

Donkeys, Elephants & Hashtags:

How Your Brand Thrives in the
Zoo of the 2024 Election

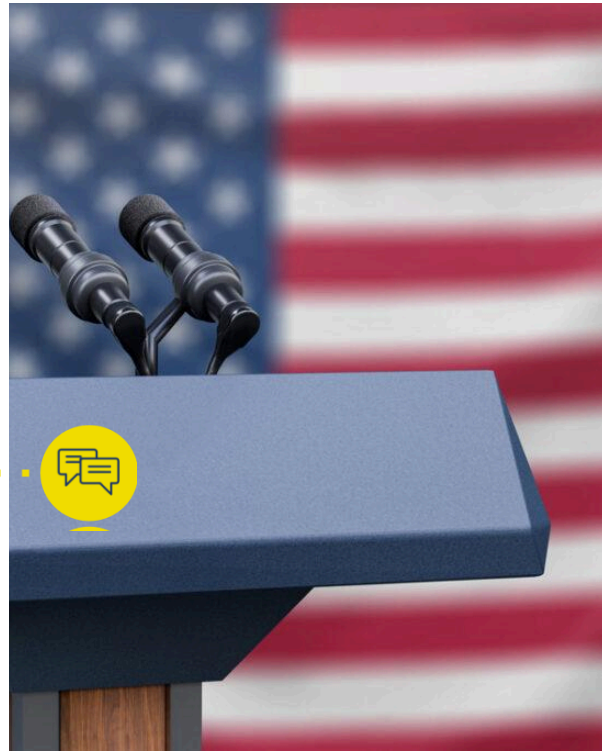
Social Factor Point of View

The political divide in the U.S. is well-documented. The Pew Research Center says a growing number of Republicans and Democrats view people in the opposite party as “[more closed-minded, dishonest, immoral, and unintelligent](#) than other Americans.” In 2020, we saw how this divide played out on social media, as political echo chambers led to significant ideological segregation in news exposure during the election.

With the 2024 U.S. presidential election looming, brands must be mindful of all areas of their social media operation. Social Factor, a leading digital agency specializing in social customer relationship management (CRM) and strategy, focuses on four primary areas, all of which are essential for your brand to navigate the impending social storm: strategy, technology, intelligence, and engagement. Consider these recommendations for how to thrive during the 2024 election season.

Strategy

You have to start at the very beginning. It’s a very good place to start. And without a solid strategy, the hills may come alive with the sound of a social media crisis.



Start Now

Don't wait until the height of the election cycle to create a strategy for your brand. Bring stakeholders together now to create clear, comprehensive guidelines and processes.

Identify Risks and Opportunities

Scroll back to 2020 on your brand's timeline to see what parts of your social media strategy worked (and what parts didn't). Then, research current trends to anticipate challenges and opportunities related to this election cycle.

Dust Off Your Crisis Communication Plan

You only need it when you need it. But when you need to "break the glass" on your crisis communication plan, it must be current, comprehensive, and clear. Ensure that your brand's plan accounts for responding to negative comments, misinformation, and other potential situations that could arise. Don't forget to update who is involved at every step of the internal escalation process to mitigate risk.

Refresh Channel Guidelines

A lot has changed on social media in four years. Twitter is now X. Facebook is now Meta. [TikTok users](#) continue to rise (even as a [potential ban looms](#)). And your online communities have changed, too. Take time to understand who follows your brand on each platform and how to tailor content to that platform, with the understanding that some platforms may be more susceptible to misinformation or negativity.

Be Aware of the Company's Political Leanings

If your company or executive leaders are politically active, it's important that your social media strategy accounts for the public political stance, campaign contributions, and PAC donations. Transparency is key to maintaining trust and avoiding backlash.

Technology

Have you audited your systems and software lately? If the answer is no, then it's time to connect with your technology leaders to ensure your brand has the necessary systems in place for the 2024 election. Just like voting machines need to stay up to date to ensure election integrity, so do your social media operations.

Refine Social Listening Tools

If you aren't regularly updating your social listening queries, now's the time to make adjustments to capture evolving issues, memes, and online conversations. By taking a proactive monitoring approach, your brand can avoid potential controversies and anticipate opportunities to capitalize on key moments.

