In July 2015, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) conducted a survey of all 541 official webpages for Senators, Representatives, Delegates, and the Resident Commissioner. During the survey, CRS noted which social media services were directly linked from the official webpage. Additionally, information on the Members' political party and chamber affiliation were recorded.

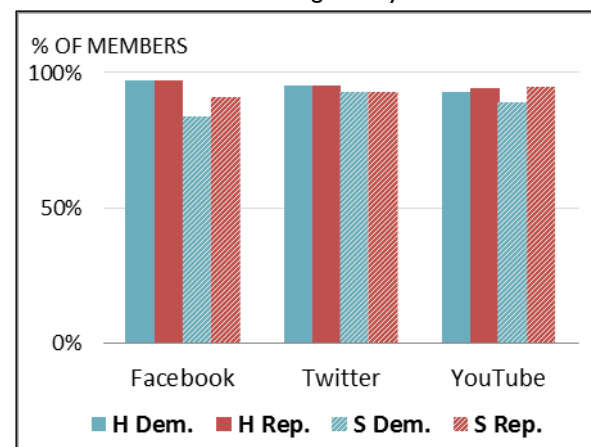
Overall, 17 different social media services were identified. The most common were Facebook and Twitter, followed by YouTube, RSS feeds, Flickr, and Instagram. Each of these services had at least one-third of Members linking to them. Additionally, numerous other services, including Vine,

LinkedIn, Google+, Eventbrite, Scribd, Tumblr, Flipboard, Picasa, Pinterest, Storify, and SoundCloud had at least one Member who linked to his or her profile page.

## Survey Results

The survey showed that three services have been almost universally adopted by Members of Congress. These are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. **Figure 1** shows the percentage of each chamber and political party that has adopted these three services.

**Figure 1. Links to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube Member Websites, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, by Chamber and Party**



Source: CRS analysis of House and Senate websites.

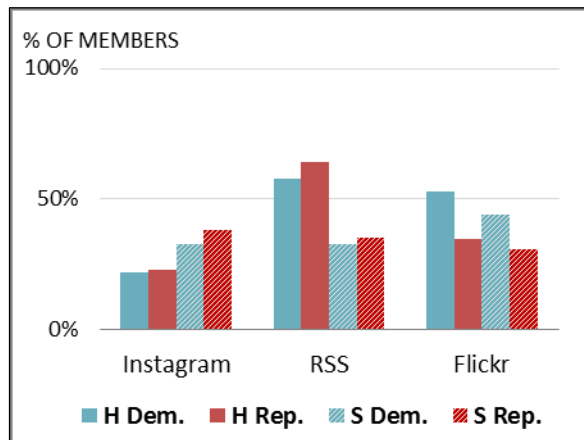
House Members of both parties link to Facebook (97%) and Twitter (95%) at the same rate and almost at the same rate for YouTube (93% for Democrats and 94% for Republicans). In the Senate, Republicans link to Facebook (91%) and YouTube (95%) more than Democrats (84% and 89% respectively). For Twitter, 95% of both Senate Democrats and Senate Republicans provided links.

The number of links suggests that past trends in adoption of Twitter and Facebook across party and chamber continue in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. For example, in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress (2011-2012), CRS found that overall, 90% of Members were registered with Facebook and 83% were registered with Twitter. Broken out by party and chamber, 88% of House Republicans had adopted Twitter and 95% had adopted Facebook, while 80% of House Democrats had adopted Twitter and 90% had adopted Facebook. In the Senate, 78% of Democrats and 83% of Republicans had adopted Twitter compared to 77% of Democrats and 81% of Republicans adopting Facebook (CRS Report R43018). While previous studies of links from a Member's official homepage to social media were not conducted, the prevalence of links to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube

suggests that Members want to communicate with constituents through these media.

While Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the most prevalent social media services linked to from Member webpages, they are not the only ones. The survey also provided the first look into the prevalence of other services used by Members. Three other services—Instagram, RSS feeds, and Flickr—were linked to more than one-third of Members’ webpages. **Figure 2** shows the number of Members, divided by chamber and party, who have links to Instagram, RSS feeds, and Flickr on their official homepage.

**Figure 2. Links to Instagram, RSS, and Flickr**  
Member Websites, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, by Chamber and Party



**Source:** CRS analysis of House and Senate websites.

The prevalence of connections to the next three most linked social media services are significantly less than for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which each have more than 85% of Members providing a link to their accounts. That does not mean, however, that Instagram, RSS feeds, and Flickr are not commonly adopted by Members. Of these three services, the most linked service in the House is RSS feed, which appears on 58% of House Democrats’ and 64% of House Republicans’ webpages. In the Senate, 33% of Democrats and 35% of Republicans provide RSS feed links.

For Instagram, the number of links is higher for the Senate than the House. In the Senate, 38% of Republicans and 33% of Democrats link to Instagram. In the House, 23% of Republicans and 22% of Democrats provide an Instagram link.

For Flickr, the opposite is true, with the number of links generally greater for the House than the Senate. In the House, 53% of Democrats and 35% of Republicans provide links to Flickr. In the Senate, 44% of Democrats and 41% of Republicans provide Flickr links.

In addition to the six most popular social media services, Members of Congress link to 11 other services. These range in popularity from 7% of Senators linking to Google+ to one Member providing a link to Flipboard, Eventbrite, Scribd, Storify, and SoundCloud. **Table 1** lists all 17 social

media services with at least one Member link divided by chamber.

**Table 1. Links to Social Media**  
House and Senate Member Websites, 114<sup>th</sup> Congress

Service	House	Senate	Total
Facebook	427	88	515
Twitter	419	93	512
YouTube	411	92	503
RSS	269	34	303
Flickr	189	37	226
Instagram	101	36	137
Google+	23	7	30
Pinterest	12	1	13
Tumblr	10	1	11
LinkedIn	5	0	5
Vine	4	1	5
SoundCloud	4	1	5
Picasa	4	0	4
Eventbrite	1	0	1
Flipboard	1	0	1
Scribd	1	0	1
Storify	0	1	1

**Source:** CRS analysis of House and Senate websites.

As **Table 1** shows, outside of the six most popular services, the number of Members providing links to other social media accounts is scattered. This does not necessarily mean that Members are not using these social media services. Rather, it might mean that they are choosing not to provide constituents with a direct link to the accounts.

For more information on social media and Congress, see CRS Report R41066, *Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Month Period in the 111th Congress*, by Matthew E. Glassman, Jacob R. Straus, and Colleen J. Shogan; CRS Report R44081, *Social Networking and Committee Communications: Use of Twitter and Facebook in the 113th Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus and Matthew E. Glassman; CRS Report R43477, *Social Media in the House of Representatives: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Jacob R. Straus and Matthew E. Glassman; and CRS Report R43691, *Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Members’ Use of Vine in Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus, Matthew E. Glassman, and Raymond T. Williams.

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