



By Josh Powers

Last week, General Abrams (@DogFaceSoldier on Twitter) published a short article encouraging more senior leader engagement on social media. Titled [Social Media: Senior Leaders Need to Get on the Bus](#), the article provides ten reasons why leaders should be more active in the digital space. As demonstrated (blog posts, live casts, etc), I must disclose that I wholeheartedly agree with General Abrams' perspective. Based on my own experience, I remain passionate in my view that there is something in the digital world for every military professional. I see it as a medium where we can learn, grow, and interact. Still, there is risk associated with engaging online and it is worth discussion. Many leaders in the profession have considered engagement but weigh perceived risk and reward only to ultimately abstain from engaging online. So what are they worried about? Over the past few

weeks, I polled the Twitter audience on the topic and, based on their feedback, I offer a few of the main risks that keep our colleagues offline.

First, there's a concern amongst military professionals of undue scrutiny associated with digital engagement. In [Radical Inclusion, GEN \(R\) Dempsey and Ori Brafman](#) describe the digital echo as an infinite reverberation of information, echoing across distributed networks with no method for recall. In the context of this discussion, the digital echo applies to each and every thought we share; the implications of a post or tweet remain limitless. Expressing an opinion digitally exposes vulnerability to an infinite audience of critics, each possessing the opportunity to expose flawed logic or lack of knowledge.

Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of such scrutiny, predominantly on Twitter. Have a quick look through this Twitter [thread](#) and you'll notice numerous examples of what could be, at best, categorized as some bizarre type of bullying. As I researched the topic, several individuals sent private messages detailing their experiences. In one example, a faceless, digital mob attacked with ferocity, berating and threatening the individual for posting their perspective. His post made it to 24,000 Twitter users with 1,480 engagements, most of them negative. At the darkest end of the spectrum, some users reported threats of violence and professional reprisal.

Given these examples, there are obvious concerns that the "public arena" of social media will bleed over into our work. According to Twitter, people are apprehensive of providing a divergent opinion from what their command published in an official talking point or message. They perceive that their opinions are subject to command censorship through the unit's Public Affairs Officer and cite this hazard as rational to Tweet anonymously.

The most notable examples in the ballpark of "professional reprisal" come, once again, from the faceless mob in the dark shadows of Twitter. These characters usually come forward to comment on sensitive topics, such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Numerous MilTwitter

reports being professionally threatened for expressing opinions well...all of which is within stated Army policy and its overarching values (respect).

I hope that this short article can assist in sparking conversation among military professionals. For those who are already vested in digital engagement, it is worth considering these very real concerns. Reflect on what drives you to connect online and share these thoughts with others. For those who stay away from online engagement, consider the reward associated with these risks. For me, engaging in the digital space has become a part of who I am as a leader. It gives me the opportunity to connect with other leaders and contribute to an ever-evolving professional dialogue, all while forcing my own self-development. In doing so, it furthers our profession, and that's one bus we should all ride on.

*Josh Powers is an active duty Infantry Officer and founder of the Field Grade Leader, a blog focused on organizational leadership. This article represents his own opinions, which are not necessarily those of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the federal government.*

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