Optimize Moderation Workflows

Similarly, if you haven't taken a peek under the hood to ensure your [moderation tools](#) and workflows are operating efficiently, connect with your team to refine workflows for managing increased online activity during the election cycle. While leveraging automation can help create scale, remember, there's no replacing the human touch for complex and nuanced situations that will likely arise during this time.

Strengthen Security

Small things can make a huge difference. Audit who has access to your brand channels. Ensure multifactor authentication and other security measures are up to date and being utilized. Check that security updates are in place for software, systems, websites, and computers. Leave no security checkpoint unchecked. Every brand needs to prepare for potential hack attempts, especially if your brand has a large online following.

Engagement

Don't let everything you've just read scare you away. You wouldn't climb Mount Everest without training and then arriving at the mountain base prepared with everything you need to make it to the top and back. Before you can scale Mount Election 2024, you've got to be ready. With preparation in the rearview mirror, let's talk about how to start taking steps toward the top.

Take a Strategic and Proactive Approach

Your strategy should define how you'll engage in election-related conversations online, whether that's [proactive, reactive](#), or even removed entirely from the narrative. If your brand chooses to engage in election-related conversation, it's important to be proactive in cultivating positive conversations around your brand, helping to keep negativity from spiraling out of control and dealing with reactive consequences.

Stay True to Your Brand

It's easy to get caught up in the moment. That's why people engaging and responding on behalf of your brand online must understand brand identity, values, and strategy. With a consistent approach to engagement across the team, your brand can build community and become a trusted voice. This includes clear communication about the brand's political positions on relevant issues.

Offer Something Valuable

Don't wait for a golden opportunity to strike during the election cycle, and ignore your overall content strategy. Continue to share [content that engages](#) and entertains your audience.

Use Humor (Carefully)

Being truly funny on social media is a fast track to engagement. But being culturally insensitive and offensive is a one-way ticket to an unfollow or a block. If humor isn't

in your brand's wheelhouse already, tread lightly. You want people to engage because of what you say, not how you say it.

Be Responsive (to the Good and the Bad)

Likely, you won't be waiting at your keyboard when misinformation strikes or a negative comment goes viral. That's why it's vital to have a clear escalation process to address these issues. Be sure your team is prepared to act quickly and transparently when a crisis occurs. In the same way, be quick to engage with [brand love](#), praise, and positivity from your online community.

Enforce Community Guidelines

Just like "no shoes, no shirt, no service" is a standard rule of engagement for restaurants, online spaces need guardrails. You can help ensure a safe environment by having clear community guidelines and consistently enforcing them across all brand platforms.

Protect Your Community

At the same time, be mindful of how moderating election-related conversations can potentially be perceived as censorship. Review your community guidelines for areas that need to be adjusted to allow for an open exchange of ideas while still ensuring your community is a place where people can come and share without hateful or harassing discourse.

Know When to Disengage

Avoid getting into debates or arguments that can damage your brand's image. Sometimes, it's best to just say no to an opportunity to engage in a conversation you know is needlessly inflammatory. Don't forget, the hide button is your friend when leveraged appropriately.

Intelligence

The special sauce that will take things to the next level is an analytical approach to the insights you've gained from everything you've done to this point. Much like a gourmet cheeseburger dripping with deliciousness, your social media operation will be something you look forward to biting into if you're consistent with analysis and optimizations.

Stay Informed

Track key issues, public sentiment, and potential flashpoints for engagement to stay informed during the election season. Monitor competitor activity and emerging trends to remain adaptable, strategic, and opportunistic.

Think Outside the Box

By embracing creative solutions, you can mitigate the impact of a crisis and capitalize on opportunities as they arise.

Monitor Community Performance

Beyond standard social performance, such as likes, comments, and shares, be sure to measure which content drives community engagement. Are most of your comments spam or single, non-engaged comments (e.g., cool, ok, agree)? Determine if your users are thoughtfully engaging with your content and with others.

Make Data-Informed Adjustments

[Analyze your data](#) and performance to optimize your social media strategy throughout the election cycle.

Recommendation

Preparation, flexibility, and transparency are the keys to navigating the social media landscape during an election cycle. Be proactive, address potential issues, and authentically engage your audience. With planning and an actionable strategy, your brand can maintain a positive image and thrive during another sure-to-be-tumultuous election season.

Do you have questions? We have answers. Let's connect at socialfactor.com/contact or sales@socialfactor.com.